

## Chapter #

# Community, Scenarios and Narratives of Action: Reflections on a case study in the Hamilton region of Victoria

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### Introduction

Much of the public discussion on climate change impacts in Australia has focused on national policy initiatives that would reduce carbon emissions. There has been much less discussion about how local and regional communities might adapt to the reality of climate change impacts over the next 50--100 years. However, when researchers from RMIT University organised a public meeting on the topic of climate change in the Hamilton region in April 2007 over 70 people came and the mood was for taking action at the regional level without waiting for new national policies and initiatives. As a result of this meeting researchers in the new Global Cities Research Institute at RMIT have decided to continue working in the Hamilton region on strategies for climate change adaptation.

This paper focuses on the use of scenarios mapping as a method for engaging a regional community in long-term thinking about climate change adaptation. A two-day scenarios mapping workshop was held in Hamilton in February 2008 with internationally experienced scenarist Sally Jones and this paper critically examines the use of this way of engaging with local and regional communities. While scenarios mapping is a very good technique for getting people to think more strategically and with much longer timeframes about the future, this paper argues that it is critical to see scenarios mapping as just one component in a broader strategy for working with communities on climate change adaptation. The work by RMIT researchers on climate change adaptation in the Hamilton region builds on four years of community-

engaged research conducted by a 'local-global' research team in RMIT's Globalism Institute. The scenarios mapping workshop was followed by further consultations and conversations about the region's future.

### Community climate change action groups

It can be argued that the public has led the push to address climate change in Australia and the government has slowly followed (Australian Research Group, 2007). In regard to local and regional communities there has been significant dialogue between shire councils and their residents about what strategies and actions to implement. Many local communities are developing action strategies that draw on international resources through use of the internet and new ways of communicating experience. There has been an emphasis on lobbying local councils and shires to commit to emission targets, incorporate responses to climate change in strategic plans, and to work with community-based organisations to share information and ideas (Walker, 2008). As of early 2008 there are approximately 60--80 community-based climate change action groups active in Victoria, while there are probably 80--100 such groups in NSW (Ibid). However, only Murrindindi Climate Action Group in central Victoria has a funded co-coordinator and all the others survive through volunteer commitment. According to Walker (2008), these groups are largely politically non-aligned and fiercely independent although more of the NSW groups seem to have links with large NGOs compared to those in Victoria.

People living in rural communities are probably more likely to be aware of the early impacts of climate change--such as more frequent and prolonged droughts--and Walker has noted (ibid) that climate change community action groups are active in areas where the environment movement has not been traditionally strong. Sometimes the concern with climate change is clearly linked to local industries and resources—such as the future of coal mining in the Newcastle area in NSW or concerns about the future of tourism in coastal areas. Existing community organisations—such as Landcare or the Rural Women's Network—are beginning to focus on climate change issues (see organisation websites) and local issues are being linked to global issues through the work of what Bulkely (2001) has called 'sub political' action groups.

According to Harz-Karp (2007) the forging of links between people taking action at local, national and global levels is positioning local action groups within a broader communitarian framework.

Perhaps the best known example of community action on climate change in Australia is the Castlemaine 500 project that began in July 2006. Also known as the 'My Home, My Planet Campaign' this project has focused on convincing local households to sign up to a pledge to reduce energy use for the good of the region as a whole and by September 2007 350 households had signed up to this pledge (Castlemaine 500 website, 2008). While this project was initiated by residents it has attracted support from government agencies and is being funded by the Victorian Department for Sustainability and the Environment as a model project. Similar projects have also been initiated in Ararat and Kyabram as partnerships between community groups and local government and enthusiasm to emulate the model has spread to other towns such as Maldon and Newstead. Also inspired by the Castlemaine 500 project a local community organisation in Queenscliff invited CSIRO climate scientist Barrie Pittock to address a public meeting on the topic of climate change in October 2007 and they were rather overwhelmed when around 300 people attended (Fuller, 2008). This led to the formation of a local climate change action group and the development of a 'push upward and downward' local climate change strategy (Ibid). The My Home My Planet website shows how communication technology can be used to ensure the spread of good local initiatives. The Castlemaine 500 project has now turned its attention to energy reduction in regional industries and the Mount Alexander Sustainability Group is receiving active support from CSIRO to identify ways to reduce energy use in the KR Castlemaine smallgoods manufacturing business (Pennie, 2007) and to recycle methane gas emissions from local pig farms (McDonough, 2008).

