

**STORY-TELLING AND COMMUNITY VISIONING:
TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

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**Background Paper for the State Sustainability Strategy
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SEPTEMBER 2003

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Peter Newman, Professor Brian Jenkins, and Dr Sue Graham-Taylor for their contribution towards this paper.

INTRODUCTION

In the pursuit of sustainability¹, the State Government of Western Australia has made the commitment to develop Regional Sustainability Strategies (RSS) for each region within the State. It has been suggested that to encourage the pursuit of sustainability at the regional scale two fundamental elements are required: story-telling and community visioning.

Storytelling is seen to be a powerful tool for sharing and understanding the many and diverse community stories about the regional place, and include the Indigenous and European stories. When these stories are woven together they form a *shared story*, and help to define a regions' community values, sense of place, and aspirations for the future, as successfully demonstrated through Kodja Place and Capture Wales.

Community visioning is a process whereby a community envisages the future it wants, i.e. a *shared vision* of the future, and identifies actions on how to achieve it. Visioning uses a range of techniques to engage the community, including workshops, surveys, public meetings, community tours, publications, and special events. Numerous community visioning exercises have been conducted, or are currently running, on local, national and international levels. Visioning examples include Dialogue With the City, Tasmania *Together*, and Charting a Course for Corvallis.

The objectives and outcomes of the story-telling and community visioning processes are listed, and methodologies for story-telling and community visioning are suggested.

The tools of story-telling and community visioning are a profound way of defining a region's sense of place, and of creating a shared understanding of the past, and a shared vision of sustainability for each region's future. The stories and community visions are intended to aid in the determination of regional sustainability objectives and strategies.

The sustainability of a region requires an understanding of the beliefs, values and perceptions local people hold about their local place if sustainability is to successfully integrate the social, economic and environmental aspects of that region. Story-telling and visioning are an ideal way to obtain this information.

WHY 'REGIONAL' SUSTAINABILITY?

Sustainability should be pursued at all levels – local, regional, national and international – however it is believed that the regional level is the most appropriate scale at which to pursue it. Reasons for this include:

- Variation in land, water and vegetation is less distinct;
- Useful scale to plan for environmental and natural resource management;
- Influence of predominant industry/s within a particular region e.g. mining, agriculture, tourism;

¹ Sustainability is defined as “meeting the needs of current and future generations through simultaneous environmental, social and economic improvement”. Government of Western Australia, 2002, *Focus on the Future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy*, Consultation Draft, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Perth: 8.

- Local communities exist within and relate to a region – it is part of their identity; and lastly,
- Many government services are delivered and administered regionally.²

It has been suggested by the State Government Methodology Working group for Regional Sustainability Strategies that a ‘region’, for the purpose of the Strategies, can be regarded as a grouping of between four and six local government authorities. This applies for both urban and rural areas throughout Western Australia. For the purpose of this report, therefore I will not be exploring the concept of ‘region’ or how a ‘region’ should be defined. The term ‘region’ will be used throughout this paper in reference to the Working Groups understanding of the term.

Another reason as to why the regional scale is most appropriate is because ‘regional’ sense of place offers communities the unique opportunity to better understand and communicate what makes their particular place distinctive and special, which subsequently builds resilience to unsustainable change i.e. that which detracts from a region’s sense of place.³

SENSE OF PLACE

Place is the intersection where ecological, economic and social worlds meet. It is the site where communities and individuals construct sustainable [or unsustainable] landscapes from past experiences and future intentions”⁴.

Sense of place links issues of place (where we are) to issues of identity (who we are). It provides a useful vehicle to explore people’s perceptions of, and identification within, a regional area. Sense of place results from the interplay among the physical attributes of an area, people’s conceptions and interpretations, and their actions and activities within the physical setting.⁵

Building, strengthening or renewing a regional sense of place is about linking the positive social, environmental and economic components of a region, to create a sense of identity and belonging within a particular region. Place should not be seen as an abstract notion, such as a site or a resource, where these three factors exist independently of one another, but should be viewed as something which has and gives meaning and value to the community.⁶

Sense of place comprises both physical and non-physical attributes of a particular area or region. Physical characteristics include the built environment, natural environments, geography, climate, and natural resources. Non-physical traits

² Government of Western Australia, 2002: 58.

