Creating transactional space for sustainability: a case study of the Western Australian Collaboration

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

………………………………

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ABSTRACT

Progressing sustainability requires a more networked approach to governance—an approach that connects otherwise segmented policy areas and fosters greater communication among governments, stakeholders and citizens. Of particular importance is the development of discursive spaces in which diverse actors are able to explore the differing knowledge, perspectives and values raised by the challenge of sustainability. This thesis develops the notion of transactional space to bring into focus the processes of reflection, dialogue and mutual learning that effective sustainability discourse involves. In the first part of the thesis I review literature on the theory and practice of participation, deliberation and collaboration, giving particular attention to the ways in which these processes have potential to create space for a depth of exchange and enable participants to engage with the tensions inherent in complex policy issues. While many authors point to the importance of negotiating difference in these processes, the literature reveals that, in practice, this type of exchange tends to be overlooked or underdeveloped. I therefore argue in this thesis that critical, reflective dialogue plays a key role in generating greater understanding among participants, more comprehensive understanding of policy issues, and more integrative and shared approaches, and for these reasons must be actively developed.

The case study in the second part of the thesis explores this concern for developing reflective exchange in practice. The formation of the Western Australian Collaboration in 2002—a partnership of non-government organizations from a range of social and environmental perspectives committed to ‘a just and sustainable Western Australia’—represented an opportunity to examine the development of participatory and collaborative processes for sustainability. The thesis presents a case study of the WA Collaboration’s development over 2002-2006 to illustrate the potential such networks and open forums offer for transformative exchange around sustainability. It describes the intensive process conducted with the Steering Committee to cultivate a culture of reflection and learning in the organization, and the practical initiatives the process helped to generate.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the lessons learnt and key principles and practical considerations relevant to fostering transactional space. The WA
Collaboration experience and the review of literature reveal a tendency in practice to privilege action and outcomes over reflection and learning. Furthermore, despite the necessity for a depth of engagement with complex policy issues, funding systems and policy environments often fail to allow the time and resources needed to support genuine dialogue and collaborative work. The thesis provides the concept and principles of transactional space as a means of helping to address this imbalance. They are designed to encourage practitioners to create opportunities for critical, reflective dialogue in a range of deliberative settings.
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Introduction

‘Sustainability’ is a challenging notion that is increasingly capturing the interest of governments, businesses, community sector organizations and individuals alike. Over the past few decades it has emerged almost concurrently with the similar concept ‘sustainable development,’ and is gaining acceptance for its ability to focus attention on developing integrative and holistic approaches to the advancement of social, economic and environmental objectives. Sustainability calls for governments and communities to work together to create outcomes that foster social justice and prosperity for current and future generations, and that at the same time support the integrity of the ecological systems on which we depend.

At a time when the concept of sustainability is being taken up at the local level, many organizations are seeking ways to involve greater numbers of people more effectively in the development of informed, mutually supportive and far-sighted strategies for change. Traditionally-used consultative and participatory processes have often been inadequate to both the task of negotiating deep differences in belief and perception among participants, and developing more comprehensive understanding of issues. Many practitioners have looked for ways to better facilitate the development of integrative and shared outcomes, and a suite of processes has emerged across both government and community-based initiatives demonstrating potential for a deep and transformative level of exchange.

This thesis explores the potential of participatory and deliberative practice to allow for the negotiation of differing knowledge and perspectives and in turn the development of more collective and sustainable solutions. It does this through an examination of literature related to critical and reflective dialogue in theory and practice, and through a case study of a collaboration of diverse organizations and individuals working towards sustainability in Western Australia. Central to the overall discussion is the development of a concept of transactional space.
Understanding the challenges involved in progressing sustainability

In early 2002 I volunteered to assist in the work of the Sustainability Policy Unit, in Western Australia’s Department of the Premier and Cabinet. This recently established unit was given the brief of developing a whole of government framework for sustainability for the vast and diverse state of Western Australia, and, being small, relied heavily upon student volunteers such as myself. Involvement in the development of the Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy provided a first-hand introduction to the challenges associated with developing public policy from the standpoint of sustainability. My work included preparing a summary of public submissions to inform the development of the draft strategy, reports of public seminars and stakeholder meetings, and a background paper on sustainability assessment, as well as helping to organize and report on sustainability assessment workshops. These experiences provided insight into policy-making processes and their attendant processes of consultation and deliberation. Observation of the public seminars and meetings of public, private and community sector stakeholders, together with the study of the public submissions, helped me develop an understanding of the practical challenges involved across the range of issues and the divergent views and interests surrounding those issues.