Outside Victoria, the Sunshine Coast region in Queensland has attracted attention for work on climate change initiated by the Sunshine Coast Energy Action Centre (SEAC). Driven by a desire to prepare now for the double-whammy of peak oil and creeping climate change SEAC has been able to mobilise a wide range of business, community groups and individuals, to explore options such as community gardens and permaculture as part of a broad strategy for living sustainably on the

Sunshine Coast (SEAC website, 2008). Campaigning for what they call 'relocalisation' SEAC has also taken steps to join the Transition Town movement initiated in the UK (Transition Towns website, 2008) and yet all this has been achieved by a centre run by two volunteers. Interesting work is also being done by Newcastle Climate Action (Newcastle Climate Action website, 2008) and Kyogle Climate Action Network (Kyogle CAN website, 2008) in NSW.

It seems that many local communities are not prepared to wait for the federal government to introduce its much vaunted carbon emissions trading scheme which will, at any rate, be a very blunt instrument when it comes to local concerns. Indeed Walker (2008) has suggested that the enormous challenge of climate change is reinvigorating community action, especially in rural and regional areas. Climate change has the potential to create new partnerships between community organisations and local government in rural and regional communities and in response to such a crisis many local communities may gather strength and purpose. As Thomas Homer-Dixon (2003) has suggested, converging energy, environmental, and political-economic stresses could lead to a breakdown of national and global order. Yet those same stresses could lead to the reinvention of local communities that can lead the nation on implementing comprehensive plans for adjusting to the realities of climate change.

#### Mobilising community action in the Hamilton region of Victoria

On the 27th April 2007, the function room at the Grange Burn Motel in the town of Hamilton in south western Victoria was full. It was 5.00pm and a forum titled *Climate Change – Local Global Issues* was about to begin. The forum was organised to reflect on the national debate on climate change and to share information about existing responses to climate change within the region. Looking to the future the forum also addressed two significant questions: Where do we go from here? and How do we get involved in a common effort? The need for a space in which people can critically engage with difficult and complex questions is more urgent than ever and, of course, it is always hard to co-ordinate work being done by people ranging from individual concerned farmers to those working in government agencies. It is hard to keep up with the

various interpretations of climate change science and the growing body of knowledge on the issue and it is even more difficult to create integrated and co-ordinated responses across the many sectors of the community. Adequate responses are neither easy to articulate nor cheap to implement and local communities need to be good at taking political action that can mobilise support from state and federal governments. Despite the challenges there was a surprising degree of optimism about the prospects for local action expressed at the Hamilton forum and it was clear that people were not prepared to wait for an adequate response from the federal government.

More than 70 people from across the region attended the forum and the speakers included representatives of Southern Rural Waters, the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Environmental Farmers Network, Landcare, the Department of Primary Industries, and the Globalism Institute of RMIT University. Keynote addresses were given by Dr Bill Kininmonth, consultant to the World Meteorological Organisation and former head of the National Climate Centre, and Professor Peter Hayes, Director of the Nautilus Institute in San Francisco and leader of climate change adaptation research in the Global Cities Research Institute at RMIT University. Different views were expressed regarding the likely impacts of climate change in the region but the prevailing sentiment was that the time for sitting on the fence had passed and the organisers of the forum were asked to look for ways to build on the momentum of this gathering. The forum had been organised by RMIT University's Local-Global Project, which takes the form of a partnership between a team of researchers in RMIT's Globalism Research Centre and a Critical Reference Group (CRG) formed to direct the project within the Hamilton region. This project was established in 2004 but it is based on a much longer period of engagement in the region by senior Globalism Institute researcher Yaso Nadarajah—stretching over a period of more than 12 years. The project aims to explore local responses to issues of global scope and character and the impact of climate change became an obvious topic of interest. Social learning opportunities are created for the community to undertake dialogue, shared research, decide on and take responses to issues of growing concern across the region.

Situated 300 kilometres from the metropolitan centre of Melbourne, Hamilton is a significant regional centre in the relatively prosperous

farming districts of western Victoria. Like many other substantial towns in Australia, Hamilton's development as a regional centre over the past 150 years has been founded on a steady expansion of an agricultural sector based predominantly on wheat, sheep and cattle grazing. Colonial settlement depended on the division of land and diversion of waterways to make way for European farming systems. Today, while the economy of the western district still continues to be dominated by wool, beef and dairy properties; the booms and busts in the global wool market have led to major ups and downs in the local economy. Many members of the community are now discussing new ways of mitigating the risks of an economic monoculture by actively seeking new opportunities for economic diversification within the region. New industries, such as the blue gum plantations and mineral sands mining, have been embraced by some sectors of the community as a desirable and much needed strategy for rural renewal (Nadarajah and Donati, 2008) while others have expressed doubts about the environmental sustainability of these resource industries (see Bird, 2007).

