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Political Entrepreneurs and Regioneers

A Netnographic Study of Regional Identity and Soft Regionalism in Somerset, England

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Abstract

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Soft regionalism and regional identities in Great Britain has seldom been explored beyond the national debates of Scotland, Wales, and Cornwall. Many recent local studies in England have, too, been neglected. This study is set against the backdrop of the ongoing debates around devolution within the United Kingdom and the creation of new regional authorities and city-regions. This thesis investigates how material culture, place-myths, and 'identity-talk' is used by two different social agents to inform, conceptualise, create legitimacy for, and challenge regional identity, using the case study of Somerset, England. A different methodology than is usually applied to regional studies, virtual ethnography or netnography, is used to demonstrate the method's significance in the future of regional studies due to the increasing number of people using social media and the internet to exhibit their identity. Regional identity is problematised through the use of two distinct types of agents discovered in Somerset, *political entrepreneurs* and *regioneers.* Originating from Thomas O'Dell's concept of the *regionaut,* this study introduces the *regioneer* that actively handles and produces material culture within their region to exhibit their regional identity. The existence of these new agents is indicative of the ever growing tourist and heritage industries in counties and regions within England and the commodification of these regional identities. Using the concepts of border, institutionalisation, and place, contested regions and regional identity are also discussed using the case study of the former county of Avon in England. This study contributes to the use of cultural analysis in regional studies and explores the role of the internet in future identity formation. It also attempts to contribute to the devolution debate and show the significance of cultural and regional identities in the decision making processes in creating functional regions particularly in county regions such as Somerset.

Keywords: cultural analysis; identity; region; Somerset; England; Britain; political entrepreneur; heritage; commodification; soft regionalism;

Abstrakt

Politiska entreprenörer och regionärer: en netnografisk studie om regional identitet och *soft regionalism* i Somerset, England.

Zachary Mooney

Soft regionalism och regionala identiteter i Storbritannien har sällan blivit utforskade utöver nationella debatter avseende Skottland, England, Wales och Cornwall. Dessutom har även många senare regionala studier i England försummats helt. Denna studie har sin bakgrund i den pågående debatten om decentrialisering (devolution) och skapandet av nya regionala myndigheter och urbaner-regioner i Storbritannien. Denna avhandling fastställer hur den materiella kulturen, *place-myths* och *identity-talk* används av två olika sociala agenter för att informera, konceptualisera, skapa legitimitet för, och utmana regional identitet genom att använda Somerset, England, som fallstudie. En annan metod än den som normalt används vid regionala studer, virtuell etnografi eller netnografi, används här för att demonstrera metodens betydelse för framtida regionala studier på grund av det ökade användandet av internet och sociala medier i uttryckandet av social identitet.

Regional identitet problematiseras genom användandet av två olika typer av agenter upptäckta i Somerset, *politiska entreprenörer* och *regionärer.* Med rötter i Thomas O'Dells koncept *regionaut* myntas här begreppet regionär (regioneer), en som aktivt agerar för- och producerar materiell kultur inom sin region för att uttrycka sin regionala identitet. Förekomsten av dessa två nya agenter är vägledande för ökade turist- och kulturarvsindustrier i län och regioner i England och för skapandet av de regionala identiteterna. Genom att använda koncepten gränser, *institutionalisation* och plats, diskuteras även ifrågasatta regioner och regionala identiteter genom användandet av det tidigare distriktet Avon, i England.

Denna studie bidrar till användandet av kulturanalys i regionala studier och utforskar internets roll i skapandet av framtidens identiteter. Studien strävar även efter att bidra till decentrialiseringsdebatten (devolution debate) och att visa betydelsen av kulturella och regionala identiteter vid beslutsfattandet inför skapandet av funktionella regioner, framförallt i län som Somerset.

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Lund, 2015-05-28
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Introduction

Sitting on a bale of hay, holding tightly to a plastic pint glass of scrumpy, the Somerset man looks across the field where dusk is falling, skittle balls are rolling down an erected wooden platform, wellington boots are being flung to enormous cheer, a number of cheeses are being sampled by an ever growing mass of drunken people, whilst dancing and singing along to a Wurzels tribute band (Somerset's answer to Skåne's Hasse Andersson). Regional and county identity in England is still distinct and vibrant despite popular concerns of ever creeping commercialisation and urbanisation of our English cultures. The patchwork of both personal and collective identities throughout the United Kingdom has been largely ignored or has manifested itself in nationalist parties in Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, and Northern Ireland.

> I am not sure if people were expecting the no vote to be the last word, we can't just pretend that things are ever going to be the same as if this had never taken place at all and nor, I imagine, does anybody want to pretend that (BBC, 2015)

Since devolution to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland occurred under the New Labour Administration (1997-2010) and the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014 (that questioned whether Scotland should secede from the rest of the United Kingdom), there has been an urgent discussion about devolution to or within England. Due to the perceived urgency to solve the 'West Lothian Question' (essentially that Scottish Members of Parliament can vote on English legislation, yet not vice-versa), a quick decision to devolve powers to regional authorities may be detrimental to the success of devolution if questions about social and cultural identities are not addressed. Differences between the urban and the rural (of which Somerset is part) are often neglected when politicians focus on the concept of city-regions. City-regions and greater metropolitan areas are set for devolution or greater powers under the second Cameron ministry, yet 'shire counties' or the rural areas of the country have not been discussed in such depth.

Whereas in Scotland and Wales there has been more of a presence of nationalism and patriotism, soft regionalism in England has been on the rise. There has been a move in recent years to create more community oriented enterprises and to promote forms of regional

identity within England. Against the backdrop of the current economic crisis, regional identity and community have been used as a means of innovation, entrepreneurship, and attracting foreign investment, especially for trans-national regions (Löfgren, 2008, p.196), but also in sub-national contexts.

Aim

The devolution debate and the 'innovative' responses succeeding from the economic crisis led me to focus on regional identity and agents within these regions that use this identity for economic and cultural outcomes. I want to investigate *soft regionalism* in Somerset and how place is used in the formation of regional identity in England. I will use the county of Somerset in the south-west of England as a case study and through the use of *material culture* in the county, I will explore how material culture and 'identity-talk' is used by different social agents, particularly what I call *political entrepreneurs* and *regioneers*, to conceptualise and create legitimacy for regional identity. My questions will be: How does regional identity relate to local authorities and agents? How do place-myths contribute to the production of regional identity? Who is promoting regional identity? How is it related to the economy and culture? How is material culture modified to construct this regional identity? To what extent do political entrepreneurs and regioneers contribute to soft regionalism?

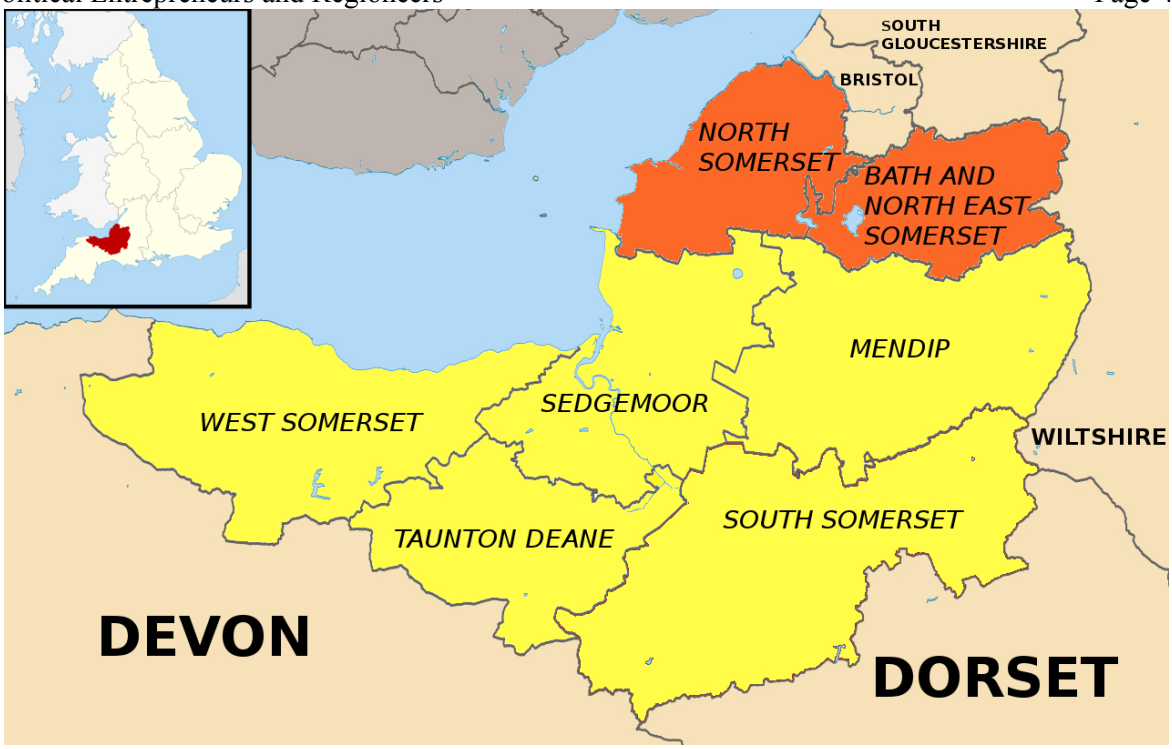
Location of the ceremonial county of Somerset within England (Nilfanion, 2010, November 23)

Background and Theory

Literature about regionalism in the United Kingdom tends to focus on the 'more aggressive' nationalisms of Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland (Donnan & Wilson, 2001) or it focuses on England in a general administrative sense and local authorities (Coombes, 2014). Where detailed accounts of English regions exist, such as for the South West of England, scholars (Jones & MacLeod, 2004) tend to focus on counties that have strong 'national' movements such as Cornwall/Kernow. On the other hand, where regionalism in England is discussed, it focuses on commercial endeavours or infrastructure (Ball & Nanda, 2014), rather than the social or the cultural.

Although some areas around England are receiving greater attention in the literature such as Yorkshire and North-East England (c.f. Willett & Giovannini, 2014), there is still a tendency to speak of these areas in regards to administrative and functional units. What is missing in much of the literature are studies of the banal or the mundane, of the everyday lived *soft* regionalisms of the English counties. Somerset has a rich history stretching from the 'celtic' tribal Iron Age hillforts, Romano-British settlement, Brythonic lands and Arthurian Legends, to the more recent English Civil War. It is famous in England for its cider, cheese, and beautiful countryside, but the people's pride for the county is less militant than other parts of the country.

Somerset is a county in the South West of England. The entire county of Somerset has a population of around 908,600 (Office for National Statistics, 2012). Somerset is predominantly rural in nature and has two cities Bath (with a population around 89,000) and Wells (with a population around 10,400, the smallest city in England after the City of London). The county is largely agricultural (sheep, cattle, dairy, apples), but it also has industries in clothing, defence, and especially tourism. Somerset consists of three administrative divisions, Somerset County Council (the largest division in the southern half of the county consisting of the local authorities of South Somerset, West Somerset, Sedgemoor, and Mendip), Bath and North East Somerset, and North Somerset. The two latter 'unitary authorities' were formerly part of the administrative county of Avon that consisted also of the City of Bristol, and South Gloucestershire. The county of Avon was created in 1974 and dissolved in 1996.



Local Authorities within Somerset (adapted from Nilfanion, 2011, February 27)

English regions are often discussed in terms of their functionality. Regions or sub-national units are now seen as "focal units of economic growth" (Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2013, p.31). As such, nation-states have been reorganised into regions that are suited to this regional competitiveness. Where culture is discussed, it is in ways in which it can be capitalised on or used in a heritage or tourist context. Therefore, this thesis attempts to reinvigorate the discussion on regional identity, to highlight the richness of soft regionalism within English counties, and how this is linked to the capitalisation and commodification of these identities.

Individuals in Somerset who grapple with material culture in this commercialised way, can be categorised into two distinct groups; those who use their social and economic capital to further their own goals and the other group, that may use the same material, who handle the material rather than manipulate it. These two groups, political entrepreneurs and regioneers respectively, have been an important aspect of 'identity politics' in Somerset and have used material culture in vastly different ways to the rest of the general public. Throughout this thesis I will use their perspective to understand how this may affect the creation and recreation of regional identity and soft regionalism, as well as how they may be challenged by similar agents in other areas. This latter point will be explored through a case

study on “the former counties of Avon”, Somerset, and the organisation *Association of British Counties*.

Theoretical concepts, that will be used throughout this thesis, are *regional identity, political entrepreneurs, regioneers, place, material culture, institutionalisation, branding, 'identity-talk',* and *soft regionalism.* My theoretical background will derive principally from cultural analysis as well as anthropology, and sociology. I have derived much of my understanding of regional identity, institutionalisation, and regionality from the works of Anssi Paasi, a regional geographer from the University of Oulou. Donnan & Wilson's (2001) book *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* has given me insight into how place and borders (and boundaries) plays a vital role in identity, regions, and the nation. My concept of the *regioneer,* although different, originates from the term *regionaut* from the works of Thomas O'Dell, Orvar Löfgren, and the book *Regionauterna* (2010). I will be using a few examples from some of my previous research and also some case studies from other authors to clarify my theory.

Instead of a separate chapter on previous research, I will begin at the start of each chapter and sub-chapter by introducing previous research conducted on the subject in question, which will lead directly to my data, discussion, and analysis.

Methodology and Ethics

Soft regionalism, as a 'less aggressive', 'softer', or less materially apparent form of regionalism, is often lived online within a virtual environment. This is often through the means of online forums, news websites, and as a result of the ease of communication that the internet offers. For this reason in this thesis I would like to demonstrate the importance of virtual/digital ethnography or netnography (net-ethnography) in the study of regionalism.

The main forms of methodology used in this thesis have been observational and digital documentary evidence. Much of the outward expressions of 'identity-talk' in Somerset has been through the internet, especially through the use of social media. With this in mind, I have had to carefully deliberate how I would be able to integrate netnographic techniques into my research.