³ Maser, C. 1998, ‘True Community is Founded on a Sense of Place, History and Trust’, *The Trumpeter*: 15.

⁴ Armstrong, R. 2002, *Developing a Strategy for Regional Sustainability in the State of Western Australia*, sustainability background paper, Draft Sustainability Strategy CD-ROM, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Perth.

⁵ Horwitz, P. et al. 2001, *Biodiversity, Endemism, Sense of Place, and Public Health: Inter-relationships for Australian Inland Aquatic Systems*, Blackwell Science, Perth.

⁶ Warburton, D. (ed) 1998, *Community & Sustainable Development: Participation in the Future*, Earthscan Publications, London.

incorporate neighbourhood character, Indigenous history, cultural heritage, and spirituality. Sense of place is also about the extra-ordinary but more importantly the ordinary components of a place that make it special, unique and distinctive. These components, physical and non-physical, ordinary and extra-ordinary, are interrelated and intertwined and should not be viewed separately. The interconnectedness (or lack of interrelation) between these qualities creates a sense of place (or lack of sense of place), which in turn determines the community's sense of identity and belonging.

Sense of place is a living, ever-changing concept that evolves through time. It is about creativity, accommodation and constant dynamism, not compartmentalism and preservation.⁷ Story-telling and visioning are two tools that are also 'not ends in themselves', so are able to continually build, strengthen and/or renew a community's sense of place.

STORY-TELLING

"To facilitate the development of strong regional identity, each region needs to write its story. The story would elaborate on the 'sense of place' or 'belonging' that characterises the regions. These stories need to incorporate environmental, socio-economic and cultural histories of the region and would improve understanding of potential factors that may enhance or obstruct regional sustainability. They will aim to facilitate a shared understanding of the past, and the development of a shared vision of sustainability for each region's future. These 'stories' would ideally be created as part of Regional Sustainability Strategies."⁸

Stories are simply accounts of experiences. Stories of the place, or place narratives, are used then to describe stories - social, environmental and/or economic - that are bounded by a narrator's particular experiences, observations, and attachment to place. Place narratives encompass oral histories, anecdotal information, local and Indigenous knowledge, and they can make a significant contribution to the sustainability of a region.⁹

"Storytelling is central to the well-being, the confidence and sustainability of communities. It allows communities to generate and sustain a sense of belonging and cohesion and purpose even through periods of tumultuous change – *especially* through periods of tumultuous change. It allows them to constantly redefine (who) they are and (who) they want to be".¹⁰

Storytelling has been and is still essential to a community's sense of place, to their sense of identity and belonging. Stories have the power to bind people together across families, communities and regions. Through storytelling history, cultural knowledge and values have been understood, maintained and communicated from generation to generation.¹¹

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Armstrong, R. 2002.

⁹ Robertson, M. et.al. 2000, *Environmental Narratives and the Need for Multiple Perspectives to Restore Degraded Landscapes in Australia*, Blackwell Science, Sydney.

¹⁰ Longley, K. 2002, *Stories for Sustainability*, Sustainability Forum, 3 December, Perth.

¹¹ Ibid.

Through the personal process of storytelling, the communal process of healing, reconciliation and forward thinking can begin. The many and diverse regional stories must be told and listened to before they can be weaved and transformed into a new regional story, and before a region can imagine a new and sustainable way into the future.¹² It is noted that care must be taken when working with indigenous communities as some Aboriginal people object to their Dreamings being subsumed by labels such as ‘stories’ or ‘myths.’ They consider that this detracts from the central role of Dreamings as the embodiment of religious lore.¹³

Stories of place do not simply mirror reality; they are subjective accounts of personal interaction with, and perceptions of, the environment, society and economy.¹⁴ It is these interactions and perceptions that indicate past and present sustainable or unsustainable relationships, and thus provide the basis and means for analysis of future sustainable directions of change.