The Local-Global Project in the Hamilton region has aimed to draw together the local knowledge and expertise of community activists with the research skills and expertise of university researchers who are also looking at contemporary experiences of local communities in countries such as Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and India. In the early stages of building this partnership a lot of work was done to establish mutual trust and open up a creative space in which new ideas and new ways of looking at old problems could be aired and nurtured. Those who have participated in the CRG bring with them a host of relationships and linkages with other people and organisations in the region but the emphasis within the group has been on building relationships of trust. It is not easy to build such relationships between communities as diverse as those working within a very urban university and those who live in a 'distant' regional community but the success of the exercise has enabled the project to open up other spaces for wider community dialogue (see discussion of specific projects in next section). While this work in the Hamilton region has been built on the foundation of a process of engagement stretching over more than 12 years it is possible to build such partnerships in a very conscious way provided those involved are prepared to be patient and committed to a rather

open ended process of exploration that will take some time to unfold. The process of building relationships and essentially long term partnerships is, in fact, a process of face-to-face dealings with the 'cultural other', and active participants acquire deeper understanding and new perspectives through listening and talking. In many ways, this process is what community leaders like Mel King and Gloria Anzaldua have described as an 'opening up' (see Sandercock, 1998), of enabling relational creative spaces to be constructed and issues to be negotiated.

The principal outcome of the 2007 community forum on climate change, mentioned above, was the expression of the need to have further opportunities to come together as a diverse group of people to continue the dialogue about how to prepare for future uncertainties. While the issues are pressing and public alarm is growing it is also important to take time to consider the options and to avoid hasty and narrowly based forms of action. It is important to create a calm and supportive reflective space for the community to answer questions such as: What kinds of scenarios should we start preparing for? What do we fear and how can we address such fears? What can give us the most hope in preparing for a future of uncertainty? Only when questions of that scope are addressed can we address the obvious question: How can we move forward in a united way?

In speaking to the community forum Professor Peter Hayes floated the idea of holding a scenarios mapping workshop in the region to involve a significant cross section of the community in teasing out possible scenarios of the future. As the Director of the Climate Change Adaptation Research Program at RMIT University, Professor Hayes had already used scenarios mapping in other settings in Australia, USA, North Korea, and China and he offered to identify a suitable facilitator. The Local-Global Project team decided to act on this suggestion and a range of community representatives were drawn into planning meetings to set up the workshop that was held in February 2008 (see discussion below). It is important to note that the scenarios mapping exercise was not seen as a stand alone activity but as an addition to the community mapping work that had already been completed by RMIT researchers working under the direction of the CRG.

### Community-engaged research methodology

The ongoing community mapping research has been occurring in the Hamilton region for over four years. It has led to the formulation of a research methodology that has been called ‘community engaged research’ (Mulligan and Nadarajah, 2008). The Globalism Institute researchers introduced a range of research methods that could work well in combination to evoke local knowledge and experience. Component research methods were tried out, and refined, in consultation with CRG members in the Hamilton region and the information collected was not only used to produce research reports<sup>i</sup> but also to plan community events, such as the First International Food and Thought *Mela* held in Hamilton in February 2006. The research led to the publication of two ‘Hamilton editions’ of the *Local Global Journal* that combines articles written by community members and papers written by university-based researchers. The community engaged research methodology that was developed and refined for use in the Hamilton region has subsequently been used by Globalism Institute researchers in other communities in Australia and in countries such as Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and India.

The community engaged research methodology that was developed in this way combines quantitative and qualitative elements and a combination of methods that complement each other in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. In the Hamilton region a broad ranging survey of community life was mailed out randomly to households and around 120 were returned. A more targeted survey was conducted of people attending community events. Lengthy ‘strategic conversations’ were held with a wide range of community ‘activists’ and some ‘life stories’ were also collated. A long list of interesting stories was drawn up and on the advice of community members this was turned into a short list of stories that were documented for analysis. A ‘photonarrative’ technique—in which people living in the community were given cameras to take images related to their daily experiences—was used to reach people who may have a relatively undeveloped ‘sense of community’. This latter technique relies on interviewing the photographers about their choice of images they have captured. More recently, the community engaged research methodology used by Globalism Research Centre researchers also involves the collection of

brief ‘community member profiles’ that can be seen as a qualitative sampling of community life. Of course, not all of these methods can be used in every study of local community life and a ‘minimum set’ would combine the random survey with a collection of stories and the completion of a range of ‘strategic conversations’. It is highly desirable to get the results of the random survey early because interesting outcomes can inform the collection of stories and questions included in semi-structured interviews. The photonarrative technique might then be used to fill in gaps later in the research process.

The research methods outlined above create diverse forms of ‘data’ ranging from statistical analysis of the survey results to lengthy transcripts of ‘strategic conversations’. As well as collecting ‘fresh data’, researchers using this methodology are encouraged to also draw on existing data sets—e.g., census outcomes—and start by creating a ‘social profile’ of the community concerned. All the material thus generated can be subjected to ‘empirical analysis’ that simply aims to identify important, sometimes unexpected, patterns in the data collected and this level of analysis has been called ‘community mapping’ (see Mulligan and Nadarajah, 2008). All this, in turn, can be subjected to ‘conjunctural analysis’ that relates the mapping of specific community experiences to broader social processes and influences and the Globalism Research Centre is interested in comparative experiences related to themes such as authority-participation, inclusion-exclusion, and mobility-identity.