The internet is more than just computers and data connected to one another, it is fundamentally millions of humans engaging in social relations. Christine Hine (2000) in her book *Virtual Ethnography* shows the reader some of the effects that the Internet will have on

society such as “changes to the role of time and space; changes to communication and the role of mass communication; and a questioning of dualisms such as the real and the virtual, truth and fiction, the authentic and the fabricated, technology and nature, and representation and reality” (Hine, 2000, pp.2-14). These predictions are seen as “foreshadowed problems”, that the ethnographer must deal with. Is the internet user aware of its capabilities? Are users and other users authentic or have authority? “How are identities performed and experienced, and how is authenticity judged?” (Hine, 2000, pp.2-14). Is there a difference between the offline and the online worlds? How does the lack of the 'ordinary' social cues found in face-to-face interactions such as gender or race affect social interaction?

This research is a deliberate online study that looks at how regional identity is experienced through the internet, how material culture in 'meatspace' is perceived in 'cyberspace', and how tourism and history are portrayed in this medium. I have used a number of websites, blogs, online news websites, 'tweets', social media, internet 'memes', and online forums as part of my empirical data. During the data collection process, I ensured that I was open to the types of websites and sources that I was using. I did not just use sources such as the 'BBC' or the 'Office for National Statistics' as they appear 'legitimate' or 'trustworthy', I also used blogs and websites created by individuals- despite their looking 'untrustworthy' with multiple colours, flashing pictures, and midi music. These are often the spaces that regioneers use to exhibit this identity. As a result my research was highly textual and visual and by virtue of this virtual or digital research I was able to collect vast amounts of data. This was often categorised thematically, for example with key terms such as devolution, heritage, or tourism, and cross-referenced with the concepts employed in this thesis.

The literature has neglected virtual ethnography in the study of regions and identity. Communities across England have for several years used Facebook and other online spaces to develop communication between residents, develop democracy, share news, and some people even live many of their waking hours on the internet. Smartphones and wearable technology are increasingly blending the boundaries between the 'real' and the 'virtual', disregarding its significance neglects much of contemporary lived experience.

Although individuals (both regioneers and political entrepreneurs) may be willing to open up intimate layers of themselves on the internet and that the internet gives a voice to those who have inhibitions in face to face situations (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013, pp.1, 8), there is a question of the legitimacy of informants from the internet. It can be argued

that someone is able to portray to others through social media an idea of the 'real me' or their 'true self', yet the answers that they would give are filtered through this online self, and thus, it is argued, not real. As people tend to spend much of their time (especially younger people) on the internet and use social media platforms as a form of a 'social-identity card', their 'real self' could be more pronounced and can be delineated more easily. The virtual self can be a performance or a mask of the true self.

This should not be overemphasised however.

Identity on the internet can be manipulated (Bailenson & Segovia, 2013), where (other people's) identities can be misrepresented or stolen. How do I know who this is? Is this person from Somerset? Is this person trustworthy? Commenters on news sites, such as those writing about the Somerset flag competition, may have vested interests in it or may be 'bots' (i.e. not human) to skew the conversation. Although these questions are often asked by those who dissuade the use of or criticise internet research, the same can be said about face-to-face contact. Interviewees recruited through agencies can have to a similar extent the same degree of trustworthiness. How do I know that a random bystander is an 'expert' in my topic of study?

What is required when using internet sources is knowledge of how language is used on different internet platforms, the different etiquettes used, knowing the frequency of the individual's post, the types of posts, and other interactions. By taking a case by case basis, the scholar can determine whether this person is lying, misrepresenting, or stealing someone's identity (or misrepresenting information). Commenters, again, who may write about the ills of immigration in Somerset may have a particular political adherence or may have a viewpoint not shared by the general population. The individual could also be deliberately antagonising the online conversation or being an internet 'troll'. This may give a 'false' impression of the population, organisation, or projects in or around Somerset. The 'digital footprint' that individuals leave can actually give me as a researcher more information about the individual to determine their trustworthiness or legitimacy (i.e. do they come from Somerset, is their place of origin important, why, and if important do their experiences show expertise on a given subject?).

This leads to a series of ethical questions. The internet is nebulous and vast amounts of personal information can be accessed by the researcher. This information, however, can be easily accessed without the person's permission. What is a private or a public space in these

instances? Should I ask permission from the informant? I must ask myself, is this information relevant to my field of study? How much information is too much information? These 'intimate layers' that people expose on the internet, perhaps through a pseudonym, can be exposed by the researcher. Discretion, anonymity, and relevancy should be reflected on at all times during the data collection process. The process of doxxing (the researching and broadcasting of personal information via social media and public databases) is a current concern for some within the internet community due to its often malicious connotations and practices.

As I have closely used communicable material in my research, I have also become a participant in the process of identity formation. This would inevitably have *some* effect on the region. By highlighting the existence of these two social agents (political entrepreneurs and regioneers), I have shown that there exists a significant influential group of individuals who have vested interests within the heritage, tourist, and political spheres. I must be aware that I am discussing individuals whose reputations and businesses may be at risk if someone were to target them. This is particularly pertinent in chapter two where I use the case study of *Passion for Somerset,* an organisation which consists of a number of business representatives.

These two agents will also have different online identities and may be campaigners or curators for other projects in their own right. Regioneers tend to use different platforms for communication such as blogs or social media in a personal capacity, perhaps to strengthen their public image. In comparison, political entrepreneurs will use websites via their organisations and social media via organisations as well as personal to give an air of professionalism and legitimacy. This can be indicative of what 'type' of agent an individual is and what interests they have.

I also suggest that these two agents have a responsibility to the people of Somerset as they have this influential position. I am aware that this is an ethical statement, which is based on my own moral judgement. Their influential position allows the agents in question to be able to distort or manipulate the political discourse in the county and therefore would be able to restrict or dismiss certain regional narratives.

I must make the reader aware that I was born and bred in Somerset and the reason for its inclusion as a case study was partly due to contacts that I already have there, the significant knowledge that I have about the county, and the access that I have to certain documentary sources. I refer in some instances to some informants or respondents that I have

interviewed during my face-to-face fieldwork. Although I will be conducting a netnographic study and that I have chosen not to conduct more traditional ethnographic methods, my added knowledge of the areas has been helpful within my research, to quickly build connections between people, places, and events.

This raises the issue of personal bias. Although one cannot be wholly unbiased, the use of the two 'social agents' (political entrepreneurs and regioneers) has allowed me to distance myself. My continuous reflexivity of the material and the analysis of the agents, has allowed me to do a ”documentary-literature walk-along”, being able to ”see through the eyes” of the agents. The agents too have been discussed and reflected on in this thesis to ascertain what their gender, class, age, and social groups are in order to not only give better analysis of them, but also check and balance any prejudices that I may have.

Outline and Case Studies

In the first chapter “Agents in Action”, I start by discussing some of the theoretical concepts that I have used throughout this thesis, such as *regional identity, material culture, political entrepreneurs, accumulation of culture,* and *regioneers.* This chapter also introduces some of the literature that underpins these ideas. In that chapter I introduce the main political entrepreneurs in Somerset, the organisation Passion for Somerset and their involvement in the creation of the new flag of Somerset.

In the second chapter, I look at history, tourism, and the heritage industry and how they have been used in the process of commodification in the region, particularly in the use of political entrepreneurs and tourism. I introduce the use of memes, place myths, and narratives as part of analysing how history plays a key role in the identity formation in England and Somerset. Political entrepreneurs, tourism, and the heritage industry are shown how they commodify these narratives and historical events.

A case study, ETHNOS, a consultancy organisation specialising on ethnic minority communities is used in chapter two. ETHNOS (2005, p.6-7) identified eight dimensions for Britishness based on Geography (topographical features and the British Isles), National symbols, People (British Citizens, White English people, or those from disparate ethnic backgrounds), Values and attitudes, Cultural habits and behaviour, Citizenship, Language, and Achievements (political, historical, technological, sporting, and scientific).

Although these dimensions were intentioned for the ETHNOS project on Britishness, not on specific regional identities, it shows that there are many similarities between that of Britishness and Somerset-ness. Chapter two discusses the relationship between the English national identity and Somerset regional identity using ETHNOS, along with a project called ICONS. These organisations are examples of how individuals, in a number of ways, articulate regional (or national) identities on an online platform.

Chapter three “Avon is like Piles” leads onto the discussion about soft regionalism, the 'constructed' county of Avon, and how its dissolution still reverberates in Somerset and its constituent parts. The concepts of place, border, and institutionalisation are discussed to demonstrate how they are able to affect regional identity and in what way political entrepreneurs and regioneers play in this. The *Association of British Counties* (that advocates the use of historic counties) is used to demonstrate soft regionalism. The ongoing debate on a 'Greater Bristol region' that is somewhat inspired by the previous incarnation of Avon, is discussed as well as the tension and opposition that can (and will) exist between different sets of political entrepreneurs and local authorities and how this links to a virtual environment.

Agents in Action

> Collective identity is not out there, waiting to be discovered. What is 'out there' is identity discourse on the part of political leaders, intellectuals and countless others, who engage in the process of constructing, negotiating, manipulating or affirming a response to the demand – at times urgent mostly absent – for a collective image (McSweeney, 1999, pp.77-78)

What is Regional Identity?

Paasi (2013, p.1207) notes that for "researchers, planners and policy-makers" regional identity has not been understood concretely and processes of identity construction has not be discussed adequately. For a method to disentangle and unpack identity, it is suggested by Paasi (2013, p.1208), that the researcher must focus on identity-talk and identity politics rather than taking for granted or assuming the indisputable existence of identities themselves.

As a result, although regional identity has been discussed in geographical, planning, and governance literature, the term regional identity has not been problematised until recently. Regional identity, like collective identity, is something that is continuously constructed and not something tangible that can be discovered – or else one is contributing to its construction. It may be better to ask what it means to claim a regional identity over territory rather than what regional identity actually is (Paasi, 2013, p.1209). Territoriality, too, is an integral part of identity formation and will be revisited later.

Although Paasi (2013) says that agents are in the process of "manipulating" to the "demand" of a regional identity, this may be too negative or may suggest ill-intent. It may be true for some agents, such as political entrepreneurs at times, but it is more true to say other agents such as regioneers 'handle' identity-talk. The processes of soft regionalism tend to be less manipulative than stronger movements.

In comparison, identity, according to the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1950), was concerned more with individual development and the individual person. Identity has become associated more recently with phenomena of the group or the collective. Although identity has become associated with the group (or the region), identity aggregates individuals. Although it is a means of inclusion into a group, it is also a means of exclusion,

thus it is a means of being someone that is disassociated from other individuals (Anico & Peralta, 2009, p.1).

Anico & Peralta (2009) describe identity as an "acting of making and being part of" and this is how the term differs from culture, which is often confused. What we are has come from what "we have selected from the past and chosen to retain in the present" (Anico & Peralta, 2009, p.1). This could be in the form of what clothes we wear, our mannerisms, the people we socialise with, the food we eat, and social agency. Cultural processes such as changing relationships and social relations, rituals, and material culture affect and influence the development of *regional* identity, therefore regional identity can be seen as a process..

Identity, as Brubaker & Cooper (2000, p.1) say, can mean "too much" (as in too many things) when it is meant in a strong sense, "too little", in its weak sense, or "nothing at all", due to the word's ambiguity. The word identity can mean a multiple of different things and yet at the same time, due to its multiplicity, it can mean very little. My use of the word identity is guarded and I am aware of its ambiguity and its fluidity. As such, I do not wish to be bounded by words or strictly constrained by definitions.

I discuss ways that people, through interaction, construct ideas of belonging, commonality, and personal distinctiveness. I instead look for identification, looking for the agents that do the identifying, as discussed by Brubaker & Cooper (2000, p.14). It is also important to understand that regional identity is a method of (or rather a result of) the aggregation of individuals to one another. Aggregation (the bringing together of individuals based on commonality) helps form a shared culture and identity, in this case, based on a region or county, Somerset. Depending on who they are, agents may use material culture in a number of ways to facilitate or tarnish aggregation. Agents are key for regional identity making.

Material Culture

If regional identity is constructed through the use of material and non-material culture such as our flags, food, or our mannerisms, then what exactly is material culture? Keough & Youngstedt (2014, p.152) define material culture as "the tangible elements of culture, [it] is crucial to the everyday lived experiences of people. Objects in material culture not only have practical use, they can also elicit emotional attachment by the users and represent important ideas and values of culture groups".

So by studying material culture, I can shed "light on material practices, forms of social self-fashioning, the accumulation of economic and cultural capital, and the spatial relations between people and material objects" (Schülting, 2014, p.99). Material culture has been in vogue for many archaeologists, geographers, and anthropologists in recent years. Interpretations, though useful, have not been successfully defined or listed, though there have been some attempts at this (cf. Keane et al., 2006). As materiality is integral to understanding social conditions, these patterns in identity construction seem to be one of the essential ways to manifest identity for the individual and, in particular, regioneers.

It is important to note that 'material' and 'culture' have in the past been seen as opposing forces (Keane et al., 2006). I would like to emphasise that materiality is fundamental in understanding how identity manifests itself. Literature on the subject often split the material and non-material (such as folk song, dance, and stories) into two separate spheres. Often, as it will be discussed in some cultural events around Somerset, the borders between the material and non-material are hazy and can be used in tandem – they become inseparable in a ritualised setting.

Although I have not focused on what is often seen as non-material in this thesis, I have acknowledged its significance especially when it is used, and it often is, in conjunction with material culture. For this reason, I would argue that there is little difference between non-material and material culture, and that non-material culture has materiality just in a different form. Therefore, the split between the non-material and material cultures in the anthropological sphere, but not necessarily the archaeological, is false and should be treated as the same. Material culture as a whole will be used to problematise the reification and legitimisation processes of regional identity.

Different forms of culture are used within identity-talk. As some customs or social conditions may appear to be unique or are significant to the group as a symbol of differentiation from others (such as the Somerset accent, folk songs, or use of a Somerset traditional beverage – cider), then these commonalities can be used for the aggregation of individuals to each other. Culture is therefore significant for identity construction as it allows individuals to exhibit signs of similarity (sounding similar, solidarity in song, or toasting/drinking together) to those within their culture group or those with a shared identity.