COMMUNITY VISIONING

Community visioning “is simply a process by which a community envisions the future it wants, and plans how to achieve it.”¹⁵ The process typically involves tracking emerging trends and issues, exploring alternative futures, charting preferred directions and putting the vision into action.

The realisation of a shared community vision requires planning for action, and detailing strategies of how a community intends to realise their goals and vision over time. These strategies encompass the social, economic and environmental aspects of a region, and may focus on key areas such as community, growth, housing and liveability, environment, economic opportunity, human development and family life, health and safety.

Community visioning processes typically aim to involve all members of the community, from children to grandparents, from newcomers to third and fourth generation residents, and be an enjoyable and interactive process for all involved. The visioning process can incorporate a number of activities including research, surveys, focus groups, a vision task force, action planning teams, meetings, forums, workshops, videos, children’s visioning events and contests.

RATIONALE FOR STORY-TELLING, COMMUNITY VISIONING AND SENSE OF PLACE

“Propelled by the question ‘What do you value in your place?’....the implication is that ‘your’ place belongs to you [or in an Indigenous sense ‘you belong to the place’], and through this recognition comes responsibility for it”.¹⁶

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Graham-Taylor, S. 2003, Email correspondence.

¹⁴ Robertson, M. et. al. 2000.

¹⁵ Ames, S. (ed) 2001, *A Guide to Community Visioning*, Revised Edition, Oregon Visions Project, American Planning Association, Oregon:7.

¹⁶ Warburton, D. (ed)1998.

Unless a region has a strong sense of place, and identity, the people who inhabit it and/or use it, are unlikely to care for it. Stories and future aspirations can breathe soul into a place, and subsequently encourage community members to stand up for their place - by acting in its defence or thinking creatively about enhancing it. Places have meaning to people, and must continue to do so in order for the community to maintain an interest in the sustainability of their place.¹⁷

Through story-telling and visioning a community is able to value the special social, environmental and economical elements within their region, and the interrelationships that exist between them, which in turn generates a strong sense of place. Realising and celebrating a sense of place encourages active citizenship and builds social capital, which is essential for the sustainability of a region, and provides a secure foundation for approaching the future. It could also be a powerful vehicle for reconciliation, with differing groups realising that they are linked by the same sense of concern for and attachment to a region.

The rationale is that without a strong sense of place, and subsequent sense of identity and belonging, you cannot begin to seek social justice or environmental change. Sense of place can be a powerful force in shaping development if it can be facilitated.

Regional Sustainability Strategies should reflect the environmental, economic and social stories, as well as the future aspirations, of a region. Every aspect of regional development should respond and contribute to a region's existing sense of place and cultural identity.

“The urban form of each town and city represents an accumulated memory of its origins and the way it has grown. Future development (should) respect and add to this layering of community memory and history”.¹⁸

Much of current decision-making, planning and development does not incorporate a region's sense of place or community aspirations. With the telling of a community's story and vision, developers, local authorities and others are able to understand the important qualities of a locality, and set out to enhance, rather than exacerbate, these important regional values and thereby contribute to the sustainability of the region. Community story telling and visioning processes do not replace existing plans or policies, but aim to enhance and extend the roles and values that they have. Ultimately, however, it is up to each regional community to decide how it will integrate story-telling and community visioning with current regional activities.

“Most decisions about our surroundings are ‘taken’ by other people, sometimes on our behalf, sometimes despite our needs – they are removed from us”.¹⁹

Community ownership is important to the durability and effectiveness of sustainability planning. The information gathered through stories and visioning

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Department of Infrastructure, 2002, *Melbourne 2030: Planning for Sustainable Growth*, State of Victoria, Victoria.