Whenever it is possible to get this depth of understanding of a local community it provides a good foundation for an exploration of community responses to challenges and changes that will emerge. ‘Community mapping’ in the Hamilton region has given Globalism Research Centre researchers and the CRG a good basis for exploring the tremendous challenge of climate change. Furthermore, the Local-Global research project initiated by the Globalism Institute has been able to join forces with another research initiative of the newly formed RMIT Global Cities Institute that is interested in climate change adaptation. This second group of researchers has introduced scenario mapping as a way of teasing out timeframes and alternative scenarios for the future.

### Innovation of adding in scenario mapping

Scenarios are provocative, plausible stories about the future (Searce and Fulton 2004). They are not predictions. The scenario process is used to enable stakeholders to dialogue about the complexity and uncertainties affecting the future; to organise and test their assumptions about the future, and to provide a framework for longer term thinking, identification of ways to adapt to change and make decisions (GBN, 2007).

Scenarios were first used in the military (Searce and Fulton, 2004). Shell started to use them as a strategic planning tool in the 1970s; (Shell, 2003). Since then the scenario process has become a commonly used business planning and decision support tool (GBN, 2007). The use of scenarios spread from business to civic situations in the 1990s. Kahane (2001) states that:

The purpose of a civic scenario project is to build the leadership to change the course of a country's history. A group of influential leaders – a microcosm of the society, representing all the principal stakeholders – works together to uncover what has happened, is happening, might happen, and should happen in their country, and what they must do – what they cannot *not* do – to enact that vision. Through a structured process of action and reflection, with each other and with other societal leaders, they build the shared understanding and commitment necessary to bring forth a better future. (Kahane, 2001, p. 1)

Kahane, in conjunction with Generon Consulting has used this process to explore the future of countries such as Colombia (Kahane, 1998), Guatemala (Pinto, 2004), and South Africa (le Roux, 1992) The Nautilus Institute (see Nautilus Institute website) has used scenarios to explore the future of US-Korean relations and US-China relations. They also use the process as one for exploring solutions to complex global problems such as energy supply, nuclear threat, climate change adaptation and security issues. Scenarios have also been used in the non profit sector (Searce and Fulton, 2004) and the government policy arena (Ringland, 2002). Another increasing use of scenarios is as a tool for regional planning. Examples from the USA include the Meadowlark Project (Meadowlark Project website); the Charlotte Crossroads Project (Charlotte Crossroads Project website); and the Valley Futures project (Valley Futures Project website).

Scenarios have been used to explore sustainability issues at the global level for many decades (Raskin et al., 2002; NIES/IGES, 2005). Some, such as Meadows et al (1972) work titled the 'Limits to growth', were computer modelled, quantitative scenarios of what may happen. Others, such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) (1997) scenarios on different possible future paths for sustainable development were more qualitative.

### Scenarios and climate change adaptation

The value of using scenario approaches for exploring climate change impacts and adaptation options has been recognised by both the United Nations Development Program, Global Environment Facility (UNDP GEF) (2003) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat (2005). Both have provided guidance on how to use the tool in this context. Despite the recommendations the scenario process has mostly been used for predicting climate change and its impacts (Dessai et al., 2005). It is only relatively recently that the approach has been used as a way to explore adaptation to climate change.

Turnpenny et al (2005, p. 2) created '... a set of scenarios of how the East of England Region may look in 2050 under large greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions and with adaptation to residual climate changes'. In the scenarios they explored what the region would look like under '... a 60% emission reduction by 2050'. Each scenario focussed on a different way that this could be achieved and the implications it would have for different sectors – mitigation and adaptation wise. The solutions contained in the scenarios were 1) Local and Green (where local sustainable lifestyles and energy demand reductions work); 2) Market Fix (energy demand grows but the market delivers green energy supplies); 3) Guided Change (massive greening of energy achieved by regulation) and 4) More of the Same (current trends and strategies are implemented and do not achieve the 60% reduction). While the options of community led, market led and regulatory led change is not terribly surprising their report did show what this would mean for the region and revealed where current policy and strategies were operating antagonistically.