Contemporaneous with the development of the State Sustainability Strategy were the preparations a number of people were making in the Western Australian community to establish a WA Collaboration—a network and forum that could bring together organizations and individuals from various social, economic and environmental perspectives in ongoing dialogue around the challenge of sustainability. This state-based partnership of peak community sector organizations was seen within government and elsewhere as an historic initiative for Western Australia, and indeed for Australia, as it was the first state in Australia to develop such a diverse partnership. The Australian Collaboration, formed in 2001 (a similar grouping of organizations but at the national level), provided inspiration for the WA Collaboration, while the imminent development of the State Sustainability Strategy provided a catalyst. From mid-2002, the members of the WA Collaboration Steering Committee prepared to conduct a substantial community engagement process that would stretch across Western Australia and provide a counterpoint to the Government’s consultation for the State Sustainability Strategy.
I became engaged with the WA Collaboration’s work in October 2002, at the beginning of this community involvement process. Intrigued by the challenges facing the organization in its desire to promote and engage people in sustainability, I began discussions with the Coordinator of the WA Collaboration about possible research into the work and development of the organization. After a number of months of engagement with its activities in the Western Australian community, a concern arose as to how such a diversity of people—both those representing organizations in the Steering Committee and those participating in the WA Collaboration’s various open events—could experience productive exchanges around sustainability and develop effective collaborative relationships.

Observation of and participation in the WA Collaboration’s meetings, workshops and other events, indicated that sustainability, and the issues surrounding it, tend to be complex and heavily contested. It became increasingly clear that people understand and approach sustainability differently according to their backgrounds and perspectives. Because of their work, study, group associations, personal interests and/or values, people focus more on some dimensions and issues encompassed by sustainability than on others. For example, some people are oriented towards sustainable urban and regional development, creating quality of life and community building, while others may lean toward social justice and alleviation of poverty. Others still are primarily concerned with abating over-consumption of resources and protecting the integrity of biodiversity. Furthermore, some people have very specific agendas and passions for issues—often associated with past experiences—such as provision of affordable housing in urban areas, economic diversification in country towns to combat depopulation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and combating car dependence. Although the realities are far more complex than these examples suggest, the point here is simply that people bring a particularity and partiality of experience, knowledge and perspective to discussions around sustainability. This awareness contributed to my view in this thesis that the development of any work towards sustainability must involve attention to the differences underpinning discussions.

Such an awareness of the challenges involved in working collectively towards sustainability is shared by many commentators. Davison (2001), for example, argues
that “sustainability is an essentially contested and culturally rich discursive domain” (41). Sterling (2003) shares this view that the sustainability concept encourages, and indeed necessitates, broad and critical dialogue:

Sustainability is a non-prescriptive concept, which needs to become meaningful in a specific context. Its non-specific, imprecise nature can be seen as an advantage in stimulating dialogue on meaning and implications… (Sterling 2003, citing Van den Bor et al. 2000, 314, and Wals and Bawden 2000, 20).

In this sense, sustainability takes on meaning as people deliberate over particular issues and engage with the various experiences, knowledge, values and perspectives surrounding them. This fluid and iterative nature makes sustainability challenging, but at the same time allows for expansive thinking and the development of more collective and holistic approaches to policy issues.¹

Many considerations regarding the concept of sustainability have been raised in the literature, but particularly important is the role of dialogue about values. Tainter (2003), for example, argues that sustainability is “a matter of values” (213): what becomes sustained very much depends on who is involved and what their values and interests are, which could be “an accustomed way of life, opportunities to improve one’s situation, or environmental conditions that match an idealized concept of nature” (213). Tainter therefore emphasizes the need for dialogue and deliberation in which the underlying values people bring to sustainability discussions are made explicit:

The configurations of society or ecosystems that we try to sustain are those we value but therein lies the dilemma. Values are variable, mutable, and transient, so sustainability is always relative… This conflict will never disappear. We can, however, work toward making the debate rational, and the discussion explicit. This would lessen the conflicts that now arise from miscommunication…[and because] those involved in sustainability assume that the value of the things they wish to sustain is axiomatic (213-214).