I will be looking at how material culture is used within a virtual environment. This gives the regioneer or the political entrepreneur many new ways, through websites and

computer graphics, to represent material culture beyond its tangibility. Tangible objects such as the flag will have representations online and ideas will be reified differently.

The materiality of culture or material culture often centres around objects and external entities. Material culture is useful for individuals to exhibit identity as social behaviours and ideas – complex concepts of what it means to be part of the group – can imbue themselves on to objects and is an anchor on which the identity sits. Objects, now represented online, will have a similar effect. Material culture in the case of identity (such as the Somerset flag), therefore, can be a shorthand for the ideas and concepts that surround the identity without them having to be reiterated. These ideas and concepts are tacitly known by the regional identity group – those who identify with Somerset.

Political Entrepreneurs

Regional identity can often be used by agents to differentiate themselves from others and to give themselves some sort of understanding of what they do (Paasi, 2013, p.1207). The first of the two social agents that will be discussed is *political entrepreneurs*. As it will become apparent further on, political entrepreneurs often use identity to "persuade people to 'understand themselves, their interests, and their predicaments in a certain way', or to persuade certain people (for some ulterior reason)" (Paasi, 2013, p.1208). This is often coupled with the mobilisation of people and to highlight similarities and differences between people.

Literature on the subject of political entrepreneurs either fail to define the term or use it in a multiple of different ways. Christopoulos & Ingold (2014, pp.1-2) define political entrepreneurs (named policy entrepreneurs) as people who are said to have "significant impact on decision making and thus able to shape outputs and outcomes decisively at critical policy junctions". Political brokers and entrepreneurs are often seen as similar when it comes to influencing policy. Yet Christopoulos & Ingold (2014) say that where brokers tend to look for stability and feasibility, 'policy' entrepreneurs act in a "self-interested and strategic way" and try "to promote their interests so that the final outcome reflects their policy preferences". Meydani (2012) defines them as "individuals whose creative acts have transformative effects on politics, policies, or institutions" (Heingate, 2003, p.185, as cited in Meydani, 2012, p. 71).

For Lazzarato (2007, p.88) the political entrepreneurs use "communication as a strategic mode of command and organization can only lead us to understand that we have entered into a new paradigm, in which the relationship between the economic, the social and the political is turned upside down.". How could this be linked to regional identity? Political entrepreneurs may exist to assert or use the concept or their definition of regional identity for their own "strategic output". However the processes in which the political entrepreneur uses the idea will be very much contextual, but may look at what things *are* rather than how it *should* be. In essence, they may not look for stability (identity-talk or politics that could placate ethnic tensions), but rather what would be most beneficial for themselves as entrepreneurs, to reach a certain goal, or to overcome their rivals. It is important to note that the political entrepreneur is not a personality, but rather a position that someone takes in a given situation (Christopoulos & Ingold, 2014, p.4). I argue, as agents, these political entrepreneurs know the cultural aggregatory properties of regional identity, and therefore, use this for their own purposes, such as for political or economic power.

In a regional setting, political entrepreneurs will have knowledge of material culture and how they have these aggregatory properties (such as the rural idyll and Somerset flag). This, as it will be discussed, will form part of the branding process that political entrepreneurs engage in through heritage and the tourist industries. In a virtual environment, they are able to transmit ideas and advertise these new events, such as competitions, quickly and affectively. They often have a central website that aggregates these images and events.

The European Union actively promotes entrepreneurialism within the regions through the label European Entrepreneurial Region that is awarded to any region that "show[s] an outstanding and innovative entrepreneurial policy strategy, irrespective of their size, wealth and competences" (Committee of the Regions, n.d.). The existence of political entrepreneurs then in a regional setting should therefore not be surprising as it is actively encouraged. Paasi (2013) has noted the frequency of some buzz words in regional planning documents such as "competition", "innovation", "cluster", "regional identity", "image/brand", and "social capital". The political entrepreneurs are an important and now a greatly influential agent in identification of the region. Later in chapter two, this growth of political entrepreneurs will be discussed in its link with commodification of culture.

Regioneers

Thomas O'Dell coined the term regionaut for people who "develop skills of using the world on both sides of the border" (Löfgren, 2008, p.196). It was used for people who crossed the border between Skåne in Sweden and Copenhagen in Denmark in an area known as the Öresund Region. These were people who had to grapple with the different systems in the two countries thereby crossing a border on a mental and physical level. For my study, borders between the different authorities in Somerset do not pose much of an impediment for those passing the border. Instead of regionauts in the county, I would use the term *regioneer* to denote someone who instead of grappling with different or changing systems, is actively using and handling them.

I use the term regioneer for someone who associates themselves with the region, who handles and produces material culture related to the region. This term differs from a political entrepreneur as regioneers are not normally associated with an organisation in a leading capacity and lack enough social and economic capital to enact change. Regioneers, although not able to enact swift change, would, I argue, create lasting change as they are the ones who actively engage in identity-talk. They are the ones who are singing Somerset songs in the pub, flying the Somerset flag in their back gardens, and commenting and critiquing the choices in the Somerset flag competition. Regioneers can be seen as a type of regionalist who is ideologically motivated, its ideology being regionalism.

Whereas political entrepreneurs are often male, older, and middle to upper class, regioneers can be from any background as long as they exhibit and get involved with identity-talk. Regioneers tend not to be publicly known figures and it is difficult to discern where the general public ends and the regioneer begins. In this sense, the regioneer is, like the political entrepreneur, a position that one takes to engage in identity-talk and handle material culture.

Passion for Somerset

An organisation in Somerset called *Passion for Somerset* consists of what I call political entrepreneurs, who want the county to become a "leading location for business enterprise and innovation" (Chard and Ilminster News, 2015). Passion for Somerset was created "to represent businesses across the whole county, and those who work for them" (Passion for Somerset, 2015, March 24). This organisation has been at the forefront of new cultural

activities in Somerset and brings together many different organisations both private and public, their involvement in creating these activities shows the organisation's importance and potential effect on the regional identity of the county.

The inaugural meeting for the organisation was held at Taunton School (a well-known private school in the county town) on 14th January 2014, which was attended by "businesses leaders and influencers". The "brainchild" behind the organisation is also the Head of Marketing at a solicitors in Somerset, the existence of the organisation is both a means and an end for publicity for the solicitors and the member organisations.

The new Somerset flag (from personal collection, 2015)

The first signs of the organisation seem to originate from a competition, led by the Solicitors and its Head of Marketing, to find a flag for the county of Somerset. Although it was not linked with *Passion for Somerset* at this time, the law firm did receive the "Marketing and Promotion prize" in the Sedgemoor Business Excellence Awards at Bridgwater College, Somerset (Somerset County Gazette, 2014, March 28). The organisation already existed at this point in time and it was not long until a new competition led by *Passion for Somerset* was started to choose a "Somerset Day" to celebrate "all things Somerset".

The name in this context, through the word 'passion', evokes positivity and it signifies to those outside the organisation that they have great enthusiasm for the county and by extension to be protective over it. By using such a name, the organisation can develop trust.

At first glance, it would not be obvious that the organisation is a collection of businesses and businessmen, especially when its name has been linked to more cultural events such as the flag and the day of celebration. This positions themselves as the vanguard of Somerset cultural activities.

Members are promised networking opportunities and an “invitation to business events, seminars, training, and conferences”. Passion for Somerset is a group of a number of different political entrepreneurs. Their support from local government and their contacts from their business and their own personal lives allows the group to have access to a number of different resources. Businesses include accountancy, media, marketing, solicitors, Chambers of Commerce, Taunton School, 'The Castle' (whose facilities the organisation used), and VisitSomerset (the primary tourist organisation for the county). Their access to resources and people allows them great influence and firmly positions them as strong social agents and political entrepreneurs.

The business world has tended to be dominated by men and as a result the vast majority of organisations within *Passion for Somerset* tend to be represented by men. This is not a deliberate exclusion of women, but rather just the remnant of the traditional business oriented patriarchal system. Deborah Meaden, a famous female entrepreneur and television personality, was chosen as a judge for the Somerset flag competition. It is more likely she was chosen for her fame, her entrepreneurship, and her connexion to Somerset, rather than her gender.

Passion for Somerset clearly wishes to persuade people and to influence the region in a transformative way. Their position as a ”voice” for Somerset shows that this communication is their “strategic mode of command and organization”, as Lazzarato (2007) puts it. They are using concepts of identity, the region, and culture to capitalise on them. This is similar to the trends seen by some scholars in the study of the cultural economy[1].

Allen et al. (2012) discuss that in the “political project of neo-liberalism” business entrepreneurs (in the south-east) can be seen as 'icons' as their “enterprising” qualities are dominant in this context. Political entrepreneurs in other regions such as the South-West may be indicative of the 'neo-liberal' region that Allen et al. (2012) discuss; however, these agents are influenced by the cultural turn of the 1990s and the culturalisation of the economy. The

1. The culturalisation of the economy has been discussed at length in du Gay & Pryke's (2002) book *Cultural Economy* and Lash & Urry's (1994) book *Economies of Signs and Space.*

political entrepreneur values 'enterprising' qualities (as Passion for Somerset are a group of businesses and business leaders), but acknowledges the benefit of this cultural dimension and soft regionalism as a basis for capitalisation and commodification of the region.

As in Passion for Somerset, organisations through deliberate policy and the deliberate uses of material culture, can change the course of regional identity, despite the regional identity's historical depth. Passion for Somerset events that are held in schools will change the pupil's perception of Somerset's regional identity. An example of this can be seen at King Alfred School, Highbridge, where "Students and staff...[urged] local residents to vote for their famous namesake to be crowned as the theme for the new annual 'Somerset Day'" (Burnham-on-Sea.com, 2015, January 31).

The school engaged pupils in the identity-talk around Somerset identity. It reinforces the idea to those pupils that King Alfred is an important individual to be associated with Somerset. Moreover, it also frames, for the pupils, that regional identity and the idea of Somerset-ness is based around history, historical figures, and the monarchy. It places the identity into historical time and anchors the day of celebration for the county around King Alfred. This event for them would be an example of accumulated history that forms part of their idea of the county. It demonstrates that pupils and staff in this context act as regioneers and are affected by the acts of Passion for Somerset as political entrepreneurs.

Accumulation of History, Regionality, and Class

Regional identity is constructed through the accumulation of history (Paasi, 2013, p.1209) and material culture. It is interpreted and reinterpreted through governmental, planning, and creative channels and through time with various ruptures and interruptions. When I talk about accumulation, I do not mean a quantifiable number of objects or customs – it is the qualitative aspects that are learnt and performed by agents through time. Some aspects are retained, some may drop out of usage.

Individuals are a result of their experiences and their interactions with other people. Through their lives they learn behaviours and ways in which to communicate and ascribe certain ideas and concepts to objects and circumstances. These perceptions and modes of behaviours are idiosyncratic and are a result of their unique experience and social relations. Through life they *accumulate* these different understandings and thus have a perception of what their regional identity is and what that means.

The individual, too, is an experience or social relation to another individual whose perception of regional identity is thus affected by that individual. Through time a number of events and experiences alter the regional identity. Others who may be deemed “outside” of the regional group can affect the perception of regional identity through their social relations. This explains why curry is often cited as England's favourite dish. The *accumulation* of regionality is not quantifiable but rather it is the amalgam of various social relations and experiences that are passed from person to person through time. The concept tied to the phrase “Somerset identity” or “regional identity” is thus not static and is constantly in flux. Now in a virtual environment, individuals can have access to many different social relations, experiences, and visual material. It is too early to anticipate how this could change regional identities in the future, yet similar studies on mass media such as radio and television could give some insight into this.

Beyond regional identity, people will form their identities within their own social networks, which may go beyond the boundaries of a region (Paasi, 2013, p.1209). What people's identification is could be drawn from their profession, hobby, gender, age, place of birth, ethnicity, or class. One's experience is thus manipulated by the different positions one takes. Through interaction with others and one's manipulation with material culture, these interpretations are added to the pool of material that is part of culture making and the idea that different agents have different degrees of accumulation.

These agents can be anyone who lives in the region or interacts with associated material culture and is involved in identity-talk. Through the ease of high speed communication and the internet, I can become an agent whilst sitting in Sweden through interacting on Somerset online forums or sharing messages or news. I can communicate with friends and family who live in the region, whilst also interacting with those from all around the world. Limitations to this are language barriers and also the cultural proximity someone has. Through increasing globalisation and the fact that many live their lives through the internet, there will be a number of examples of this cross-cultural interaction without having to be face-to-face. Agents can be part of different streams of accumulation in different regions and affect the formation of identities in those regions. One can live the region if one is involved in its identity-talk and uses its material culture. Identity for this reason is not bounded by place, yet region or place can be used in its formation (as part of its materiality).

This is especially true in a virtual environment where place is not much of a determinant and individuals have access to many different streams.

In the Passion for Somerset organisation, social networks are crucial to the institution and the role of a political entrepreneur. Its culture and 'success' relies on its business and enterprise connections. With very similar connections, the organisation links people from the business world, heritage, and tourism. One of the benefits as a member of Passion for Somerset is that "[it] gives us a powerful platform to get our message across, shape opinion and act as a lobbying group on behalf of you and your business. Passion for Somerset is the vehicle to remove obstacles holding business and enterprise back." (Passion for Somerset, 2015, March 9).