Jordan et al (2001) created climate change impact scenarios for the East Anglian region of the UK. Their scenarios explored futures dominated by 1) World Markets (globalisation and consumerism focus), 2) Provincial Enterprise (local governance and consumerism focus), 3) Global Sustainability (globalisation and community focus), and 4) Local Stewardship (local governance and community focus). Within each scenario a range of factors are predicted including the locus of responsibility for action, the likely economic growth and which sectors will grow or decline, the likely annual UK GDP and the level of global carbon emissions. They also explain what the climate regime, climate policies, and level of adaptation and mitigation actions taken are likely to be under each scenario. Furthermore they explain the likely level of climate change and the impacts of this on the natural environment, coastal zones, and the water, agriculture and tourism sectors in the region.

Both Jordan et al (2001) and Turnpenny et al (2005) used a 'top down' approach to scenarios development. In essence, this involved their team of 'experts' creating the scenarios and then seeking input, feedback and discussion of the scenario implications with people in the targeted regions. This is the reverse of the approach used in the current study. In the current study a 'bottom up' approach was used. A group of diverse stakeholders from the Hamilton region participated in the workshop and created the scenarios themselves. They discussed the implications of the scenarios and brainstormed next steps for action. It should be noted that this approach to creating scenarios of the future means that the challenges will not be confined to the impacts of climate change because other factors--such as 'peak oil' or changing markets for rural products—will also weigh on the minds of participants. However, it can be argued that this is a better way to contextualise the challenges of climate change.

#### The Hamilton scenarios mapping workshop

Participation in the Hamilton workshop, held in February 2008, was by invitation only and a great deal of thought went into the invitation list. The lead scenarist Sally Jones said that she wanted to limit the numbers to around 35 in order to ensure active participation and it is essential to ensure that different sectors of the community are given voice within

the exercise. In the end there were 41 participants (18 female, 23 male) and there was impressive diversity. There were several farmers, an ex school principal, a church minister, an ex-publican, local councillors; a Country Fire Authority representative, artists, business personnel, and community representatives including an aboriginal person and a recent migrant to mention a few. Participants were split into four small groups and taken through a process for identifying and discussing the many factors likely to affect their community's development in the future. They explored what they felt were the most significant risks and uncertainties facing their community. These were used to generate their scenarios. Throughout the two days a number of plenary sessions were held where each small group reported back on their developing scenario and received input from the other participants.

The scenarios produced did not focus on what level of climate change would occur or on how adaptation would be achieved as was done in the studies reported above. They focussed on the adaptation challenges facing their region and the likely impacts of these. The scenarios generated show four possible futures for the region. One scenario explores what would happen if there was a mass migration into the community as a result of a climate change related natural disaster in Vietnam. The second explores implications of altering practices within the region to be more in line with aboriginal perspectives of living in harmony with the land. The third scenario explores the impact of high levels of unemployment that could result if farming becomes less viable and the challenges of poverty leading to poor nutrition, increased disease, increased use of addictive escape and other social ills that could result. The fourth explores a future where there is a mass exodus from the region resulting in the closure of small towns and a reduced quality of life for those who remain.

#### Some outcomes of the Hamilton workshop

As a result of creating the scenarios participants could see a range of implications that they as a community needed to consider and plan responses for. They saw a need to find ways to influence individuals to take action to reduce their carbon emissions and adapt their homes and lifestyles now. They saw the opportunity to learn from other cultures

and those who have already taken action. They recognised that their current mental health and community welfare services were not sufficient to cope with the increased demand predicted in many of the scenarios. They identified a need for preventative programs and early intervention programs for farmers and families at risk. The idea of creating a National Centre for Farmer Health was raised. Nutrition and healthy lifestyle education programs were also raised as a way to prevent health problems. Diversifying sources of farm income by moving away from monocultures to a range of different crops and other sources of income were seen as ways to minimise vulnerability of farmers to climate.

The participants saw a need to undertake activities to build community cohesion and support each other through tough times. They saw a need to develop disaster response plans to cater for a possible influx of migrants and they also wanted to start cultural exchange initiatives and awareness raising initiatives now so that it would not be such a shock to the current population if an influx of migrants did occur. Participants also highlighted a need to consider ways to attract people and businesses to the region. Expanding educational and employment opportunities were seen as key in this regard. This was also seen as a strategy to help stop the trend of youth leaving the region. The participants saw an opportunity for their educational organisations to specialise in environmental education and teach Aboriginal and Asian perspectives of environmental management.

The participants identified a range of further research needed. This included research into ways to farm effectively under drought conditions; and ways to minimise water use and ensure water security. Research exploring the implications of a shortage of oil and oil based products on farming practices, transport of produce and the functioning of other aspects of the community was also seen as needed. Research into the implications of 'corporate farms' run by large multinational companies and increased mechanisation of farming practices on employment levels in the region was also highlighted as an issue worthy of further exploration.