The interdependent nature of issues related to sustainability makes cooperation and dialogue between a range of groups and individuals both essential and demanding. The multi-stakeholder and multi-organizational partnerships emerging in many parts of the world offer significant opportunities for the development of such connections. Partnerships and collaborations draw together multiple constituencies and create forums for dialogue and knowledge exchange. Those in the community sector in particular create alternative spaces for policy deliberation. When civil society organizations form

¹ Like many others discussing sustainability, I use the word ‘holistic’ to suggest approaches that take into account the full suite of aspects or concerns. Holistic approaches are comprehensive and integrative in terms of the various objectives involved, and as such involve discovering commonality and convergence around issues.
partnerships they bring together overlapping interests and provide opportunities for integration of public preferences. Organizations like the WA Collaboration can broaden policy deliberation beyond one-off or short-lived official processes, which are often restricted to selected stakeholders and citizens. As organizations that are open to the public and that encourage regular participation, civil society organizations can provide continuity of space for deliberation and learning.

Many commentators have drawn attention to the central role of partnerships, within and between sectors, in progressing sustainability, and to the difficulties involved (for example Hartman et al. 1999, Hemmati 2002, Maser et al. 1998, Tilbury and Wortman 2004 and Tilbury et al. 2005). Authors such as these argue that sustainability will require collaboration at various levels of activity, and that multi-stakeholder processes will be vital to building more comprehensive knowledge and more widespread ownership of strategies to advance sustainability. In particular, they argue that collaboration can help utilise the richness of different knowledge and perspectives for the creation of innovative and synergistic outcomes. Tilbury and Wortman (2004) provide a useful summary of the role of partnerships in progressing sustainability:

> By bringing together different groups with diverse knowledge and skills, partnerships can help to build collective knowledge through dialogue. Partnerships can also encourage each partner to reflect on their values, visions and missions, and they can create a space to develop new ideas and strategies. Out of this diversity, they also create the opportunity for partners to build a shared vision, inspiring motivation to work together towards sustainability (68).

Tilbury et al. (2005) contend that partnership and collaborative approaches are crucial for learning about sustainability because they encourage partners and other people involved to consider alternative worldviews and assumptions.

The significance of partnership approaches has been associated with a shift in thinking about governance towards a recognition of the role of networks of actors, including those from the voluntary sector, in democratic decision-making (for example Taylor and Warburton 2003; McClelland 2002; White 2001; Macleod and McCulloch 2000). This shift in thinking towards more participatory and collaborative modes of governance has been attributed largely to a recognition of the complexity of policy issues and the way in which they cross sectoral boundaries (Fosler and Lipitz 2002; The Three Sector Collaborative Project 2000). It has also been associated with an understanding of the
role of citizens and civil society organizations in decision-making, and in “solving community problems and re-building social capital” (Rawsthorne 2004, 4).

Partnerships can bring together particular or local knowledge with other forms of knowledge, and offer forums in which these knowledges can be utilised. Through dialogue and deliberation partnerships can facilitate the integration of interrelated issues and transfer of knowledge and resources needed for the development of more widely supported policy outcomes. Because of the multi-faceted and far-reaching nature of sustainability, a cooperative approach is needed to involve relevant actors and address overlapping concerns. Outcomes that contribute towards sustainability are more likely to emerge when a long-term approach to policy-making is taken involving coordination and negotiation of a range of interests.

Although partnership initiatives are conducive to sustainability in that they offer forums for dialogue, debate and negotiation of concerns, there are considerable difficulties to be found in discussions between diverse parties and individuals. Much greater attention is needed to the way in which diversity presents opportunities as well as barriers in partnership initiatives and other participatory processes. Hartman et al. (1999) share this conviction and from their examination of partnership processes for sustainability conclude that such initiatives require consideration of the ways in which they might build more constructive exchanges for furthering sustainability. Partnerships are essentially about collaboration, a process involving exploration of differences between parties in search of solutions that “go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray 1989, 5, cited in Hartman et al. 1999, 256). This means that collaboration necessitates the development of practices that allow for the “constructive handling of differences, joint ownership of decisions and collective responsibility of outcomes” (Hartman et al. 1999, 256-257).