¹⁹ Warburton, D. (ed) 1998.

should not just be seen as another set of data to be utilised by planners and decision-makers, but should be seen as creating high community ownership of their region. If there is no unified vision of sense of place and community values and visions, and subsequent community ownership, sustainability won't succeed.

STORY-TELLING AND COMMUNITY VISIONING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Story-telling and community visioning have numerous roles in the pursuit of sustainability. Listed below is a summary of the objectives and outcomes, direct and indirect, of these two processes.

The objectives of story-telling and visioning, include the ability to identify and/or reveal:

- Community values (economic, social and environmental)
- Community aspirations;
- Trends and forces affecting the community and region;
- Inter-relationships between the economic, social and environmental aspects of the region, and beyond;
- Multiple perspectives;
- Regional sustainability issues (economic, social and environmental);
- Possible causes of sustainability issues;
- Possible solutions to sustainability issues;
- Factors that may enhance or obstruct regional sustainability;
- Past, present and future 'sense of place'; and
- Factors that may contribute or detract from the community's actual and/or desired sense of place.

Their expected outcomes include the:

- Creation of a shared regional community story
- Creation of a shared regional community vision;
- Definition of the regions actual and/or desired sense of place; and the
- Development of concrete goals, strategies and actions to achieve vision.

Associated outcomes of the story-telling and visioning processes include the:

- Enhancement of social capital;
- Forging and strengthening of relationships within and between community, government and the private sector;
- Greater understanding and respect of all cultures;
- Increased community responsibility for their local environment, social and economic spheres;
- Inspired community action for positive sustainable change;
- Development of a strong regional identity and sense of place;
- The building, strengthening or renewing of a regional sense of place;
- Demonstration of the importance and significance of local knowledge and experience;
- Reflection of community values and aspirations in regional decisions, plans, development etc;

- Engagement of all community members, particularly marginalised individuals and groups; and
- Assisting the process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

STORYTELLING AND VISIONING EXAMPLES

Communities, Governments and non-government organisations worldwide are actively using the tools of story-telling and visioning in the pursuit of sustainability. Presented below is an array of State, national and international examples. Story-telling examples include Kodja Place – Cultural Interpretative and Visitor Centre, and Capture Wales. Visioning examples include Dialogue with the City, Tasmania *Together*, and Charting a Course for Corvallis.

Kodja Place - Cultural Interpretative & Visitor Centre

Kodja Place²⁰ is a cultural interpretive and visitor centre located in the small rural town of Kojonup, Western Australia. The centre was developed, and continues to be operated, by the local Kojonup community, a mix of Noongars (local Indigenous people), Italians, and Wadjelas (the Noongar word for white people).

The central theme of the centre, ‘One Story, Many Voices’, is an attempt by the Kojonup community to explore and present its common story. The Kodja story, which includes the experiences and aspirations of the local Indigenous people, farmers, settlers and young people to name but-a-few, serves to highlight the involvement of the many, and diverse, cultures in the creation and development of Kojonup.

The collection and exhibition of cultural knowledge at the centre is based upon the Noongar’s way of sharing culture - through stories. This story approach was chosen by the community as it shifts away from the traditional historical ‘expert’ view, which is objective and makes generalisations about the whole community, to present-day subjective, multiple stories about the *shared* place.²¹

The centre has devised a multimedia display framework where community stories are displayed. With the assistance of various grants, equipment was purchased and local people were trained in the skills of oral history, video production, photo scanning and web-page production. The aim was to produce a range of high quality, locally produced stories expressing the cultural diversity of Kojonup, and the relationships of people between communities and with the environment. Because the equipment was purchased and local people were trained, these stories can continually be updated and new ones told.