Towards the end of the workshop participants were asked what they would like to see as the next steps of this project. The participants identified a range of strategies including generating a report on the

scenarios that could be widely distributed throughout the community; having secondary school students comment on the scenarios and stories and make movies about them; having the scenarios told on Radio National; and having each participant share their experience and insights with family, friends and colleagues. It was suggested that the participants could demonstrate actions they can take to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adapt their homes and lifestyles, thereby leading by example. They also talked about identifying partnerships to further explore the issues and progress actions. This included having the scenarios given to appropriate groups within the region to work through the implications for their organisation, so that they can incorporate appropriate strategies in their strategic plans. The Councillors said that they would like to initiate this process in the local council.

#### Evaluation of the workshop

Kahane (2001) states that there are four types of project results commonly seen from scenario processes: 1) Reframed mental models; 2) Shared commitment to change developed through dialogue; 3) Regenerated energy and optimism; and 4) Renewed action and momentum. It is too early to tell what will result from the scenario mapping workshop conducted in the Hamilton region. However, it certainly has generated energy and stories which people can use to discuss the future of their region.

Two local writers have been given the task of working on the further development of the scenarios and stories that were initiated by workshop participants. In order to ensure that this account of what came out of the workshop reflects the intentions of those working in the small groups, the writers have been asked to consult a range of people who were in those small working groups. The stories generated from the scenarios mapping workshop will be widely circulated and were a focus of discussion during the Second International Food and Thought *Mela* held in Hamilton in June 2008. It is hoped that the circulation of stories about the future that have been created within the community will stimulate further discussion about what might lie ahead and how people can prepare for a world of uncertainty.

Scenarios are stories about the future. In a scenario workshop the focus is on generating the stories, not on getting commitments to

specific actions. Therefore participants can relax – let go of their positions, discuss the issues and imagine different possible futures (le Roux, 1992). The imaginative focus of the scenario process has been found to be a less threatening way for communities to consider ‘scary’, ‘worst case’ or ‘unthinkable’ possibilities. These can be considered amongst the many possible futures that may unfold (Jordan et al., 2001; le Roux, 1992; Ogilvy, 2003). People can relate to the events and characters that are evoked by stories and the stories provide them with a common vocabulary and starting point to discuss the issues. Stories can be easily remembered and referred to over time. Another benefit of the scenario process is that it helps participants to see that they can take actions to shape what future evolves and plan how to respond to the different futures. It is therefore an empowering process which can help individuals to overcome feelings of helplessness and overwhelm related to issues like climate change and sustainability. Reducing helplessness is reported as a key factor necessary for obtaining behaviour change (Kaplan, 2000).

Having representatives from a wide range of organisations and community members working together leads to a higher likelihood of integrated policy responses as people can see the impact of different possible actions on the various characters and elements of the community described in the stories. They can consider the implications of a story about the future from the perspective of their own organisation and its priorities and responsibilities. This enhanced cross-sharing and learning may lead to joint initiatives if participants continue the dialogue post-workshop.

It is really important to explain to participants the purpose and process involved in a scenario mapping workshop. Most of the workshop time is used to discuss the issues facing the region, imagine possible future events, make up story outlines and then compile the scenarios. Analysis of them and their implications does not start until the afternoon of day two. This can be frustrating for people who want to focus on problem solving from the start. Most of us are used to dealing with facts and hard evidence, so being asked to use our imaginations and create stories can be quite challenging. It is important to help participants through their discomfort and remind them of how useful the scenarios can be. At the end of two intense days many

participants expressed frustration about having to disband when the work had only just begun. It might be desirable to have more time for such a workshop but this raises difficulties about getting busy people to commit to the exercise. It might also be useful to have a follow-up workshop at a later date. Certainly we will argue in this paper that some kind of follow-up is essential.

The current authors intend to repeat the scenarios mapping workshop with other local communities within Australia and the Asia Pacific region. We will further refine the process used to create a methodology that will be replicable and comparable across cities, towns and regions. We will simplify the terms used and more clearly explain each step in the process and how it fits into the overall picture. We will generate materials to support the small group facilitators and scribes in their roles, and consider possible pre and post-workshop processes to enhance the effectiveness of the workshop and increase the likelihood that the community will take actions to address the implications and adapt their region accordingly. However, it is important to note that the word 'community' is much abused and to apply scenarios mapping methods in community settings it is critical to avoid simplistic and mechanistic understandings of what communities are and how they manifest themselves in the contemporary world.

#### A richer understanding of community

As far back as 1994 the historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote: 'Never was the word 'community' used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life' (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 428). Yet there is little evidence to suggest that the word is fading from use. In fact some sociologists (e.g., Walmsley, 2006) have suggested that evocations of community have increased to the point where the word now has a 'high level of use but a low level of meaning' (ibid p.5). Many contemporary sociologists hark back to the distinction made by Ferdinand Tonnies in 1887 between what he called *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* and these German terms have been roughly translated into English as 'community' and 'society'. While Tonnies was describing an historic shift from a time when most people in Europe lived in small rural communities steeped in tradition to the conditions of modernity when most people were living in cities in

which social life was determined more loosely by the structures and conventions of the nation, contemporary sociologists still look for the elements of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* in contemporary communities. Surely it is time to radically update this prevailing conception of community and, thankfully, a book by Gerard Delanty (2003) has gone a long way towards doing that.