There is also a key class perspective with Passion for Somerset. At least two of the members associated closely with the organisation were educated at 'public schools' (a term used for older British prestigious private schools). Lady Gass, the former Lord Lieutenant of Somerset (the Queen's personal representative in the County), showed her support for the Somerset flag campaign. Deborah Meaden, of *Dragon's Den*[2] fame and successful entrepreneur, was one of the initial judges of the Somerset flag competition (Pardoes, 2013, July 5) that kick started the Passion for Somerset organisation. Their choice of Meaden as a 'celebrity judge' shows the Passion for Somerset link as a member of the entrepreneurial class. John Turner, the Chairman for Passion for Somerset, is also CEO of Visit Somerset (the leading tourist organisation in Somerset) (BBC News, 2015, February 1). These agents within the organisation have combined experiences within business/entrepreneurial organisations, tourism, heritage, and also social status gained from a prestigious education, peerages, and positions of high social capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

As Whitehead (2009) says, places such as fitness clubs or greyhound tracks will have their own codes of conduct or behaviour that attendants have to abide by and through individuals' own consciousness and habitus they choose to avoid or inhabit. The processes in which individuals are able to successfully inhabit these codes of conduct (or how they choose to avoid them) can "also be linked to the political operation of cultural capital" (2009, p.30). As the group grows and continues, Passion for Somerset will construct for itself a perception of Somerset centred around business, tourism, and will be partly reflective of a particular social class or at least an entrepreneurial or business one. It promises to become a "lobbying

2 Dragons' Den is a television programme where entrepreneurs stand infront of a panel of venture capitalists to secure investment for their business ideas.

group on behalf of you and your business" and therefore it has vested interests beyond Somerset cultural activities. This could generate a different view of what Somerset is to the general public, as they would have had their own individual different *accumulated* experiences around Somerset coupled with their own business interests.

Flying the flag for Somerset

In this section I will show how some of the concepts that have been discussed in this chapter can be implemented through the case study of the new flag of Somerset.

A man from Yeovil in Somerset proposed in 2006 (BBC, 2006, August 16; Ward-Willis, 2006) that Somerset should have its own flag. Previously, many people were using the flag of Somerset County Council, a flag with a white background with a red dragon holding a blue mace. The blue mace, however, is the legal property of and is associated with Somerset County Council, not the whole historical county of Somerset which also includes the unitary authorities of 'Bath and North East Somerset' and 'North Somerset'. This division of the county and the question between the use of the *old* County Council flag and a *new* flag were fundamental reasons for the flag campaign and the competition.

> I think a flag is of great interest in this county though as we are still divided up into three parts, so what was needed was a symbol to unite the country from Porlock to Portishead...I think that a lot of people are unaware that Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset are part of the county of Somerset, imagining them to be separate counties of a sort...Although not a part of the administrative county, they are still very much part of the historic and ceremonial county. (Ward-Willis, 2006)

An early Somerset flag campaigner and regioneer, hoped that the campaign would foster this unity. The campaigner did not mind if people saw him as "a touch eccentric" (BBC, 2006, August 16) as he felt that this issue of a flag in comparison to others, does not rank very highly. The issue of Somerset 'unity' and Avon will be discussed in chapter three.

The (old) Somerset County Council flag (which covers the area of southern Somerset) has on it a part of the county arms. The College of Arms granted the arms to the council in 1911 and consists of a red dragon holding a civic mace on a gold background. The blue civic mace symbolises the county council and therefore many thought a flag that would represent

the whole county would be more appropriate not just one particular area. The motto used on the arms is “sumorsæte ealle” meaning “all the people of Somerset”; a phrase that was first used in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle dated 878 AD (Savage, 1982).

“Somerset is the only county in the westcountry [roughly South West England] not to have a flag – so it's time to put that right!” (Westcountry, 2013, May 14). Why? The idea that Somerset does not have a flag seems to mean that the county is lacking something, something that is implied to be universal. There has been a move in the last few years all across England for counties to have its own flag, the adoption of these new flags has increased in recent years. Counties such as Devon, Dorset, and particularly Cornwall have used their flags with much enthusiasm. So as a material cultural object, the flag should have imbued in it ideas of identity or regionality. Flags are often used as a symbol of sovereignty or as a marker of territory. So by creating a flag, the flag allows Somerset to become a “proper county” as it has shown its legitimacy and sovereignty. The flag is also an example of both accumulation of history as it is acts as a material cultural object that can be used to exhibit identity, but it also has aggregatory properties as it is a common symbol for the inhabitants of Somerset.

The flag is also exhibited, and so the exhibition of the flag is an outward sign of inward cultural building. These are the number of ways in which regioneers express that affiliation and aggregation. In addition, the raising of the flag above buildings seems to be important, as was seen at the Museum of Somerset and at Creech Castle, where an official unfolding took place. This symbol is an expression or a sacrament that is fulfilled, it is a bold sign as people can see it from a distance and it is a clear sign of territoriality. The campaigner also advocated it to be a universal symbol for the whole of Somerset. By flying the flag in northern areas of Somerset, where they are not under the direct control of Somerset County Council, it can be seen as a symbol of reifying and legitimising that identity. The display of the flag denotes affiliation to the county. This is clearly seen by the new presence of lapel pins, embroidered badges, car stickers, table desk flags, and stickers. In a virtual environment, the flag has been used on advertisements for events and also 'shared' on social media in celebration of Somerset's first county day on 11th May 2015. It also acts as an easily identifiable and communicable device that can be shared and seen by many more people than would be possible offline.

One of the judges of the competition, Head of Heritage at Somerset County Council Tom Mayberry said “Somerset has never adopted its own flag although the dragon is an

ancient and important symbol and Somerset is lucky to have it" (Westcountry, 2013, May 14). For the competition the dragon seemed to have played a significant role. In the same article, 'This is the Westcountry' provided "ideas to kickstart your creativity" which had the dragon on the top of the list describing it as a "cracking symbol".

Other suggestions for themes included were "apples – drawing on the county's cider-making heritage", "cheese – we're famous for it", landscape symbols such as "green – the colour of the lush hills.", "blue – the famous Somerset Levels are designed to flood and we have some rugged and beautiful coastline", and "red and gold – the colours granted to the county council and also used by the Anglo-Saxon Kings of Wessex" (Westcountry, 2013, May 14).

These suggestions were based mainly on three things. History – the symbol of the dragon and the colours of the Anglo-Saxons; the landscape – to draw on the county's geographical and territorial extent (also plays on nostalgia and place-making, which will be discussed in the next chapters), and materiality in the form of cider and cheese that historical commodities that signal to the uniqueness of the county.

On 31st May 2013, the competition rules were updated (Westcountry, 2013), which stipulated that anyone born in the county could enter the competition and therefore a copy of their birth certificate had to be provided. The fact that the competition should be open *jus soli,* may have been partly due to those who have moved away from the county "I still think of it as my home, so why can I not have the same chance to design the Somerset flag?" (Westcountry, 2013, May 14). Commenters agreed on the whole that this was an appropriate idea although some thought "it should be someone who is ENGLISH and SOMERSET and who LIVES in the area...I personally would be annoyed if for example someone from London, Birmingham, Poland, Bulgaria got chosen" (Westcountry, 2013, May 14).

In a virtual environment, why should being born in the area be important? If an individual lives in London, then the internet can give a direct link to Somerset and give them a feeling of *home.* This gives them a 'right' to the county even though they have moved away. By having this caveat of being born in the county, they can retain their romanticised notions of the county and feel that this has been preserved, as the native regioneers of Somerset are the major active agents.

Regioneers embody identity and engage in identity-talk by exhibiting material culture (from personal collection, 2015)

Before the winning flag (a red dragon on a yellow background) was chosen commenters thought that “this [was] the only real contender for a historic flag”. History seems to be a very important concept for Somerset:

> I just pray that the judges respect history. Somerset already has arms; a red dragon rampant on a gold background. A form of this should be the flag. I live in London (for work) but eight generations of my family have lived in Somerset before me. Please god endow the judges with sense; the red dragon on gold NOT cheese, apples or any other fatuous stupidity... (Westcountry, 2013, May 14)

What is wrong with cheese or apples? Although these may be 'totems' of Somerset, they would not be perceived as appropriate for a flag. Its “fatuous stupidity” is drawn from the fact that national or regional flags are often simple, historical, and are flown with great dignity. Cheese and apples, as perishable and industrial items do not pull the same historical or metaphysical weight as the dragon with its ancient symbolism. One commenter is adamant about the dragon's adoption: “dragons have been associated with Somerset probably for millenia [sic], with their adoptin [sic] as standards by the Romans, Celts and Saxons alike” (Westcountry, 2013, May 14).

The dragon and by extension Somerset's perceived historical legacy are more meaningful for people than the organic material culture of cheese and apples. Flags have been often linked with royalty and the upper-classes and follow certain rules. Cheese and apples,

as agricultural items, are linked to farmers and the peasantry. Normally regioneers would not take these class relationships as important, yet this historical and royal link would suggest in the context of flag design, this would not be appropriate. Cider, apples, and cheese as 'living' material culture with agency could appear transient in its contemporary usage. In spite of its uniqueness as symbols for the county, something that can persist for a longer time and conforms more to the established rules of flag creation is preferable by a public that takes historical legitimacy as vital. Note in the previous quote that the writer does not include the blue for Somerset Levels or the green for the hills, as these may too link to something more historical and deep rooted in the Somerset identity as they form part of its landscape.

> The dragon emblem reflects the glories of the era of Alfred the Great and his successful campaign against the Danes which began in Athelney. In time the Saxon banner became standardised as a golden two legged dragon or wyvern on a red background, use of a specifically red dragon, reflects the older local Celtic use and romantic associations with the Arthurian legend, often of course, linked with Somerset. The red dragon on a yellow field therefore is the county's recognised symbol, full of local heritage and history and naturally familiar to its inhabitants, who have already displayed various versions of a gold flag bearing a red dragon. (Westcountry, 2013, May 14).

The red dragon is seen as historical as it is reminiscent of past Roman, Welsh, and Saxon 'states'. As a legendary creature, it can be a persistent and immutable figure, which is key for a feeling of longevity in regional identities, flags, and regions. Although the Arthurian legend is linked with many areas around the British Isles and France, it is important for many that it is linked with Somerset. It gives the county an historic and romantic past for the population and regioneers. For political entrepreneurs it is crucial for the county's branding as a mystical place (this idea will be discussed more in chapter two).

Different agents can have different interpretations of 'totems' and identity. The accumulation of cultural items will be multiple and varied. One commenter did not approve of the inclusion of a dragon "Sorry - to me, the dragon symbolises Wales or Puff the Magic Dragon! But not Somerset." (Westcountry, 2013, May 14). Also, "For Somerset - Glastonbury Tor; the M5, cider, tractors, 20 mph signs and possibly willows – for cricket and the willow

industry. A fascinating combination to place on a flag.....but definitely no dragons." (Westcountry, 2013, May 14). Some also were not concerned about history, saying that it was "not in keeping with today". In reference to the other flags around England "The stallion, Saxon axes, martlets and swans are all real creatures and objects – whereas dragons have yet to be discovered in the wild" (Westcountry, 2013, May 14).

As voting closed, thirteen finalists were chosen from about 300 entrants (Westcountry 2013, June 21). Only one of the finalists did not include the dragon as a symbol. Seven of the flags included a cross motif which is reminiscent of the English flag (although one was a saltire) and perhaps, but not wholly, from the Christian religion. The final flag chosen was the red dragon on a yellow background, which seemed to be the favourite throughout the competition. The flag now flies above many buildings and places such as various solicitors' offices and at the ship HMS Somerset. A facebook page has been tracking the use of the county flag since its inception (www.facebook.com/SomersetFlag). So far it has been seen flying at a cider festival, the Museum of Somerset, and has been used for an art workshop.

The winner of the flag competition was promised "the place in history and the prize of £250" (Westcountry, 2013, May 14). As the organisers of the flag competition, Passion for Somerset wished to attract people to the competition and so these two things were part of what was seen as incentives for participants. The "place in history" attracts those who wish to be part of flag creation (with the assumption that the flag and county will be linked in perpetuity) and those who want their name to be linked to the flag creation, increasing their social capital not only now, but also in perpetuity.

Remuneration must have been chosen almost purely as an additional incentive. This would increase the number of entrants, but may not necessarily provide quality. By providing remuneration entrants may not have in mind the flag as part of a moral, historical, or community endeavour, but almost purely for monetary gain. Whether or not this may be true, it was a choice of the organisers to allow this type of prize. This monetary incentive may or may not be in the benefit of the organisers, depending on the organisers' intention for the competition, but most likely to attract as many people to the competition as possible.

How is consensus or reconciliation maintained with differing interpretations of regional identity? For Somerset, a popular vote was a method as a way of authorising and legitimising the new flag. It was not enough for the organisers to just impose a new flag on to the county, but to open the competition to those from the county and for those in the county

to vote on it. This creates inclusion both for the entrants and the voters. This is in a sense a way that individuals who feel a Somerset identity can both embody and exhibit it. The extent in which the Somerset populace knew of the competition can be debated, yet the popularity of the flag so far may not deter from its legitimisation. The mere act of a public vote helps reify its symbol. This type of competition is not unique to Somerset, similar competitions have been used all over the world, such as in Australia and New Zealand.

The man from Yeovil, the campaigner, would be a great example of a regioneer. Although he shares aspects of the political entrepreneur by creating a campaign lasting over a half a decade, he was very much engaged in the identity-talk of the county. It was not until the political entrepreneurs of Passion for Somerset were brought together as one organisation, was it that the flag was instituted. They were then able to, through their social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), bring the various agents such as tourism, heritage, and business together to enact change.

Political entrepreneurs can have a profound effect on regioneers by providing new material (such as a flag or a day of celebration) and giving new meanings and content within identity-talk. Passion for Somerset on their website encouraged individuals to “Gather the People of Somerset” (Passion for Somerset, 2015, February 12) in reference to one of Somerset's most early historical events, a war fought by King Alfred. Many people are unaware of some of the historical significance behind material cultural items in Somerset, such as the dragon. This further adds to the accumulated material that people use to formulate their culture and identity. Images of flags and leaflets can be shared online by political entrepreneurs such as Passion for Somerset and regioneers therefore utilise these new forms of material and further identity-talk in the region.

“We are a bunch of ooooo aaaaaa rrrrrrs and so may we live.”

> I was brought up West Country but hated the Wurzel's because of what their image portrayed us as, a bunch of thick yokels. In the end I realised that the Wurzel's were part and parcel of who we are, and to change who we are would be the biggest shame on this planet. We are a bunch of ooooo aaaaaa rrrrrr's and so may we live. (Westcountry, 2013, June 21).