Kodja Place also houses an outdoor rose maze which features the stories and cultural experiences of three fictional women, Maria (Italian), Yoondi (Noongar) and Elizabeth (English), since the time of federation. The maze is made up of a number of

²⁰ The centre takes its name from the Noongar word ‘kodja’ which means stone axe. The building also takes its shape from the stone axe as well.

²¹ Robertson, M. 2003, *Personal Stories*, Talk and Power Point Presentation, National Museum Conference, 25/5/03.

sections, each corresponding with a decade of the 20th century. Throughout the maze the stories of the three women are intertwined, and in the final sections the stories begin to converge.²²

Some of the positive outcomes associated with the development of Kodja Place include:

- Community capacity building;
- Cross-cultural interactions;
- Greater appreciation and understanding of the various roles each cultural group has in the local history, economic development, and cultural richness of the region;
- Celebration of local life;
- Local skill development
- Strengthening reconciliation between the cultural communities;
- Relationship building;
- Allowing people from different cultural backgrounds the chance to sit down and talk to one another;
- Local employment; and,
- Show-casing local culture to visitors, real and virtual;

In essence, the centre aims to highlight the existence of the different cultures in Kojonup and to provide a space where they can all be together.²³ Capturing the unique 'Kojonupness'²⁴, Kodja Place has created a fresh identity for Kojonup through the sharing and weaving of the many and diverse community stories.

Capture Wales

'Capture Wales' is a project being run by BBC Wales in conjunction with digital story-teller Daniel Meadows from the Centre for Journalism Studies at Cardiff University. The project aims to showcase the diversity and richness of life in Wales through digital stories told and made by the people of Wales. Together the BBC and Daniel have been running a series of three-day workshops throughout Wales, in both English and Welsh, working with community members to help create their own digital stories.

Digital story-telling is simply the process of telling a personal story using a range of multimedia tools. Participants of the project choose the story they want to tell, and the trained facilitators provide them with the technological skills to produce it in digital form (no previous skills are required).

Participants use their voice as narrative and the audio-visual resources of their personal archives (photography, video footage, text, music and sound) to produce a 3 - 5 minute personal story. The stories are mostly personal and range in topic from love, loss, illness, travel, self-discovery, isolation, and celebration to any other experience of life in Wales.

²² Available World Wide Web, <http://www.kodjaplace.net.au/maze.html>, accessed 11/06/03.

²³ McVee, C. 2003, *Introduction and Noongar Perspective*, Talk and Power Point Presentation, National Museum Conference, 25/5/03.

²⁴ Unknown, *Strengthening Communities through Sense of Place*.

After completion, each digital story-teller receives a copy of his/her own story on VHS cassette and CD-ROM, and selected digital stories are displayed on the BBC Wales website, or shown on television. The BBC is also currently working on digital story-telling projects in Humber and Lancashire.

Dialogue with the City

The Western Australian State Government, through the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, is currently conducting a comprehensive community engagement process for the future planning of Perth. This process, known as 'Dialogue with the City', aims to address Perth's high population and economic growth rates, and the significant impacts that they will have on land, resources, the environment, employment, transport and housing during the next thirty years.

Dialogue with the City aims to engage the Western Australian community in the future planning of Perth and empower them in identifying planning issues and solutions. A number of ways to engage community have been chosen, including:

- A survey of 8,000 households;
- Competitions for primary and high schools;
- Sessions with young, Aboriginal and non-English speaking people;
- An interactive website, with access to latest research and experts from Perth, Australia and overseas;
- A television program on the potential futures for Perth in the metropolitan area; and
- A consultative forum with 1,300 citizens.

The State Government of Western Australia aims to use the community views expressed through Dialogue with the City to form guidelines, policies and a strategic plan that focuses on making Perth the world's most liveable city.²⁵

Tasmania Together

"Together we will make Tasmania an icon for the rest of the world by creating a proud and confident society where our people live in harmony and prosperity" – vision statement of Tasmania Together.²⁶

Tasmania Together is a 20-year social, environmental and economic plan that has been based upon the shared ideas and aspirations of the Tasmanian people. As well as the vision above, Tasmania Together incorporates 24 goals and 212 benchmarks, which are grouped under five headings – Our Community, Our Culture, Our Democracy, Our Environment and Our Economy.