At the same time, however, participants of collaborative initiatives tend to be outcome-rather than process-oriented, and to experience a “tension between driving the project forward and developing the means of collaborating” (Rochester and Woods 2005, 23). They tend to underestimate the length of time required to work collaboratively (Rochester and Woods 2005). This dynamic was evident in the WA Collaboration. Whereas the structure and operation of the Collaboration presented significant potential
for the dialogue and learning needed to support collective action, the busy schedule meant limited opportunities for a deep and transformative level of exchange. The WA Collaboration therefore faced the difficulty of involving disparate groups and individuals while lacking the opportunities to explore the tensions as well as richness such diversity brings.

This situation led me to initiate a process with the Steering Committee of the Collaboration that could provide an opportunity to generate greater understanding of organizational backgrounds, perspectives and values, through exploration of commonalities and differences. This process aimed to encourage reflection on diversity in knowledge and views and establish the importance of such work across the WA Collaboration’s activities.

**Thesis argument**

Through the research with the WA Collaboration and an analysis of a range of participatory theory and practice, I formed the argument of this thesis that while participatory, deliberative and collaborative processes have potential to generate a depth of exchange around sustainability, the negotiation of differences in interests, perspectives and values, the development of closer understanding among participants, and the formation of more integrative and holistic approaches to policy issues will require opportunities for critical and reflective dialogue in regular practice.

As a multi-interest context, sustainability requires a genuinely dialogical space. Sustainability has become recognized as offering a way to fathom the complexity and interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental issues. At the same time, it is dynamic and iterative in nature since it takes on meaning for people in its application to particular contexts. In sum, the scope of sustainability and breadth of knowledge it demands requires the involvement of a range of stakeholders and citizens in participatory and collaborative processes. A broad dialogue is essential for the development of more relevant and robust outcomes and ownership of strategies.

However, although communication and dialogue are necessary for sustainability, they are also problematic. This difficulty emerges because of the diversity of concerns and
perspectives the sustainability concept attracts, and because of the need for integration. People bring layers of diversity to participatory processes, including identifications with particular ethnic and social groups, and membership or associations with particular interest groups. This identification creates a sense of belonging to certain groups and ideologies and at the same time a sense of difference from others. People also bring particular experiences and specific concerns arising out of those experiences.

I therefore argue in this thesis that participatory and collaborative processes must facilitate engagement with the backgrounds, beliefs and values underpinning discussions if participants are to appreciate the complexity of the issues, engage with the tensions in views surrounding them and develop shared outcomes. Dialogue that involves sharing of knowledge and experience, explication of perspectives, and engagement with value difference can allow for more mutually beneficial decisions and more holistic approaches to problems, because this deeper exchange can facilitate greater understanding of issues and of the respective concerns and priorities of participants.

The essence of deliberative democratic practice is that people are encouraged to engage in reasoned argument and consideration of multiple views, and in doing so to develop their own views. I argue that while such processes are conducive to progressing sustainability for their ability to generate more comprehensive understanding around issues, they must better address the tensions in perspectives, values and priorities that often arise among participants. A combination of critical and reflective dialogue can help expand understanding through appreciation of alternative knowledge and experience, and encourage participants to consider both the value and limitations of differing arguments and perspectives. It can facilitate exploration of overlaps and commonalities in perspectives and priorities, and can help address assumptions and misunderstandings among participants.

While critical, reflective dialogue may not always resolve underlying differences in values and priorities to the extent that outcomes satisfy or are supported by all participants, a depth of process can have a significant impact on how approaches to policy issues are developed and how participants contribute to outcomes. Reflective
and critical dialogue also fosters inclusion of differing concerns and perspectives, and the richness of understanding needed to support holistic action.