Delanty (2003) begins his impressive review of literature on community by tracing the evolution of the idea back to the time of the ancient Greeks. 'Community exerts itself as a powerful idea of belonging in every age', he asserts (p. 11) and yet there has always been an 'ambivalence' at the 'heart of the idea of community' (p. 12) because it has been used to refer to both 'locality and particularness' and also the sense of a 'universal community in which all human beings participate'. If we begin to see communities as being 'wilfully constructed' and as being 'defined by practices rather than by structures or cultural values' (p. 130) then we can identify many forms of community in the contemporary world. A range of 'social movements', for example, might be seen as 'communities of dissent', and new communication technologies have facilitated the formation of 'virtual communities' that can cross the boundaries of space and time. While Delanty suggests that it is important to distinguish between 'thick' and 'thin' forms of community he argues that all forms of community—even local communities—are products of the imagination in the restless search for identity and belonging. Community survives as a normative concept, Delanty concludes, because it 'offers people what neither society nor the state can offer, namely a sense of belonging in an insecure world' (p. 192). It is impossible to make sense of community formation in the contemporary world, Delanty suggests, unless we shift the emphasis from forms of social organisation or sites of meaning to an understanding that community is 'an open-ended system of communication about belonging' (p. 187).

Delanty's dynamic and normative conception of community is a liberating one and it is confirmed by what Globalism Research Centre researchers learnt about community formation in Australia in completing a three-year study on community wellbeing for VicHealth (Mulligan et al., 2006). The report of that study, titled *Creating Community*, puts even more emphasis than Delanty on community as an

act of creation and constant recreation in a world of change. It also suggests that 'sense of place' can be an important foundation for the negotiation of what human geographer Doreen Massey (1999) called the 'coexisting multiplicity' within local communities, and it explores the complexities related to inclusion and exclusion within local communities. While some people seek active participation in the formation of local community--perhaps reflecting their needs at a particular time of life--others will be content with an 'avowal' of community that can be confirmed by a more passive participation in events such as festivals. The report notes that the field of community development in Australia has been enriched by an active engagement with the field of community art in recent years and that, as a result, the expression of community at a local level is being seen as an act of creative imagination rather than the result of a more mechanical process of 'development'.

It is useful to combine this dynamic, creative sense of community formation with the conception of the 'civil sphere' recently articulated in the blockbuster book by Jeffrey Alexander (2006). Like Delanty, Alexander presents a very impressive review of the relevant literature and he draws on Jurgen Habermas' notion of the 'public sphere' in counterposing the conception of the 'civil sphere' to the conceptions of 'civil society' developed in the work of Anthony Giddens and Robert Putnam. Like Emile Durkheim before him, Alexander is interested in understanding the conditions in which strong notions of justice and solidarity might emerge and he argues that recent interest in 'social capital' has been an unproductive distraction for that search. The *Creating Community* report reached a similar conclusion about inappropriate use of the term 'social capital' in literature focusing on the social benefits of community art practice in Australia, UK, and USA. Rather than looking for accumulations of social capital it will be more productive to look for manifestations of community within a 'civil sphere' that is conducive to such manifestations. It can be argued, for instance, that the Howard government tried to manipulate the civil sphere in Australia—for example, through its promotion of the so-called 'history wars'—to put its stamp on community formation at all levels of Australian society. Hopefully the resounding defeat of the Howard government at the 2007 elections reflects, at least in part, a

rejection of this attempt to constrain the necessarily restless search for identity and belonging at all levels of society.

Clearly it is very different to run scenarios mapping exercises in communities that are defined normatively rather than in organisations--such as corporations--that can be defined structurally. In a sense the community is only formed for the purpose of the exercise and the extent to which it reflects the complexity of the local community that is being evoked will depend on who is in the room and the extent to which they can represent the 'coexisting multiplicity' of the community they have been called to 'represent'. Inevitably, the representation will be limited or even distorted in some ways but the point of the *exercise* is to provide an opportunity for social learning and create some well grounded stories about future challenges that can then be circulated within the real community. As the *Creating Community* report stressed, the circulation of stories is a good way to draw attention to the lived experiences of individuals and groups of people living within a community. As discrete stories they can circulate relatively independently; sometimes challenging hegemonic claims about the identity of the community. They can provoke reflection, discussion and even debate about the characteristics and capacities of the local communities concerned. The beauty of scenarios mapping is that it can bring into play challenging plausible stories that stretch the act of imagining community well into the future.