Over a two-year period an extensive community consultation process was undertaken throughout Tasmania. The process included over 60 public meetings, consultation with more than 100 community organisations, and the delivery of comment-cards to households throughout the state. More than 160 detailed written submissions were

²⁵ Government of Western Australia, 'Dialogue With the City', *Intersector: Official Magazine of the Western Australian Public Sector*, Vol 9, No. 15 – Aug 1, 2003: Pg 7.

²⁶ Available World Wide Web, <http://www.tasmaniattogether.tas.gov.au>, accessed 24/8/03.

received from business groups, peak bodies and individuals, 6,200 messages from website visitors and 4000 comment sheets were received.

The vision, goals and benchmarks of Tasmania *Together* aim to shape community, industry, and government policy, service delivery and budgets into the future. An example of how this has happened so far is the changing of the State Budget process. The Budget now assesses agency proposals against the objectives of Tasmania *Together*, and requires agencies to report their performance against the benchmarks of the plan annually.²⁷

All sectors of the community are responsible for the success of Tasmania *Together*, however it will be monitored by an independent statutory body, the Tasmanian Together Progress Board. This board is responsible for promoting the work of the plan, raising awareness of the vision, goals and benchmarks, encouraging community involvement in their realisation, and reporting on the progress towards achievement of the benchmarks. The board will also conduct five-yearly reviews of Tasmania *Together*, in conjunction with extensive community consultation.²⁸

Charting a Course for Corvallis

Corvallis, a city of approximately 43,000 people, was one of the first, and most successful, cities in Oregon to complete a community visioning project. Corvallis' visioning project, titled 'Charting a Course for Corvallis', arose out of community concern for the need to provide a strong sense of direction for the future of the city.²⁹

Key aims of Corvallis' visioning project were to maximise public involvement and be creative throughout the process. A range of strategies, including public meetings, neighbourhood meetings, community forums, special focus groups and a representative citizen task force, were created to encourage extensive community involvement. Children were also invited to participate in a special visioning exercise where they prepared essays and drawings about their vision of Corvallis' future.

The citizen task force in conjunction with the City of Corvallis staff and elected officials produced a range of documents including a:

- Community profile;
- Community values statement;
- Trends summary;
- Scenarios of the City's probable and preferred futures; and the
- Final Vision.

Whilst the City of Corvallis didn't prepare an action plan, the importance of their visioning process was in "building consensus, reflecting the community's values, and communicating the vision so that citizens and community leaders would have [the vision] in their heads to guide their daily activities".³⁰

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ames, S. (ed) 2001, *A Guide to Community Visioning*, Revised Edition, Oregon Visions Project, American Planning Association, Oregon: 2.

³⁰ Ames, S. (ed) 2001: 2.

STORY-TELLING AND COMMUNITY VISIONING METHODOLOGIES

This section of the paper proposes methodologies for undertaking story-telling and community visioning processes in regional areas.

Story-telling Methodology

It is suggested that multimedia technologies offer a powerful medium for the documentation and dissemination of stories. Multimedia technologies allow:

- Stories to be expressed in their most appropriate form e.g. performance, dance, song, writing, cultural trails, painting etc;
- Community members to tell and document their own story (with training);
- Stories to be told in situ;
- The opportunity to disseminate and educate the stories to the broader community, including students and tourists;
- An extensive range of mediums to be used to tell stories e.g. photographs, text, sound, images, video etc;
- Stories to be transferred onto a range of formats including CD or DVD;
- Stories to be shared through radio, television, exhibitions and the Internet; and
- Stories to be updated, modified and added;

Taking example from the aforementioned Kodja Place and Capture Wales projects, it is important for the local community members to document their own stories. With appropriate training and equipment, made available through sponsorship and grants, local community members should be able to document their own and others' personal stories. This reason is to not only skill the community, but it is also to empower communities, and generate a greater interest and responsibility for place.