**Transactional space**

This thesis argues that the transition toward sustainability will require participatory and collaborative processes that provide opportunities for a transactional space in which participants can better understand the differing backgrounds and perspectives that affect their deliberations. At the heart of this space is engagement with personal experience and critical, reflective dialogue as a means of enabling people to review and expand their knowledge and perspectives. I use the notion of transactional space as a focusing concept to draw attention to the development of rich and potentially transformative exchange in participatory and collaborative processes.2

The noun ‘transaction’ has a number of meanings with the one pertinent to this thesis being “an exchange or interaction between people” (Soanes and Hawker [Compact Oxford English Dictionary], 2005). Furthermore, the *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary* states that a transaction is “a communicative action or activity involving two parties or things that reciprocally affect or influence each other.” The prefix ‘trans’ tends to be defined in dictionaries as ‘across,’ ‘through’ or ‘beyond,’ while the verb ‘transact’ tends to be described as ‘perform’ or ‘carry through.’

I use the phrase ‘transactional space’ because it connotes communicative activities in which participants inform and influence one another during the process. Transactional space is used in this thesis to suggest opportunities for dynamic processes in which boundaries are crossed and some form of change occurs. These processes may involve shifts or expansion in beliefs and perspectives, and the development of greater understanding. I also use the phrase because implicit in the meaning of ‘transaction’ is a sense of goodwill and willingness to enter into exchange. Furthermore, whereas the noun ‘transaction’ suggests completeness of the activity, the adjectival form in the phrase ‘transactional space’ should be understood as an exchange that is in the process

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2 While transactional space involves a depth of exchange during face to face interaction, its significance is not limited to this contact. Face to face interaction is important because it provides access to extra information about what a person is thinking and feeling, such as tone and body language. However, online forums can often complement face to face interaction and in this way support the creation of transactional space.
of being carried out. However, at the same time as transactional space suggesting an open-ended, provisional process, I also see it as conveying a sense of fulfilment of purpose and comprehensiveness of discussion or activity (which I find to be implicit in the meaning of ‘transact’ as ‘perform’ or carry through’).

‘Transactional space’ emphasizes processes of exchange, expansion of thinking and learning in which participants recognize the value and limitations of their own and other people’s knowledge, and in doing so challenge preconceived views, assumptions and misunderstandings. It is a concept I use to focus on reflective dialogical processes in which participants can explore their diverse wealth of experience, knowledge and perspectives, and in doing so reveal the underlying values that govern deliberative outcomes. In terms of sustainability, transactional space refers to processes that create opportunities for the shared discovery and expansion of understanding needed to develop more mutually beneficial and robust outcomes across a range of social, economic and environmental objectives.

The following diagram (Figure 1) illustrates further my conception of transactional space and represents negotiation in the metaphorical sense of navigating a river of differences. Transactional space is about mediating this barrier or threshold between individual experiences, interests and values on the one side, and collective vision and aspiration and holistic approaches on the other. The arrows indicate that this exploratory process is a continuous back and forth exchange—the individual informs the collective, and the collective must relate back to the individual.
I encountered the phrase ‘transactional space’ in Gristock’s (2001) report of the British Council seminar “Science and Society: Towards a Democratic Science.” Gristock heard the phrase used in this seminar in relation to the role of democratic processes in the development of new technologies. I saw potential for the phrase to be used to draw attention to a depth of exchange in deliberative and collaborative processes, and sought to develop it into a concept that could inform work towards sustainability.

Exploration of other instances where people have used the phrase ‘transactional space’ or the word ‘transactional’ revealed divergent meanings and applications. The phrase ‘transactional space’ has been used in many different contexts to describe various relationships such as those in business, those between organizations and those involving information and communications technology. It has also been used in relation to the study of body language and behaviour between people during interaction (for example Kendon 1990).

Dewey and Bentley applied the word transactional more than half a century ago when they laid out their ‘transactional view’ or approach in Knowing and the Known (1949). I note the approach here for its argument that knowing should be seen as an ongoing, cooperative and thereby communicative experience because knowledge is always partial.
and provisional, and because matters are connected rather than separate; it advocates ‘seeing together’ which I understand as similar to a combination of holistic thinking and collaborative inquiry.3

**The contribution of this thesis**

This thesis seeks to contribute to the emerging body of knowledge about progressing sustainability through participatory and collaborative processes. It focuses on a perceived gap in analysis of the forms of dialogue and deliberation that can support these processes. The thesis is therefore essentially concerned with contributing knowledge towards addressing the following questions:

- What forms and conditions of dialogue and deliberation are necessary for progressing sustainability?
- In particular, what processes are vital to the success of multi-stakeholder or collaborative situations involving diverse participants?