### Collective action, agency and the power of stories

The complexity of a relationship, in this case, global climate change, can also affect the degree to which it and its effect is perceivable to individuals. The social, ecological and economic realms, amongst others represent the numerous systems involved in environmental debates – often resulting in an emergent complexity far more complex than the sum of all of its parts. From positive and negative feedback, to self organising systems, to the resiliency of an ecosystem; complexity lies at the very heart of understanding the causes and consequences of climate change (Carolan, 2006). As environmental problems and the environments continue to become more global in scope and/or representational in form, it has become even more imperative to ground

attempts to respond to the growing crisis of climate change in the lived, non-representational world of everyday life.

This is where stories, as shared narratives--public stories--can become powerful devices for enabling communities to learn and act collectively. While there is vast literature on collective action, exploring its nature and seeking to explain how humans come together to overcome problems; there is remarkably little about the role of stories in mobilising such action. This is surprising given that when one considers collective action, whether in political movements, community mobilisation, or even celebrations, there are always stories. Mayer (2006, p. 2) argues that that there is good reason for the ubiquity of stories.

First, narratives play an important role in constituting mind; enabling memory, structuring cognition, making meaning and establishing identity. Second, we are creatures constituted by narratives, we can be called by stories; engrossed by them, moved emotionally by them, persuaded by them, and ultimately motivated to act by them. Third, because narratives are shared, they can operate at both the individual and the collective level, constructing common desires, enlisting participation in a common drama, and scripting collective acts of meaning. (Mayer, 2006, p. 2)

Earlier research conducted by the Globalism Research Centre (see Mulligan et al., 2006) demonstrated that the creation of stories can help people and groups of people to make sense of their own lived experiences in a world of great flux and uncertainty. This, in turn, enables people to see themselves as actors in their own life stories and as a result they might see themselves as agents rather than as more passive bystanders. Stories can provide the space to externalise ideas or issues that communities may have been thinking about but never expressed; and this can create a space for discussion that can empower individuals to become agents in helping to shape their own futures. In this sense, stories can become frameworks for action, or, to put another way, narratives of action. A greater relational understanding of the world, where self, other, and the environment come together in a multitude of ways, lies at the heart of sustainability (Carolan, 2007). As already mentioned scenarios mapping involves the crafting of challenging stories that can stretch the imagination of those involved in the exercise well

into the future. The design of the Hamilton region workshop forced the criss-crossing of sectors, backgrounds, social structures and environments by bringing together diverse members of the community. This challenged conventional ways of knowing, particularly those that only focus on the projection of a single vision. Of course, there is a clear difference between scenarios and stories and the creation of rich and evocative stories takes time; suggesting that a scenarios workshop can only be the start of a process of creating such stories by interested members of the community.

As Richard Sennett (2006) has observed, many people are trying to create 'narratives' of their own lives that can make their experiences 'cohere' in the context of great uncertainty and change. Scenarios mapping, in combination with the community engaged research methodology discussed in this chapter, offers a way of framing individual and social narratives that can help people think their way into a challenging future. The creation of stories based on diverse future scenarios enable people to engage with moral dilemmas that may change the ways that people think and act in the present. It is the link with narrative that turns speculation about the future into an interpretive tool that forces people to grapple with complex conceptual and moral challenges regarding action that can be taken in the present or near future. Furthermore, rich narratives ensure that such challenges must be constantly revisited as events unfold and the sharing of narratives can help to ensure that these challenges are discussed and negotiated collectively. In making such a strong claim about the centrality of narratives for collective community action, this chapter is not arguing that the narratives themselves enable such action. However, we do suggest that the effective use of narratives can provide the basis for a much richer theory of the collective good. Mayer (2006, p. 38) describes the benefit of this as enabling the community to converge on a shared conception of possible futures, and providing a way '... that an individual might receive identity and expressive benefits from participation in the pursuit of that good'.

It is too early to identify any enduring outcomes of the scenarios mapping workshop. Over the five months that followed the event six of the local participants continued to work on the emerging stories and these were highlighted at the Food and Thought *Mela* held at the end of

June 2008. The response to the creation of challenging stories about the future suggests that this is a good way to engage the imagination of a wide range of people in a community, although the local writers involved in the project suggested that a clear distinction needs to be made between the creation of scenarios and stories. The early evidence suggests that scenarios mapping is a useful social learning technique for raising community awareness about the complex challenges posed by climate change. However, while a scenarios mapping workshop may generate energy and ideas for action, much follow-up work is needed to explore the implications and turn ideas into action.

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<sup>i</sup> For example, a major report on community wellbeing written initially for VicHealth and then circulated widely (see Mulligan et al 2006)