Where these stories will be housed is discussed later.

Community Visioning Methodology

The suggested approach to community visioning for the regional areas of Western Australia, is the Oregon Model, developed by Stephen Ames. The Oregon Model provides a comprehensive four-step approach to community visioning, with each step focusing on a driving question, involving different planning activities and resulting in a specific product/s (see table 1).³¹

Step One: Profiling the Community

The first step is to conduct a community profile. Information is compiled on regional characteristics such as marine and terrestrial environments, natural resources, population, demographics, major employers/industries, culture and the arts, infrastructure, community institutions, housing, and educational resources. This step can also include the development of a community values statement.³²

³¹ Ames, S. (ed) 2001:7.

³² Ames, S. (ed) 2001: 8.

Step	Driving Question	Planning Activities	Product/s
1	Where are we now?	Research and data collection, compilation and analysis. Community survey, meetings.	Community profile, values statement.
2	Where are we going?	Determination of current and projected trends, and assessment of future impact. Creation of probable scenario/s through task forces, work groups, community meetings and brainstorming sessions.	Trends Statement, probable scenario.
3	Where do we want to be?	Creation of a preferred scenario and final vision through task forces, work groups, community meetings, brainstorming sessions.	Preferred scenario, vision statement.
4	How do we get there?	Identification of goals, strategies, actions, implementation agendas and priorities through task forces, work groups, or stakeholder meetings.	Action Plan.

Table 1 – The Oregon Model Four-step Process

Information source: Ames, S (ed) 2003.

Step Two: Analysing the Trends

The next step is to determine where the community is headed if current trends and activities continue. It involves analysing research to determine current and projected trends and their potential impact on the community. Probable scenario/s are developed based on the expected trends and large scale forces influencing the future in different directions.³³

Step Three: Creating the Vision

The third step involves the development of a “vision” for the future: What does the community want to become? Based on identified community values in step one, preferred scenario/s are developed. The development of the vision and preferred scenarios involves imagination, but need to be grounded in the reality of the trends affecting the community and their responses.³⁴

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ames, S. (ed) 2001: 8-9.

Step Four: Developing an Action Plan

Once the vision has been developed, an action plan is created detailing how to achieve it. The action plan is quite specific, and includes steps to be taken, assignment of responsibilities and timelines.³⁵

Whilst I am suggesting the use of the Oregon Model as a community visioning process for Regional Sustainability Strategies, it should be noted that I am not suggesting that each community needs to follow this four-step process in great detail. It is important to remember that any visioning process should be designed to suit the unique needs, resources and capabilities of the particular community.³⁶

The Oregon Model is designed to be versatile and suited to a wide range of regional communities. Some communities may choose to undertake all of the four steps, some may only follow the first three. Some communities may choose to focus on the creation of the shared vision, others may place great importance of the development of the action plan. Failure to recognise the uniqueness of a community may result in an unsuccessful visioning process.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

No one sector of the community is, or should, be responsible for the implementation and development of the story-telling and community visioning processes. It is suggested that these processes be incepted and developed by a range of stakeholders, including:

- Community members;
- The private sector i.e. business, industry;
- Non-government organisations;
- Local government bodies;
- Regional Development Commissions; and
- Regional Councils of Local Government.³⁷

It should be the responsibility of the State Government to demonstrate how the processes should be done. This is mentioned further in the paper below.

Western Australian Telecentre Network

The Western Australian Telecentre Network (WATN) has the potential to provide the means for developing, storing and communicating regional stories and visions. The Western Australian Telecentre Network (WATN) currently has 97 established centres throughout the State, each individually owned and managed by the local community. Each telecentre is equipped with a range of technologies including high quality computer equipment, the Internet, videoconferencing, digital cameras and satellite communications.