In this chapter I will be exploring how history and culture are essential to Somerset's regional identity and how the identity is perceived from the outside. The tourism and heritage industries along with political entrepreneurs have taken different approaches in commodifying or handling history and disparate narratives of the county. I will begin by discussing the nature of Somerset, the geography and history of the county, how place myths are formed through romanticised notions of place, and the relationship between the English national and Somerset regional identities. I will then continue by looking at Museums, the commodification of culture and how there is a trend worldwide to create national and regional brands (Anholt, 2009) and what this regional branding process is.

Somerset as a County

> Cornwall's as ugly as can be: Devonshire's better certainly; But Somersetshire is the best of the three, And Somersetshire is the country for me. (Southey, R., 1807, as cited in Chapman, 2015, January 26)

Somerset's geography is very diverse due to its size. Most people associate Somerset with the low lying Somerset Levels and Moors in the north, especially since the extensive flooding in the area at the end of 2013. The Somerset Levels has been an important part of the county's history since the prehistoric period and the Romans.

It has been proposed that the name Somerset means either land of the summer people or the people who are dependent on the town of Somerton (meaning Summer settlement). Similarly the Welsh word for Somerset, *Gwlad yr Haf* means land of Summer. This is significant as the area was only accessible during the summer due to its historical drainage and in prehistory its access by a series of wooden trackways. This association with Somerset brings to the mind's eye and accentuates the rural nature of the county and the summer idyll,

this forms part of how Somerset is perceived. This is in contrast to places such as Scotland which is mostly associated, from a southern English perspective, with winter, the cold, and darkness.

Landscape and geography has also been used by the heritage and tourist industry, such as the Somerset Levels and areas of outstanding natural beauty. A lowland wetland area south of the Mendip Hills has been renamed Avalon Marshes (The Avalon Marshes, n.d.). It has been described by the organisers of Avalon Marshes as the "most evocative part of Somerset, it has a distinct atmospheric feel and character". The use of the word Avalon brings up notions of romanticised versions of Late Antiquity. Avalon (The Island of Apples) is said to be the island that King Arthur was sent to be healed after a battle. Glastonbury (which may have been an island at the time) is said to be the resting place of King Arthur. Much of the Arthurian legend was developed in the 12th Century AD and so notions of medieval England are mixed with romanticised notions of England in 500s AD.

History has a huge significance for the country (and the county) and as a tourist site, for the rest of Britain; as legends and stories associated with this period are part of the national myth and the creation of the nations of England and Wales. Although for most it does not play much a part in modern identity formation, Somerset straddles the 'celtic'/Brythonic and Anglo-Saxon in historical and territorial space putting it at the cross-roads of two distinct, but often fused traditions. Somerset also has a series of hills in different areas of the county (the Blackdowns, the Quantocks, Exmoor, and the Mendips), which are 'Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (areas of countryside under conservation due to their value) and in the case of Exmoor, a national park.

As discussed in the first chapter, the dragon, cider, and cheese have long been associated with Somerset and more recently the Somerset flag. In spite of this, there is still a 'farmer' stereotype around Somerset, where many assume that the county is dim-witted or full of 'country bumpkins'. This idea is closely related to language or rather the regional dialect across the Westcountry, that often has connotations of farmers and the "wild and woolly" (The Spectator, 1969). As one redditor[3] commented "Somerset oo arrgh ye ol farms folk" (Redditor, 2014). A simple phrase to encapsulate the perception of some towards Somerset[4].

3 A name given to users of the website www.reddit.com .

4 As a note of interest, the Somerset (or rather the Westcountry) accent is often associated with 'pirate speech' as popularised by the neighbouring Dorset native Robert Newton who played Long John Silver in the 1950 adaptation of Treasure Island (IMDB, 2015).

The National and Regional Relationship

ICONS of England (ICONS, 2015) sought to find 'icons' – areas or artefacts that represented England. They hoped that it would become "a rich resource of material about our lives and cultural heritage". I see ICONS as an attempt to engage the population into a national discussion about identity on an online platform. It is an early example of what can be accomplished on the internet in regards to raising important questions about identity and the 'nation'. Each icon that was selected by the online community and the ICON staff were debated and voted on, until the icon was agreed. Baveystock & Mason (2009, p.24) through their research on the ICONS of England project, discovered the prevailing theme of the dominance of London, that proportionally it was over represented on the website. One commentator from "glorious Devon" said:

> I was under the impression we were voting for English icons? London is a tiny bit of it, and quite insignificant to most people, apart from those who live there. London and all it contains is not an icon...Could this sad city not have its own site and stop cluttering up this one??? (Baveystock & Mason, 2009, p.24)

There is a growing resentment and loathing towards London as the centre of the political elite, yet it goes the other way too "those Londoners who increasingly view the rest of the country as losers begging for handouts." (Hinsliff, 2015). This is a major theme about the dominance of the country's capital, that is common throughout Europe and in England. Yet what we see from here is that self-construction of identity is affected by external forces and not just internal ones. It is not fixed, but rather fluid and dynamic. Paasi (2013, p.1207) notes that regions cannot be seen as "hermetically sealed", identities within them are continuously affected by mobility and different networks, thus identity is subject to change.

Indeed, the organisation ICONS of England was aware of this phenomenon: "Some people argue that there is no such thing as a shared English culture. They say all those invasions by the Normans and Romans simply left us with a 'hotch potch' of other people's cultures. Paradoxically, this melting pot is what makes England unique. And today's multicultural communities make this mix even more vibrant and interesting" (ICONS, 2015). Although ICONS (the project finished in 2011) wanted for the general public to independently choose ICONS, in the first paragraph, they tell us that the 'mix' of cultures is a

unique asset for England, yet there are many who would argue against this. An advisory board “from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences” were also there to consider and to sift through the nominations.

The man from 'Glorious Devon' a neighbour of the equally glorious Somerset, felt that this website's icons did not reflect the cultural reality that he is living. What the website demonstrates is the difficulty for such projects like ETHNOS and ICONS to categorise cultural patterns in large geographical areas with complex and multiple cultures. There is also a tendency, as it was shown from the discussions about London, that some areas can be over represented – areas that may be very different in terms of rurality or social/ethnic make-up.

On a regional level, such as in Somerset, those in a position of *authority*, to guide what cultural *icons* are used to represent Somerset, may be all from different backgrounds or experiences. Regional identity seems to be based on the idea of birth and 'naturalisation' into the county identity. For example, the entries to the Somerset flag competition was only open to those born in the county. On who should vote and create the new Somerset flag one commenter said “ it should be someone who is ENGLISH and SOMERSET and who LIVES in the area” (Westcountry, 2013).

Some are more extreme on their position on immigration even with domestic migration, yet for the creation of new icons such as a flag or a day of celebration it is important for some that the decisions should be taken by those native to the region. “I hear more immigrant than West Country voices nowadays in Taunton, which is sad and my Grand dad would be rolling in his grave. Before I hear you are talking about Polish again, no I am talking about brummies [people from Birmingham], London and others as well.” (Westcountry, 2013, June 21). So the authenticity of the region is perceived by some to be changed by the presence of others from the rest of the United Kingdom, especially large urban centres. This comes back to the last ETHNOS dimension, people. Further research should be done on who is accepted as a native, whether one can identify as being from the county and be accepted, and to what extent does ethnicity and immigration/migration play in a predominately white English county.

Heritage and Museums

Political entrepreneurs use heritage and representations of museum pieces and events as a basis for their commodification of the region. These place-myths and narratives are often

shared and reinforced on social media platforms such as facebook or twitter as they are now the major vehicle for online advertising. As a result heritage and museums should be examined, which will lead to a discussion on what role this can have in the process of commodification of the region.

Identity, as Anico & Peralta (2009, p.1) argue, must have materiality – "the totems that symbolize the solidarity felt by generations of heterogeneous individuals towards a unifying narrative of belonging". Heritage is therefore important in legitimising this identity, as it links materiality (with its imbued ideas and concepts) through time with the present. In its curation, identity can manifest itself through the politics of power (displaying certain images or objects) and community shaping (by the deliberate exclusion or addition of objects). Museums exhibit the essences of a culture and modify material culture to form this identity. The heritage industry has become more widespread in recent years and it has been argued that it poses locally particular counter-narratives to hegemonic cultural traits (Anico & Paralti, 2009, p.2).

Cultural heritage in the 1990s and early 2000s was transformed into a brand through the turn of 'the New Economy' and 'The Experience Economy' (Löfgren, 2008, p.196). Place-making through the use of heritage utilised material such as "commodities and services" as well as feelings of atmosphere, aura, and experiences as part of change. Löfgren (2008, p.196) argues that this change actually territorialised culture and strengthened cultural rhetoric and stereotypes of the nation. Even on a sub-national level, stereotypes and generalisations can be packaged, such as the county's accent or 'rural idyll'. Complexities of social relations are then ignored and what is 'true' about the county or region is glazed over and replaced by a commodified form. As this commodification plays part in the identity-talk of the region, it reinforces certain aspects of the region and therefore challenges and changes them.

Heritage needs to be collectively approved by the community on shared aspects of memory (Anico & Paralti, 2009, p.2). To balance these contesting fictions the "democratic vote" of the flag and Somerset day of celebration may have been needed in order to placate "competing pulls". If not placated, then the legitimacy of the decisions made by organisations such as Passion for Somerset may be contested, which would be counter productive, to what I see as, their aim for cultural unity and branding.

On the other hand, Smith (2010), in his report on the South-West for the ONS, and Baveystock & Mason (2009), specialising in heritage and museology, warn of a central discussion focusing around an official narrative. This can be particularly seen with the apparent lack of Empire and race in Britain's national story (Baveystock & Mason, 2009, p.17). Heritage can be and often is a top-down authorised interpretation of a particular story or event. “Heritage is simultaneously knowledge, a cultural product and a political resource” (Ashworth & Graham, 2005, p.8 as cited in Baveystock & Mason, 2009, p.17). What does the role of local heritage organisations play in this discourse? Is it a central actor to the formation of heritage? What is the mission of a local heritage organisation and how does this correspond to the national or regional heritage organisations?

In Chinese ecomuseums, Corsane et al. (2009, p.54) foresaw a potential risk that living cultures could be transformed into exhibitions with a “potential loss of authenticity and cultural identity”. This is of course provided that the role of these museums is to encapsulate a fair and accurate representation of communities and their past and present 'cultures'. As it has been discussed previously there may be an agenda to utilise or enhance a perceived identity in the view of fusing the community together. This does not necessarily have to be malicious. Many museums in order to secure funding have to attract as many visitors as it is needed to remain afloat. There has been a trend for museums to provide cafeterias or tailored exhibitions, such as at the Museum of Somerset, in order to attract these visitors (but also to look after them). Through the commercialisation of the museum, perceptions of identity and place may be distorted or caricatured to satisfy visitors and a greater appetite for audio and visual interaction. This can also be seen as an example of the further commodification of culture and heritage, away from the museum being a public service.

The display of local heritage for Anico (2009, p.64) is a juxtaposition between fragmented collective memories and the contrasts of time and conflicting cultures. Anico (2009) sees exhibitions as a “protective strategy” promoting a “mythical local community” and creating and demonstrating a past reality based on solidarity, authenticity, and a distinct local distinctiveness. Anico (2009) says that museums can create “identity bunkers”, where identities based on territoriality can disfigure, exclude, and depreciate present conditions and cultures.

Within the Museum of Somerset, the main and largest museum in the county, I would not say this is necessarily the case and these words may be too strong. The Museum was

recently refurbished and a lot of time and thought was put into how Somerset should be represented. Quotes and poems were used to represent different people from around Somerset as well as taking the visitor through time. Archaeological evidence is at the forefront of all the exhibitions and so visitors 'can make their own mind up' about the county's overall narrative.

The museum's website, although incredibly informative and descriptive, does not provide a particular narrative or place-myth. However, museums designed on retrograde nostalgia and cultural particularism can exclude those who do not exhibit traits of the 'authorised' regional identity. Visitors can act as another form of agent, but their visitations can be multiple and varied. Although a goal of community museums is for cohesion, they may inadvertently cause the opposite effect. If the museum wishes to safe guard itself from these issues, then it must become very flexible and continuously re-evaluate its collection and whether it "represents" or conforms to the remit that they have set themselves. Museums are therefore depositories or representations of regional identities and heritage, but its contents and the identities they represent can be subject to distortion and commodification.

Commodification of Place

Some would argue that in a more globalised world we need to make England an attractive place to visit and competitive in the face of tourist development elsewhere in Europe. England already has a reputation for its rich history and attracts many by its castles, monuments, countryside, and the metropolitan city of London. Domestic tourism also plays a huge part in this, especially urban inhabitants who travel to the countryside and those living inland who might travel to the sea.

Places conjure in people's minds certain visions and ideas. These images of place are used in the process of place-making by both placing the area in time and also providing an aura or atmosphere around it, such as linking it with types of weather, seasons, or experiences. Place myths can help form this atmosphere and provide images for place making. These cultural regions are regularly packaged as part of the experience economy (Löfgren & Willim, 2005) or cultural economy (du Gay & Pryke, 2002) to create certain moods and auras and to excite the magic that comes from visualising certain places. If I were to say Bath, many English people would respond with 'spa' in reference to the natural springs and Roman baths in the city which have been used as a tourist destination for centuries

(Löfgren, 1999, p.113). Similarly, Brighton (with its pier) and Blackpool (with its beach and illuminations) (Löfgren, 1999, p.215), have remained in the English consciousness for decades. Often internal migration is based on these attributes.

Ilminster, a typical Somerset market town. (from personal collection, 2015)

The South West in particular, with its often described 'quintessential English countryside', receives most of its internal migrants from London and the South East which are large urban areas (Smith, 2010, p.5) and has the highest number of domestic tourists in the English regions and the nations (Smith, 2010, p.3). From the 18th Century travelling for the picturesque and to consume the "air of nostalgia, epitomized in the idyllic rural life" became popular (Löfgren, 1999, p.21). One in ten of the South West region's jobs in 2007 were based around tourism (Smith, 2010, p.3).