In sum, I focus on how current practice might create more transformative spaces for sustainability and the role of transactional level exchange in developing holistic and shared strategies.

The thesis draws together theory and practice from a number of related but distinct disciplines into a discussion of fostering reflective exchange in participatory and collaborative processes. Through interviews with key stakeholders and a case study of the WA Collaboration it provides insight into the development of reflective exchange in multi-stakeholder and participatory contexts. Case studies such as the WA Collaboration describe experiences that relate to and can inform situations beyond their own particular context. Furthermore, examples of collaborative work towards sustainability can demonstrate sustainability in practice and the realities of the challenges involved. Out of the research I distil lessons learnt and principles and practical considerations for developing transactional space. Furthermore, I identify a range of contexts in which the concept and approach of transactional space could be beneficial.

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3 For further information see TransactionalView.org, a website dedicated to Dewey and Bentley’s work.
The approach and form of the research

The research for this thesis consisted of an examination of theory and practice related to reflective exchange in the literature of several disciplines, and a case study of a collaborative initiative. The *bricolage* or quilt-like nature of the thesis is apparent in the sense that I have drawn together—around the problem of developing a depth of exchange in participatory practice—my own observations and perceptions with that of a range of sources, and have used the overall material to develop an emergent model of transactional space. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) write,

> [t]he interpretive bricoleur produces a *bricolage*—that is, a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. “The solution [bricolage] which is the result of the bricoleur’s method is an [emergent] construction” (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p. 161) that changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation are added to the puzzle (5).

In the following section I discuss action research as the primary approach informing the research with the WA Collaboration, the form of the research as a case study, and highlight the ways in which the approach and form have been complementary. I also provide an outline of the research undertaken with the WA Collaboration. My research approach supports my understanding of sustainability as inherently participatory and context-specific, and is consistent with the interdisciplinary approach many scholars take towards research about sustainability.

Methodological framework

The qualitative research of this thesis is situated within the interpretivist, naturalistic paradigm, an approach where “researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, 5). The interpretivist view of the world is that social reality is constructed by the actors in the situation (Cherry 1999). This means that “[t]he researcher must immerse him or herself in the actors’ world (as a participant observer), to attempt to get ‘inside’ reality as they define it” (Cherry 1999, 56). Cherry describes the logic employed here as abductive or dialogic where researchers listen for actors’ ways of thinking and continually question assumptions rather than imposing theories. It involves a dialogue between researcher and actors so that understanding for both is deepened by being challenged.
According to Cherry, action research as a culture of inquiry falls largely within the interpretivist paradigm, but has the potential to combine the benefits of abductive/dialogic approaches with those of the inductive logic of logical positivism and the deductive logic of critical rationalism. She describes deductive logic as a top-down approach where researchers start with a theory, proposition or hypothesis that they wish to test against what is observed. Inductive or bottom-up logic, on the other hand, means researchers tend to begin with a set of observations and then explore theories that describe it. In contrast, abductive/dialogic approaches are inherently iterative in that the researcher goes on engaging with the data through conversations, self-dialogue, listening, observation, reading etc.

As Cherry suggests, these forms of logic are not mutually-exclusive in real-life social research, and this has been the case in my research. The research began with broadly-defined ideas and some notion of what I was most concerned with, but at the same time evolved through observation of the situation and engagement with the people involved. The formal intervention (the intensive process) was developed collaboratively with the actors of the situation but had its origins in pre-conceived ideas. My theoretical argument for transactional space likewise evolved throughout my engagement with the WA Collaboration and study of literature.