³⁵ Ames, S. (ed) 2001: 9.

³⁶ Ames, S (ed) 2001: 13.

³⁷ As part of the State-Local Government Partnership Agreement the government is providing encouragement and support for the establishment of Regional Councils of Local Government particularly for sustainability issues. Government of Western Australia, 2002: 59.

The telecentres will enable regional communities to gather their stories and aspirations of the locality, and can provide the opportunity to continue to prepare, share and draw in new people, new stories and new visions.

Local Museums, Libraries, Cultural Centres and Aboriginal Language Centres

Local museums, libraries, cultural centres, such as art galleries and interpretive centres, and Aboriginal Language Centres also have the potential to be story and vision collection and presentation places. With ongoing community involvement and partnerships, local museums and cultural centres can act as public forums to promote the storytelling and aspirations processes, as well as the greater process of the Regional Sustainability Strategy, and to provide centres for building on this community resource for years to come.

Toolkits for Story-telling and Community Visioning

It is proposed that the State Government develop a series of toolkits to assist regional communities in the collection and documentation of place stories, and the conduct of community visioning. This could be achieved in conjunction with the Western Australian Museum and the Global Centre for Sustainability³⁸, and would comprise the production of ‘kits’ and associated training programs.

CONCLUSION

“Sustainability recognises the significance and diversity of community and regions for their management of the earth, and the critical importance of ‘sense of place’ and heritage (buildings, townscapes, landscapes and culture) in any plans of the future”. ... (The vision is for) Western Australia’s communities in cities and in regions (to) have a strong sense of place, supportive networks receptive to local needs, and through this (the ability to) respond uniquely to the sustainability agenda”.³⁹

Regional Sustainability Strategies (RSS) are being proposed for regions of Western Australia. As outlined above, one of the key components to RSS is storytelling and community visioning. It is a commonly expressed sentiment that community storytelling and visioning can unlock many doors and facilitate a pathway to regional sustainability.

The processes of story-telling and community visioning, involves creating a shared ‘story’, and a shared ‘vision’ of a region, so as to define the regional sense of place and rationale for sustainable development.

The values and aspirations expressed by local people also provide sustainability goals and could trigger local involvement in the sustainability process. Decisions about the place are underpinned by the myriad of values and visions of the ideal place held by

³⁸ The Global Centre for Sustainability is a collaborative research body between the four Western Australian Universities, TAFE and the CSIRO that is able to conduct long term, integrated, relevant and applied research in the sustainability arena.

³⁹ Government of Western Australia, 2002.

stakeholders. An effective sustainability process integrates these into a shared story and a shared vision.

Story-telling and community visioning can also elucidate the role of humans in sustainable change, and the reasons for local attitudes and behaviour. By assisting local people to recognize the importance of integrating sustainability management actions with social, environmental and economic imperatives, story-telling and visioning could be a positive force in the sustainability process.

The key outputs will be:

- Stories of the place are told and shared; and
- Community visions and action plan for achieving a preferred future will be produced.

Key associated outcomes comprise:

- Enhancement of Social Capital by forging and strengthening relationships between community members and stakeholders;
- Provision of vital input to Regional Sustainability Strategies;
- Identification of community values and future aspirations;
- Incorporation of all aspects of sustainability – economic, environmental and social – at the regional level;
- Creation of a shared community story, vision and sense of place
- Engagement of all community members;
- Development of concrete goals and strategies for the pathway to sustainability;
- Strengthening community cohesion and sense of place; and
- Assisting with the process of reconciliation between black and white Australia.

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Kodja Place – www.kodjaplace.net.au

Stephen Ames Community Visioning – www.communityvisioning.com

Tasmania *Together* – www.tasttogether.tas.gov.au/