Stephen Daniels, Professor of Cultural Geography at Nottingham, as cited by Brace (1999, p.92) talks about landscape in an English context: "[landscapes] picture the nation. As exemplars of moral order and aesthetic harmony, particular landscapes achieve the status of national icons...one icon of heritage has a distinctly English cast...that is the landscape. Nowhere else does the term suggest not simply scenery and *genres de vie*, but quintessential national virtues". The English countryside has been an icon and brand for both visitors from within the country and abroad. Writers and commentators often talk, as Brace (1999, p.94) discusses, about the countryside with homogeneity. Where in fact England was (and I would argue is) "highly differentiated mosaic of regions, the diversity of which was crucial to

England's character" (Brace, 1999, p.94). This diversity and differentiated mosaics are an example of soft regionalism within an English context.

Linked with programmes such as Downton Abbey, the famous 1973 Hovis Bread advert, and Midsommer Murders, a narrative is created about the English countryside and nostalgia about a by-gone era. The Mill and new programmes such as Sherlock symbolise the urban and modern element of England. This juxtaposition between urban/modern and rural/history was beautifully recreated in the London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony where Flower of Scotland (Scotland), Jerusalem (England), Danny Boy (Northern Ireland) and, Bread of Heaven (Wales) were sung amid a pastoral scene (the rural) until the character of Isambard Kingdom Brunel brought in the Industrial Revolution (the urban and modern).

The ceremony was much for Britons' nostalgia as it was for an international audience. This divide is very well-known by English people, as one person put it "I'm never sure whether to say I come from Bristol or Somerset (as clearly no-one knows where Avon was). It usually depends on whether I want to sound gritty and urban, or quaintly rural...!" (BBC, 2006, January 12). Regional narratives are often based around the primordial nature and the personalities that regions have, these narratives are often reinforced by conservatism and idyll (Paasi, 2003, p.2.).

Local heroes, such as John Stringfellow in Chard and inventions such as unmanned powered flight (Chard Museum, 2015, March 9), tend to be part of place-myths and contribute to the narrative to the region; however, in Somerset they tend to be town-specific rather than a Somerset-wide person. This may be due to a lack of a common individual, but also may be due to the only recent surge in interest in the development of regional symbols. Local heroes are still important though as one of my informants said "we all need things to be proud of, if someone famous comes from your home town its mentioned, just a way of standing out and being counted" (Informant A, 2015).

Why is there a lack of a Somerset (modern) hero? The relevancy and the proximity of the individual is important. Somerset is a large county and for someone to say they are proud of someone from the north of the county, when they live in the south, would have less potency. The individual can sympathise with that individual as they would have walked the same streets and went to the same schools. The idea that someone from your own neighbourhood did something great gives the individual hope. This potency is lost when there

are miles of countryside in between. In the 1960s and before, too, the pride for your town and community was much greater as the same respondent said “there was a lot more pride in the town you were from, there were even fights between town supporters after football matches, nowadays you don't see that” (Informant A, 2015). Now that we are passing into an internet age this will inevitably change and there may be an appetite for heroes in Somerset, but this remains to be seen. King Alfred has re-emerged as a major figure since Passion for Somerset instigated the Somerset Day event and its debate. This shows that the organisation is contributing to the region's institutionalisation, this concept will be discussed further in chapter three.

Individuals in today's economy are seen by many businesses and tourist agencies as consumers. As we have 'modernised' we have become more knowledgeable and therefore more reflexive about our social condition (Lash & Urry, 1994, p.6). As consumers in the guise of tourists and travellers experience regions, they construct and reconstruct place-myths in them due to their aesthetic reflexivity (Lash & Urry, 1994, p.6). The construction of place-myths and the consumer's aesthetic reflexivity is two-fold. First is the direct experiencing of the aesthetics with the senses and the tangible. The second is more symbolic and is the process of interpreting and thinking about the various signifiers. An example would be an English Christmas rural idyll, the thatched roofed cottage, roaring fire, and cobbled stones (preferably coupled with snow) in the corporeal experience, and the symbolic knowledge of the Jesus narrative, 'Peace and Goodwill to all Men', and family that make up the non-material conceptions. The tourist and heritage industry in this sense is not just the commodification of history, but also aesthetic reflexivity (Lash & Urry, 1994, p.256).

Political entrepreneurs use their social and economic capital to attract these agents, tourists and travellers, to the county and exhibit the cultural items that make up the stereotypical image of it. Regioneers tend to be the agents that the tourists and travellers look for as the regioneers' cultural activities such as flag waving or rituals are part of what is 'authentic' for the county. Regioneers, who are greatly involved in place-myths, identity-talk online, and events, are often enthusiastic and play with concepts from the region such as local heroes and the quintessential countryside. An example from the case study of the flag, the regioneer would talk about the ancient romantic symbolic nature of the red dragon.

Regional culture and Nostalgic Memes

Sandford (2002) in his work on South West regional devolution attempts to highlight what "distinctive identity and culture" the region could have. Sandford (2002, p.35) says that many European regions are not based on strong regional distinctiveness and that the standard English regions do not have regional identities (save for the North-East and Yorkshire). There could be a fear that in the search for brands or identities, identities could be packaged inaccurately or misguidedly. In the words of McSweeney that started my first chapter- identities are not there to be discovered, they exist between people.

> Childhood memories are powerful triggers that linger forever in our imaginations. I still cherish vivid images of my late father taking me trekking over the Quantocks from Lydeard Hill to St Audrie's Bay. Of picnicking on the banks of the River Barle near Tarr Steps in the heart of Exmoor. Of the ancient beechwoods on the Blackdowns. Of our ecclesiastical foundations at Glastonbury and Wells, which shaped this county (Chapman, 2015, January 26).

For many the place that you were "born and bred in" resounds, whether negatively and positively, on the psyche of the individual. This is perhaps due to the malleability of the child and the deep impressions events and senses have. As such, for people in Somerset, nostalgia and often 'conservative' approaches to place and identity, takes a great part in creating identity. This is especially strong if it is associated with a family member or that it is a shared experience as mentioned in the previous quote "vivid images of my late father". As it has been discussed the rural nature of the county and the landscape plays a huge part of this especially as "picknicking" and "trekking" activities are often done in the warm summer months and accompanied with loved ones. This ultimately leaves a strong positive association with the landscape and therefore the region that it is associated.

This nostalgia has taken a new form through the use of social media. Internet 'memes' are now a popular way used to communicate 'simple' ideas through graphics and text. These memes have been used to communicate shared cultural forms. When these memes become popular they are said to have gone 'viral'. These viral memes only go viral if the meme is something entertaining or deemed important. Nostalgic memes only become popular if they are 'relatable'.

You know you're from Somerset when...Meme (Source Unknown)

This meme has become popular in recent years in Somerset (as it is common with many memes, its origin is unclear). Many of what is listed are experiences. Like the last quote from Chapman (2015, January 26), experience is the highly emotive moments of a person's life. It is clear that for the success of a 'viral meme' it is not the cultural artefacts or material culture that is important, but rather the creation of experiences. Nostalgic memes are a process in which a place-myth is created and consolidated. It links common cultural traits to certain places or tracts of land in Somerset. The more it is shared and that is acknowledged as a shared experience, these experiences are consolidated. Not all must be relatable, but for it to be successful, a significant proportion must be. Some can be humourous. For example, criticism was drawn to the above meme as it mentions real ale instead of cider (cider being

the county's alcoholic beverage of choice). The internet is a growing form in which identities are being articulated. Although nostalgic memes are not themselves part of commodification, it is their creation of place-myths and narratives that allows political entrepreneurs to use them in the process of commodification.

Branding the Region

Creating a regional 'brand' can be an advantage for economic development in a region, as inhabitants can identify with and are willing to invest something in its future (Sandford, 2002). So as Sandford (2002, p. 33) puts it "this suggests that where territorial identities exist, boundaries ought to follow them if possible". This is what 'Passion for Somerset' wants to achieve.

Political entrepreneurs and governmental, tourist, and heritage organisations tend to see the nation or a region as a 'brand'. Simon Anholt (2009, p.xvii), policy advisor and author on place-branding, defines 'brand' as "the destination's competitive identity. It is what makes a destination distinctive and memorable". The brands of companies and organisations appear to them as similar to the images of countries or subregions. This relies on the assumption that "a country's image is just as important to its progress and prosperity as a company's brand is to its success in the marketplace, because it exerts so much influence over the behaviours and attitudes of that country's 'target audiences'." (Anholt, 2009, p.ix).

As Anholt (2009, p.x) puts it "every country, city and region on earth must compete with every other for its share of the world's commercial, political, social and cultural transactions in what is virtually a single market". What this does is commodify the region and allow it to be packaged. By "[taking] into account these important questions relating to the deliberate **capture** and **accumulation** [sic] of reputational value" (Anholt, 2009, p.x), countries will benefit from the preconceived positive notions of that country and therefore attract visitors. One could substitute 'reputational value' for 'social capital' and the intention would remain the same. The brand seems to be a living entity that needs to be nourished and grown.

How does the concept of branding fit in with the whole of England and Great Britain? Are regions in a process of commodification or competition? Sub-national destinations should share some characteristics with the overarching national brand as well as forming a shared 'brand architecture'. This, in a Somerset context, has been achieved recently through

the Passion for Somerset organisation. Members of Passion for Somerset are able to use the brand as part of unifying symbol for the regional area. Even a 'steering group', as suggested by Anholt in his book *Handbook on tourism destination branding,* has been created at Passion for Somerset consisting of the member organisations in order to oversee the brand's development. Brand champions and advocates have also been used by Passion for Somerset, to influence the organisations that they are part of to adopt the brands. Due to this shared branding, there is no contention between the overall English national brand and the regional Somerset county brand and identities.

Passion for Somerset and the heritage industry seem to be attempting to guide the branding process and the formulation of identity in Somerset. On the national scale no one organisation can alter the 'national image' as this tends to be deep-rooted in each country's culture. What 'small countries' (in this case counties, Somerset) need to do is 'fire all cylinders', all organisations must work together to tell the “same basic story, the same values, the same personality, the same tone of voice” (Anholt, 2009). By uniting organisations from all around Somerset like Passion for Somerset, both tourism and business, this may be an attempt to guide this regional image and for them to articulate one basic story or narrative in order to guide public perception.

To broaden Somerset's appeal to a global audience, Somerset Tourism Association (now VisitSomerset, and an organisation now within the Passion for Somerset umbrella) in 2010 worked with officials in China (in this context as political entrepreneurs) and the County Council to boost Chinese tourists in the county (BBC News, 2010). They were trying to look for what was considered “international brands”. Cheddar cheese and Glastonbury festival were chosen. As Cheddar and Glastonbury are both towns in Somerset it links these 'international brands' geographically and to place. Cheese has become a key material cultural object for Somerset (a cheese press is on display at the Somerset Rural Life Museum in Glastonbury [BBC History, 2015]), due to the historical and now international nature of Cheddar. Glastonbury festival, on the other hand, being a relatively new phenomenon, has not been. Therefore, there is a split between what is 'tourist' related and what is 'heritage', yet they are often interlinked.

The heritage industry may exhibit cultural items and may represent the region or subject they want to exhibit, the tourist industry on the other hand uses these cultural items as brands to sell. The heritage industry sees it as appropriate to maintain a Cheese press as an

important historical item, as the historical nature of Somerset is something that appears to be important for the population. Although a major tourist event, it may be a long time before Glastonbury Festival would be included in such a setting.

This chapter has shown ways in which place myths and narratives about the region such as Somerset have been packaged and commodified to enhance tourist and heritage opportunities. It shows how heritage and museums are used in this commodification process and can distort the identities they wish to represent. Online 'nostalgic' memes and romanticised notions of history and landscape are used in the processes of place-making and narrative.

These processes of commodification have all been set against the backdrop of the last financial crisis of 2008 and the impetus from local authorities, political entrepreneurs such as Passion for Somerset, and tourist agencies such as VisitSomerset not to allow the county to become what they call a “second class citizen” (Westcountry, 2015, February 18). This recent push for identity creation seems to be in part caused by a “persistent ache” that people feel when they see Somerset as a “grey ribbon of tarmac” as holiday makers travel through the county to Devon and Cornwall (Chapman, 2015, January 26). Tourism plays a pivotal role in this push for identity.

“Avon is like piles”

> [e]nough of Avon. It does not exist and, in every true West Country man's heart, it never did. (BBC, 2006, January 12).

Scholarly definitions of region within England are often devoid of any 'cultural' significance. Sandford (2002, p.12), for example, describes a region as “an area, consisting of multiple local authorities, which is used for administrative purposes for the organisation of particular functions which are not part of local government responsibilities”. Moreover, scholars in various disciplines have rarely used the concept of culture in their analysis of borders and statecraft (Donnan & Wilson, 2001, p.11). Due to the increasing discussions on politics, local communities, and the heritage industry about borders and territories, it is imperative that there should be a discussion about 'culture' and regional identity. England has not been typically seen as having many pockets of strong militant regional identities or culture. Yet this is not to say that strong regionalism is the opposite to soft regionalism. What is opposite to soft regionalism would actually be the nationalisms seen in Wales, Scotland, or Cornwall.

In this chapter I explore the concept of soft regionalism in Somerset and the former county of Avon. First I describe how regional identity is created through border and place. I then describe the processes of institutionalisation, where symbols, territory, and institutions form these regional systems, and the concept of deinstitutionalisation, where institutionalised regions merge and fragment with other regions.

England went through structural changes during the 1970s which led to the break up and merges of traditional and historic counties. This upset many people as it moved parts of the counties to others, split counties up, or abolished them all together, thereby interrupting the historically placed regional systems in England. Therefore I discuss the *Association of British Counties* (ABC), which was created in part as a reaction towards the changing administrative units across the country during this period. This organisation demonstrates the passion felt by many in their respective counties, yet seeks to reaffirm and strengthen historical counties rather than challenge them, which is the basis of *soft* regionalism compared to militant ones.

After the discussion concerning ABC, the deinstitutionalisation process of Somerset and the reactions towards the creation of Avon is described, which will lead to a discussion

about tension and oppositions between these borders. Finally contemporary discussions about a new 'Greater Bristol Region' will be discussed, where it is seen as both a reminder of the old Avon debate and current arguments for devolution and decentralisation.