The approach taken in my research has been informed largely by the action research or participatory action research (PAR) family of methods (a minor distinction I discuss in Chapter 5). Action research appealed to me because of a strong desire to provide research as relevant as possible for groups working towards sustainability like the WA Collaboration, and indeed for any initiatives or processes that help develop more democratic and sustainable societies. Action research is a culture of inquiry based upon individual and collaborative reflection and discovery. Researchers and actors engage in joint exploration of possibilities for change that may improve a practice or situation. They undergo a process of continuous planning, action and review of action in order to generate deeper knowledge relevant for practice. Knowledge in this context is therefore seen as knowing and learning through action and interaction rather than a fixed state or attribute.
As the name suggests, the purpose of action research can be seen as twofold:

i) action—to bring about change in some community, organization or program; and

ii) research—to increase knowledge and understanding on the part of the researcher, client or both, or some other wider community (Dick 1992 cited in Cherry 1999, 1).

Many commentators highlight a third major purpose—developing capacity among people in the situation to deal with the issue into the future (Cherry 1999). This third aim is the most important one for this thesis as I endeavoured not only to help expand but also to help create a *culture* of reflective exchange in the WA Collaboration.

From these aims it is easy to see why action research has become a popular choice for facilitating positive change in organizations. It enables people to deal with real problems in real time, and helps to prepare them for dealing with future challenges. It also fosters an appreciation of the complex and fluid realities of social systems. The collaborative basis of action research makes it both relevant and emancipatory. Instead of imposing assumptions, researchers gain an appreciation of an insider’s view of the situation and develop ‘critical distance’ as they move between outsider and insider thought positions (Kemmis and McTaggart 2003, 372-373). According to Cherry (1999), reflection back and forth or the testing of research through action can overcome and utilise issues of subjectivity.

This ‘critical distance’ or in Cherry’s terms ‘critical subjectivity’ (an ability to stand aside and reflect from both one’s own and other or larger perspectives) (1999, 78), is further supported by the iterative, dialectical and interdisciplinary nature of much action research. The following description of this is from Cherry (1999). She explains that researchers typically undergo continual evaluation of the effectiveness of the methods and techniques chosen as the research proceeds. The idea is to keep the space of research and insight open for useful procedures to emerge that can generate useful knowledge. This iterative inquiry has appeal because it allows investigation to begin with hunches and ill-defined issues but at the same time engenders discovery, construction of knowledge or sense-making. As I discuss later regarding case studies, action research produces considerable local knowledge but the tension for the researcher is also to produce more broadly applicable knowledge. This tension can be managed by
both iterative processes of continuous evaluation and what Dick (1992) calls a ‘dialectic’ approach, that is, working with multiple information sources or what is commonly known as triangulation. This may mean drawing from different informants or participants, collecting information at different times, and using various perspectives, theories and disciplines to pose differing questions on the one topic which are then posed to participants, all of which occurred in my research. This wealth of data, and exploration of similarities and differences within it, can help maximise the validity of the process, its generalisability and the rigour of the conclusions reached.

**Using a case study in the thesis**

The thesis provides a case study of the WA Collaboration to explore the particular experience of diverse people working together for sustainability and what can be learnt from it that can inform practice in other deliberative and collaborative situations. I approached the case both in *intrinsic* terms (where the researcher’s primary aim is to gain a better understanding of the particular case) and in *instrumental* terms (where the researcher is additionally concerned with pursuing an external interest, providing insight into a particular issue and redrawing a generalisation) (Stake 2003, 136-137). I saw considerable potential in the WA Collaboration for generating a depth of engagement with sustainability, and therefore considered that a case study of its development in this regard could shed light on how transactional level exchange might be expanded in deliberative and collaborative processes.

Case research is valuable for its ability to capture and thereby extend experience (Stake 2003). Cases described in sufficient descriptive narrative can allow readers to “vicariously experience these happenings and draw conclusions (which may differ from those of the researchers)” (Stake 2003, 141). Stake argues that “somehow people draw, from the description of an individual case, implications for other cases—not always correctly, but with a confidence shared by people of dissimilar views” (156). Case studies can provide a comprehensive account of a phenomenon within its environment (Gummesson 1991 cited in Cherry 1999, 105). This comprehensiveness can build understanding in readers of the difficulties and successes that characterised the experience. Furthermore, Cherry (1999) argues that, as stories, case studies stimulate review and reflection in the reader and new thinking.
The WA Collaboration case study provides a comprehensive account of a particular experience of a partnership, network and forum for sustainability. It provides a view of what has been possible in Western Australia and what can occur elsewhere in terms of collaboration for sustainability. Although I have endeavoured to provide a breadth of description adequate to illustrate the overall potential of the WA Collaboration, I have focussed on one particular aspect of the experience and one that I argue is fundamental—how the diverse organizations and individuals involved might create productive exchanges out of this diversity and utilise the richness of knowledge and perspective present.