Place and Borders

> It is our contention, moreover, that borders are not just symbols and locations of these changes, which they most certainly are, but are often also their agents (Donnan &Wilson, 2001, p.4)

We must first emphasise the importance of borders and the politics of borderland regions especially within the context of administrative borders and soft regionalism. We should not let the border itself be "condensed to an image" (Donnan & Wilson, 2001, p.16) or its existence be an indisputable fact. Although questions of identity and borders may seem relevant when examining from a borderlands perspective, we must also study and continuously reflect on the role of the state (i.e. government, local authorities, and Bristol City Council) and those in core centres away from the peripheries (Bristol and Taunton). In other words, although identity talk is often common around areas such as Bristol and Avon in regards to identity in Somerset, the scholar must look at how local governments respond to present realities and how core settlements such as Bristol, Weston-super-Mare, Bath in the north, and Taunton (Somerset's county town) look at identity.

Place, particularly in the context of Somerset, should not be seen as fixed. Place can be interpreted by agents, such as political entrepreneurs and regioneers, who in their own way construct their own definition of place.

The agents or inhabitants in Somerset may distinguish themselves from people from other areas by use of a flag, typical foods, traditions, or other modes of behaviour. In a virtual environment they may change profile pictures, cover photos, or share pictures or memes of the county. Borders between places can act both as barriers and as bridges. Although individuals at borders may demarcate place, they may indeed have similar customs, values, or physical appearance.

As it was discussed in the previous chapter, place myths can also play a significant part of this differentiation. When King Alfred fled to the Somerset levels, he was looked after by one of his subjects, a woman who was baking cakes. He was asked to look after the cakes, but after he let them burn, he was told off by the woman when she returned. This story is

known by and taught to every Somerset child and forms part of myths surrounding the Somerset levels. Its historical quality, its mention of geographically specific places, and King Alfred links the story clearly in the territorially bound area of Somerset. It becomes a place-myth and story for the county due to these qualities. Story-telling is another means that teachers and parents use, in their position similar to a regioneer, to create place-myths and also contribute to the accumulation of regionality and 'aggregation' of their pupils. ABC, in its advocacy for historical counties and use of them, is crucial for this process of place-making.

In regards to Somerset, many customs are similar to those of border regions. Moreover many borders are economically linked which allows the movement of people around the county and the spread of customs. This can clearly be seen from those commuting from Chard (in Somerset) to Axminster in Devon, Yeovil (that straddles the Somerset/Dorset border), and the two unitary authorities that were once part of Avon (the City of Bristol being its focal point and a core centre) (Office for National Statistics, 2001).

From this we can appreciate that there are different ways in which people can conceptualise borders between individuals, groups, and geographical space. Therefore when looking at identity and administrative units, we must keep in mind that certain groups or individuals will use the concept of “Somerset” or the “border” in different ways due to their disparate experiences and vested interests. There will also be metaphysical or abstract borders that are created *within* these geographical spaces related to the concepts of the social as well as the Marxist interpretations of class. Different classes may use material culture in a number of ways, their shared usage however may actually reinforce the symbolic notion of the material culture (the use of the flag by various members of society). In Somerset these differences are manifested through the different backgrounds that regioneers and political entrepreneurs have and in the case of Passion for Somerset, it allows access to certain groups and resources that others do not.

Geopolitical, county, and administrative borders have an objective quality to them and therefore are often referred to as 'real' borders by scholars (Donnan & Wilson, 2001, p.26). For Donnan & Wilson (2001, p.26) territorial borders, too, are culturally and socially constructed. Symbolic borders are no less real than the physical or widely known state or territorial borders, such as the borders between Somerset and Bristol. Donnan & Wilson (2001) also point out that the symbolic borders based on a spatial or territorial dimension does not necessarily have to exist, they can exist all around us and also within the mind. A

person can feel like a Somerset person (or in Somerset) or a person can feel Bristolian (or in Bristol) and this separates and differentiates them. The physical border may become 'more real' if these cultural and social elements of differentiation are identified and accepted by a larger group. This is why in an international context the recognition of a state and its borders are so important. The symbolic gesture of acknowledging the State of Palestine's existence, for example, would reify it. In a virtual environment, borders and place are purely based on this symbolic and representational model, yet it does allow individuals to articulate different tensions and regional interpretations in more imaginative ways such as through mapping and interactive pictures.

Symbolic borders can also exist between people. For Fredrik Barth “social collectivities” can change their identities strategically depending on the context in which they are in for their own advantage (Donnan & Wilson, 2001, p.21). Individuals (or political entrepreneurial organisations) may then be able to enter some circles or contexts with other classes where it is to their advantage, without disrupting the durability of these socially constructed borders. Material culture could be used as a device to facilitate social relations, create borders, create relationships, and can help legitimise place, such as the flying the flag of Somerset in the northern parts of the county to legitimise the historical county in these places.

The State not only has the monopoly on physical force, but also on symbolic force (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p.15). The state through this power has the ability to identify, categorise, and reinforce these categories and borders, through the use of material and material resources that they have at their disposal (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p.15-16). In Somerset this would be the ability to use certain buildings and the capital raised through taxation. More fundamentally the state has the ability to set and change borders and therefore potentially socially constructed borders within the mind.

This does mean that borders are a separating factor, their presence separates populations and demarcates political entities, it is not a means of assimilation or integration, but rather to know who is an insider and who is not, and to “control rather than to interact” (Donnan & Wilson, 2001, p.48). Administrative units within a state set borders in order to know what geographical area is in their jurisdiction and what they are able to control. Does this then limit the ability for similar authorities offering similar services to cooperate? Without a formal framework for interaction then authorities may only stay within the areas

that they control. The separating factor can also form identity. By merely being born in a territory, many people form their identities through the medium of the material culture within these boundaries that they have accumulated.

Institutionalisation and History

Somerset, although an ancient administrative region, is going through a new phase of 'institutionalisation' (Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2013, p.31), whereby the institutional, territorial, and symbolic emerges into the consciousness of the population and it is seen as an established regional system.

Deinstitutionalisation (Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2013, p.31) is a process where institutionalised regions such as Somerset merge into a region or fragments into smaller units. Somerset went through both forms of deinstitutionalisation. The two unitary authorities 'North Somerset', and 'Bath and North-East Somerset' once were part of the 'County of Avon', one of the new counties created in the Local Government Act, 1972, which divided the county administratively. This issue of Avon still resonated with the man from Yeovil (of the Somerset flag fame). He stated “a lot of people are not happy about this post-Avon limbo and long for Somerset to be reunited” (BBC, 2006, January 12).

When regional identity is institutionalised (either through governmental means or by the heritage industry), a 'perpetual conflict' is created between notions of “uniqueness and difference” through the reproduction and transformation of discourse (Paasi, 2013, p.1208). The process of institutionalisation incorporates the conceptions of the region through the symbolic, territorial, and institutional 'shapes' that become part and parcel of the region. The creation of the flag, the Somerset Day, the creation of 'ceremonial counties' (as opposed to the local authority divisions), and the creation of Somerset wide institutions such as VisitSomerset, the Museum of Somerset, and Passion for Somerset are all ways that the county is institutionalised, thereby creating a regional consciousness and regional system. The institutionalisation process is merely facilitated by online media by the sharing of memes as discussed in chapter two and to create border as discussed in the last section.

Association of British Counties and Place Identity

The Association of British Counties (ABC) is a society that promotes the importance of the historical (or traditional) counties of the United Kingdom. On their main website they

describe why they think the use of the historical counties is of great importance to British people:

> The ABC believes that the historic counties are an important part of the culture, geography and heritage of The United Kingdom. The ABC contends that Britain needs a fixed popular geography, one divorced from the ever changing names and areas of local government but, instead, one rooted in history, public understanding and commonly held notions of community and identity. The ABC, therefore, seeks to fully re-establish the use of the historic counties as the standard popular geographical reference frame of Britain and to further encourage their use as a basis for social, sporting and cultural activities. (ABC, 2015)

The Association argues that the historic counties should not just be “tossed aside” (ABC, 2015b) just because they are not suitable for administration, they should be preserved on the basis that they form people's identities and the essence of where people come from. In addition the counties are an instantly recognisable phenomenon due to their historical context. ABC also wants areas to be “rooted in history” which suggests stability as opposed to the unstable county borders drawn by governmental authorities.

Avon and Resistance

> In the place of the former Avon County, there are four unitary authorities of unequal size, resulting in a tendency for the political muscle of Bristol to dominate the agenda (Etherington et al., 2007, p.40).

Whereas Passion for Somerset and regioneers in the county are seeking to 'unite' the county of Somerset in a representational sense, there is also a movement to create a Greater Bristol area that consists of former Avon, that is the northern portion of Somerset. In the past, Somerset has been 'threatened' by the creation of the County of Avon which resulted in the administrative breakup of Somerset.

The creation of Avon was a controversial move as it significantly changed the administrative borders away from the traditional historical county boundaries. This was particularly felt in Somerset where the entire northern portion of the county was integrated into Avon. Even after the dissolution of Avon and the creation of four unitary authorities

through The Avon (Structural Change) Order 1995, campaigners and regioneers such as Adam Thomas (BBC, 2006, January 12) wanted to eradicate any mention of Avon, a name that "refuses to die". Many people have been known to write back or return post that had been addressed to them with the name Avon as the county. One man said that "Avon is like piles", as it was not even wanted in the first place. The animosity towards Avon is particularly felt more in the historical county of Somerset than in Gloucestershire, but even Bristol residents are passionate about it declaring that "when it was abolished, I think I danced a little jig at the time" (BBC, 2006, January 12).

Many in defence of the historical counties appeal to tradition. Residents highlight the fact of the area's ancient origin "[e]nough of Avon. It does not exist and, in every true West Country man's heart, it never did. I live in Taunton and want to see the original county boundary restored. If we need a regional term, what is wrong with Wessex[5]?" (BBC, 2006, January 12).

> Bristol was given the status of 'City and County' by King Edward III in 1373. Admittedly some 'civil service' bureaucrats decided to invent the County of Avon in 1974 (the year after we celebrated its 600th anniversary) that was supposed to include Bristol but I always refused to recognise this as I believe only the Queen would have sufficient authority to repeal Bristol's status. (BBC, 2006, January 12)

For this Bristolian, it was an affront to the city's history as well as democracy itself, as it was felt by many that it was imposed: "no one wanted it in the firstplace" (BBC, 2006, January 12). One man, however, sees it from a practical perspective. It makes sense for the region to be well connected as "[m]ost economic, cultural and leisure activities are carried out within the Avon Borders". Indeed, even today the area is well integrated due to the creation of the "West of England" Local Enterprise Partnership (West of England LEP, 2015).

Similarly when Herefordshire and Worcestershire were to be amalgamated into a single county of "Hereford and Worcester", a campaign named "Hands off Herefordshire" was set up in 1972 with a petition sent to Downing Street with over 60,000 signatories (Guest, 2013). It was seen by some as a Worcestershire take over due to the disproportionate

5 Wessex is a historical Kingdom in what is now the south of England. Today the Wessex Regionalist Party define the area as consisting of the historic counties of Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Hampshire (including the Isle of Wight).

population sizes, Herefordshire had about 140,000 inhabitants and Worcestershire had about 420,000 at the time (Guest, 2013 April 9). When the bill was first introduced to Parliament the county was going to be called Malvernshire. MP for South Worcestershire was however not impressed stating "[i]s he aware that the adoption in the Bill of the revolutionary name of Malvernshire has caused great offence in Worcestershire, which wants to be called 'Greater Worcestershire' not some new-fangled name coined for the occasion?" (Hansard, 16 November 1971, col 234).

Regional or county identity can be examined on a cultural-historical and a political-economic basis. A symbol, be that the name 'Malvernshire', without the relevant experience and history renders the symbol devoid of meaning and "impotent in terms of evoking identification" (Paasi, 2003, p.4). "Abstract slogans" cannot create identity, but through discourse, action, and 'identity-talk' by agents. This is one reason why places with hollow names such as Avon or Malvernshire, (or even worse Area 26, as was the Greater Bristol region was first called) cannot survive. A name and place seems to require attachment by its people. They appear as 'hollow' as for those in England, the historical associations with names and regions are particularly strong. Neither can regioneers attribute symbols or experiences to them, nor can they see historical signification. It is also part of the branding process of the region whereby political entrepreneurs can create a coherent identity and users of online media can attribute place-myths and memes.

If regions around the country do not have a name that speaks to the local populace, then it might not encourage successful devolution. A name may not reflect or describe the region in the best way, but whatever name is given, it will imbue itself onto the region and how it is thought of (Hansen, 2007, p.202). Names are a performative process, they can be reiterated time and time again, yet their usage can either "affirm or undermine" them (Hansen, 2007, pp.202-203). An example of this can be seen in the former county of Avon. After the proposals and before its creation the area was known as "Area 26" or "Bristol County".

If the state enforces a name onto an area its usage is determined by the power of the state to enforce them and the acceptability of these names by the people, as Hansen (2007, p.203) describes "the designator – the name – effectively designate, and thus authorize, a particular history, myth, or reference as more authentic than those its seeks to displace or erase".

As Paasi & Zimmerbauer (2013, p.31) say “the region ceases to have an official status in the regional system but may still have an important role in regional consciousness”. Somerset consciousness and the degree of historical institutionalisation was so strong, that it led to the abolition of Avon by government legislation and lead to the (re)creation of the ceremonial counties through the Lieutenancies Act 1997 (although these are still based around local authorities and not historical boundaries). The 'divided' units now sit side by side with the ceremonial county – Somerset in its symbolic and in its regional consciousness has regained 'official' status and therefore Somerset-wide initiatives have begun.

Due to the existence of Avon, the northern borders of Somerset are often fluid and depending on whether your family originates from Somerset or Bristol, you will consider yourself living in Somerset, despite the area being formally part of Bristol due to its urban sprawl. The existence of old administrative boundaries has confused identities in border regions and some, such as ABC, argue for them to revert back to the historical county boundaries or at least refer back to them.

Although commonly seen as a natural area, in the Medieval period, these borders would have been administrative borders, and so it is merely the longevity that have rendered them historically fixed and 'untouchable'. This reaffirms the importance of history in the part of territorial and regional identity formation. The acceptance by many that this was the county “as it has always been” officialises, authorises, and legitimises it. Although governments attempt to change administrative boundaries these are contested as they are seen as fleeting whims of the current government contrary to the accepted “ancient county border”. Organisations such as ABC are, as entrepreneurs, agents that contest this fluidity and champion the fixed territorial spaces.

Even though ceremonial counties do not correspond directly to historic counties, the borders of Somerset are almost identical. So what does the man from Yeovil mean by “reunited”? For many people administrative units are the geographical units that they must directly interact with, such as through bin collection and general services. This stark separation of administrative units would then seem as a complete separation of the perceived county. This fear that people may see the unitary authorities as separate counties apart from the rest of Somerset, may become realised, were they to form separate identities. The flag, as a symbol for the whole historic and ceremonial county, would be an attempt to remedy this and consolidate a coherent identity. Whether it be from a county level, people (particularly

regioneers) are finding ways of articulating identity and using 'flags' as a primary function to assert this. Political entrepreneurs might have other plans connected to tourism, heritage, and the use of branding.

Tension and Opposition

A new push for the creation of regional or local identity would require planners, organisations (such as ABC), and governmental bodies to find the common confluences of the regional identity. It may be that 'perpetual conflicts' -the relationship between regioneers and political entrepreneurs-, dissension, and this conflict of opposing views of identity is the normal position of both identity construction and everyday life in England. Britain as a nation of nations consisting of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland has a constant tension. Power balances between the nations seem to be the normal state of affairs. It could be that dissension is part of that national identity. This same dissension within or between counties or regions, may be part of everyday life and identity. A number of organisations have studied English and British national identities, its peculiarities, and its conflict. This conflict often manifests itself between administrative units and functional regions where power must be either shared or relinquished. Recent events regarding devolution and Greater Bristol (which has been influenced by other growing cities across the country) will reignite this tension and questions of identity and will be raised.

As mentioned in previous chapters there is a recent trend for historical counties to adopt a flag, even if the county flags were modern inventions. The use of the flag provides a direct link and a continuation of place in historical time. St. George, the red rose, and the royal oak too are being used as symbols for Englishness increasingly. Christian symbolism and the English and Union flags have been key features in English and British nationalism by 'far-right' groups such as the English Defence League and Britain First. In the other nations of the United Kingdom, patron saints have been a key feature of distinction. The Scottish Government, for example, set its deadline for the Smith Commission for St. Andrew’s Day (Scotland's national day) and the Welsh Secretary Stephen Crabb gathered together four party leaders to discuss devolution in Wales and set his deadline for St. David's Day 2015 (Wales' national day) (ITV News, 2014). Regioneers in counties have adopted these symbols in conjunction with their county identities.

Region and place can be used as part of the materiality of identity construction. The identity of Somerset can be bounded by the existence of a defined area or 'placeness' of Somerset. A 'placeness' that ABC seeks to preserve. Place identity is another term that is contested in many works (Whitehead, 2009, p.30). Individuals and groups can construct different place identities to their environment, moreover, place identity can discuss the construction of these identities through our immediate environment, civic, regional, national, and geographical place (Whitehead, 2009, p.30). Place identities, as has been argued in previous chapters are now constructed in the virtual environment as well.

In spite of the fact that ABC wants to enforce fixed notions of territoriality and as a consequence allow regioneers to form place-myths for places such as Somerset, the borders of the English regions have, for centuries, been incredibly fluid. Such as what is normally perceived as the 'standard' regions – originating from the emergency planning regions from the Second World War (Sandford, 2002, p.13). The 'standard' regions are in no way official, but through custom they are often adopted. Although the South West region is composed of the historic counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire, the City of Bristol, and Gloucestershire, subregional names of Wessex, 'the West', or the 'West Country' do not have strict definitions (Sandford, 2002, p.17).

Anthony Cohen, a British social anthropologist, argues that a community only exists due to its opposition to another community (Donnan & Wilson, 2001, p.25), therefore in order to research the issues of opposition and the exclusivity of communities, for Cohen, it would be at these borders. The mere proximity to a border could influence the development of the local identity and culture (Donnan & Wilson, 2001, p.34).

Opposition between communities do not exist to a great extent between administrative boundaries save for the preservation of historic counties as demonstrated by ABC. In this case counties and local identities do not exist as opposing forces, but rather as complimentary, opposed but equal to one another. Although their existence is mostly due to soft regionalism or soft localism for the advancement of the heritage industry and community spirit, a comparative example would be the 'far-right''s notion of the nation-state within modern Europe. Instead of territorial expansion, populist far-right eurosceptic parties tend to recognise the integrity of each other's nation-states. The Association of British Counties, does not want to expand certain counties into other ones, on the contrary, they want to

preserve them and promote identities within them. For ABC, it reinforces the nation-state and becomes a great reference point for all the citizens of the United Kingdom.

ABC differs to Passion for Somerset as instead of selling or commodifying the counties that they work with, they instead seek to give integrity to them and to reduce opposition by petitioning to erect markers at borders, giving them status within the Royal Mail, and encouraging Ordnance Survey to mark historic counties on their maps. Although they may generalise and create fixed fictions onto the landscape, they do not sell them for monetary gain or actively package them in the view of selling them.

Greater Bristol and County Borders

Bristol's present mayor George Ferguson would like neighbouring former Avon councils to agree to a joint authority. He criticises the brand "West of England" that has been used in recent publications, he says "For location and clarity, I prefer the title of Bristol City Region. Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds are creating Northern powerhouses, Bristol needs to be the south west equivalent." (Ryan, 2014, December 19). The leader of North Somerset George Ashton is not so certain about this:

> constantly quoting ...Manchester misses the point. We are not Manchester., and what works for them should not be mandatory for everywhere else. We talk of localism and devolution and then try to impose another layer of government further away from our communities, without even asking our residents...apparently we would also have a Metro Mayor. George says he supports devolved powers but then seeks to centralise it (Ryan, 2014, December 19).

The new 'Bristol City Region' could be seen as a re-introduction of the idea of the Avon region, which was ferociously criticised by both Bristolians and people from neighbouring counties. Even now when talks of greater integration are on-going deputy leader for North Somerset Elfan ap Rees "dreaded the idea of a Greater Bristol Authority" (The Bristol Post, 2014). It is also clear that the debate around devolution has reignited ideas of border between neighbouring administrative units based around historical ones. For Ferguson, Bristol's mayor, the argument centres around the perceived economic benefits of a joint authority, merging the surrounding councils. It is also a desire to emulate other large cities around the

north of England who may be receiving additional powers in the future. It would also mean a greater role for the mayor.

For Ashton (Leader of North Somerset), it seems contrary to the idea of localism and devolution, as the people of North Somerset have not been consulted. Ferguson argues that the extent of Bristol can be extended to the surrounding areas, perhaps due to their interdependence – so much so that the region should be renamed after its largest city. Ashton on the other hand feels that it would almost be a takeover and those in North Somerset would be subject to Bristol. This could also be in connection to the fact that North Somerset still has historical and personal ties with 'Bath and North East Somerset' and 'Somerset County Council'.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Passion for Somerset is also in the process of creating a brand identity for itself, creating a direct opposition to the ideas presented by Ferguson. Political entrepreneurs such as Passion for Somerset and organisations such as ABC are creating processes of institutionalisation in the region. Ferguson, on the other hand, would like to see a single administrative unit, yet this would, like Avon, divide neighbouring counties. This will not only create tension between political entrepreneurs, organisations, and local authorities, but also regioneers who are currently engaging in place-myths and the material culture in the region. Local authorities will then have to decide where allegiances lie and where decision making powers should be concentrated. Especially if plans to see the introduction of 'Metro Mayors' in the rural counties of the Westcountry go ahead (Demianyk, 2014).

Summary and Conclusion

> I am West Country, English, British and damm proud....If you call being patriotic as being madness, then yes I am as mad as a march hare. (Westcountry, 2013, June 21).

In this thesis I have addressed the concept of regional identity that is often ignored in a British and English context, where questions of administration and economics are often addressed, but seldom the social and the cultural. In particular, the case study of Somerset is an example of areas in England with *soft* regional identities that are often sidelined.

Regional identities cannot be something that the researcher looks for, rather it is interactions between people, place-myths, and 'identity-talk'. This is what regional identity is. Regional identity comes from the experiences and the material culture that we handle and the concepts and ideas that we imbue on them. We are inheritors of the 'accumulated regionality' that has come from previous generations, social relations with other people, and from living transmitters of heritage. The two main agents that have been discussed are the main actors in this handling or manipulating of material around Somerset and as such have the greatest influence on the creation and recreation of Somerset identity. This gives them a great responsibility in the future as they start to develop their organisations.

Research on political entrepreneurs in Somerset, a main theme for this thesis, shows that this new active agent plays a significant role in influencing tourist institutions. Although they have their own vested interests at heart, political entrepreneurship is only a position that someone takes as a representative of their business or when engaged with political entrepreneurial organisations. Despite this, in this capacity they have a great responsibility as their policy decisions will have impact on how Somerset will be celebrated (by events, the flag, the day of celebration), how it is defined (by their area of jurisdiction as opposed to the Greater Bristol former Avon area), or how it is represented through its influence on the tourist and heritage industries. Political entrepreneurs are not advocating that regioneers become part of the commodification process, but rather create opportunities for themselves to commodify and not allow Somerset to become in their words a “second citizen” economically.

As the business world has traditionally been dominated by middle to upper-middle class males, the political entrepreneurial class in Somerset (rural communities that tend to be more conservative than their urban counterparts) are too mostly middle to upper-middle class

males. This is not a criticism of the organisation, but rather a realisation that the structural make up of these organisations that affect identity will be affected by the social make-up of this class. This is a reality that local authorities, tourist organisations, and the people of Somerset should be made aware of.

Regioneers tend to be the followers and the agents who use the Somerset flag, those who actively drink cider as a symbolic regional marker, and who sing regional songs. Their position has largely been unchanged, but the internet has given them opportunities to articulate this more effectively and to reach a wider audience. We have seen that the internet amongst the younger generation, particularly through the use of memes and other websites that celebrate Somerset-ness, allows them to articulate this identity more effectively and through community groups online facilitate better connected towns and villages, which will become a warmly welcomed method for what has been criticised as a period of 'loss of community' or individualism. The inclusion of inhabitants and regioneers in the flag competition process helps in the legitimisation of the flag. Although only a few participated in the competition and its vote, the fact that it was democratically chosen, gives it a rubber stamp of approval.

History is passionately felt in the county. This is true for the tourism and the heritage industry to commodify the county, but also for residents in the regional identity's reification. History from Late Antiquity, Arthurian legend, and the English Civil War are becoming part of the place-myths and romanticised notions of place in Somerset. These notions, the landscape, and the rural idyll are thus commodified and branded by the tourist industry and given bounded places, such at Avalon Marshes.

There has been a discussion of the interesting history of Avon and its former constituent parts. Now that political entrepreneurs in Somerset wish for greater integration in Somerset and some politicians in Bristol want the return of a Greater Bristol or a new Avon area, there will be heated debates on the area's future. The question is whether agents within these areas will address the cultural and social issues that I have addressed in the previous chapters or will discussions continue to focus on the functional or the economical.

The Somerset flag has been part of the institutionalisation of the region, where the former areas of Somerset Avon have 'rejoined' the rest of Somerset in a symbolic sense. Although the county is not administratively linked, the flag acts as a symbol for all the people

of the historical county. This is something that is passionately felt and is in part a reaction from the years when the county of Avon existed.

When social or cultural identities become weak or uncertain, "symbolic resources...emerge and form part of the construction of new identity discourses" (Anico, 2009, p.67). As the main theme of this thesis is to decipher the various regional narratives and regional identities, the reemergence of identity discourse in Somerset may have been due to a perceived weakness. What forms of material culture or ways of speech form an idea of "authenticity" or "distinctiveness" in Somerset? Are there ways that identity have tried to assert itself against the backdrop of globalisation?

What I feel is my significant contribution to the study of regionalism is the use of my online methodology. In my introduction I described how people are now using the internet more and more to articulate their identities both personal and collective, and using social media to form communities. What this means is that the studies on regionalism must move more into netnography and questions of regional identity in a virtual environment. I have addressed how agents, such as Passion for Somerset and the Association of British Counties, represent themselves online, and how they may use the internet to bring together a wider audience and garner support for offline events. As more and more people will live their lives through the medium of the internet, more research must be done on how regional identity is articulated through this and how it will change in relation to tangible material culture and their representational values.

The results of this thesis will be particularly relevant to public bodies and politicians. Agents that have arisen in recent years in England and the heritage industry will draw parallels to similar cases in Europe. It could be useful to civil servants who would be able to further understand the complex social arrangements that arise in regional settings. This would help in their ability to create functional administrative regions and sympathise with these complexities (in this case the cultural and regional identities). Secondly, the general public may benefit from the knowledge of these new agents that have emerged who use their social and economic capital to handle material culture and regional identity. Though not necessarily a target audience, politicians may find my results useful in the ongoing debate in the United Kingdom around devolution. This new research may give better insight into English regional identities and how they have been misused and misunderstood in the past.

Further research that would be required in this study would be to analyse the merger of Avon and its constituent units. This would also be linked to a subsequent analysis of its break-up and its 'survival' through the use of the name and imagery. This would also contribute to the analysis of the growing movement for 'City-regions' and devolution, particularly the Greater Bristol area that would encompass former Avon. This is particularly pertinent as many feel that there will be a growing importance of city-regions and also the role of mayors with greater powers and influence (Barber, 2013).

From the data collected and from a wider English context, I have found a growing sense of patriotism and English (and British) nationalism in England. This is a phenomenon that is currently unravelling, its growth having a profound effect on the future of the United Kingdom and its relationship with Europe and the European Union. Research in this area has already been completed in political science on a macro-level, but more must be done in the cultural analytical field in the micro-level. This is critical research as the pro-EU/anti-EU, pro-immigration/anti-immigration debate is multi-faceted and individuals have a complex array of opinions beyond this dichotomy. The devolution debate and the eventual future of the United Kingdom is ongoing; I hope that I have contributed to this debate in both an informative and interesting way for the reader.

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Interviews

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