As in many instances of case research, the study of the WA Collaboration involved a tension between exploration of particularity and exploration of generalisability. Stake (2003) reminds us that cases are complex entities operating within a number of contexts, a situational nature calling for holistic examination. At the same time he highlights the need for bounding of the case, conceptualisation of the object of study and strategic decisions “in regard to how much and how long the complexities of the case should be studied” (141). Stake raises the issue of how much to develop assertions and generalisations about a case and how much of this to leave to the reader. He also raises the issue of making grand generalisations from one case and suggests assertions can be supported through triangulation—the use of multiple sources or perceptions to clarify meaning, verify observations or interpretations, and indicate that the phenomenon is being seen in differing ways. He concludes that “[c]ase studies are of value for refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability” (156).

**Outline of the research with the WA Collaboration**

Drawing on participatory action research approaches, and with the production of a case study in mind, I engaged in research with the WA Collaboration over the period October 2002 to August 2006. The research during this period included the following:

- participation in most of the Steering Committee meetings and in almost all of the wider meetings, forums and events of the WA Collaboration;
- engagement with the issues and policy-making processes the WA Collaboration was involved in;
• regular contact and discussion with the Coordinator of the WA Collaboration; and
• the collaborative development of several publications and conference papers with the Coordinator over a number of years.

This activity contributed both formal and informal data to my thesis.

An intervention consisting of an intensive process conducted with the Steering Committee between August 2003 and February 2004 constituted the major part of my formal data collection. By providing an opportunity for exploration of the differing organizational backgrounds and perspectives, this process aimed to help:

• develop a conscious appreciation of the value of critical and reflective dialogue;
• foster a culture of reflective exchange in the organization; and
• identify simple ways to provide ongoing opportunities for reflective exchange.

In sum it aimed to help develop capacity for transactional space and thereby the transformative potential of the WA Collaboration.

The process was developed collaboratively with the Steering Committee and Coordinator and involved:

➢ eliciting the organizational ‘stories’ of the Steering Committee organizations through in-depth, semi-structured interviews;
➢ capturing these backgrounds and perspectives in summaries that were circulated among the group;
➢ exploring the commonalities and differences between the organizations in a facilitated workshop; and lastly
➢ reflecting on the process through a discussion paper and feedback session.

Although the intensive process provided impetus for the Coordinator to continue developing such work in the organization, my regular contact with her was crucial for maintaining momentum. The collaborative research approach and the strong working relationship I developed with the Coordinator proved instrumental for the design and usefulness of the process and for continuing to build awareness among the group of the importance of reflective dialogue in their everyday operations.

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Another important part of the formal data collection consisted of in-depth interviews conducted in June and July of 2004 with four key people engaged in work towards sustainability. These participants were two senior policy makers from State Government, the Coordinator of the WA Collaboration, and a person instrumental in the early development of the WA Collaboration. The purpose of these interviews was to gain further insight into sustainability, the WA Collaboration and participatory and dialogical processes in general. I was also interested in comments from the perspectives of people involved in both policy-making and community engagement processes about the concept and application of transactional space. The interviews with the Coordinator in particular provided an important space for both researcher and practitioner reflection. The interviews incidentally enabled me to provide the Coordinator with a summary of key insights relevant for the Steering Committee’s strategic planning workshops held shortly after the interviews.

Transactional space was a key theme of the interviews held in 2004. These discussions provided an opportunity for the participants to consider the concept and its possible significance for their various areas of work. The discussions with the WA Collaboration Coordinator were particularly significant as they gave me an opportunity to hear more about her ideas regarding the argument for deeper dialogue, and an opportunity to gauge the relevance of the concept for the WA Collaboration’s development. They were also important in providing an opportunity for the Coordinator to consider at length the extent to which the WA Collaboration was creating space for deeper exchange about sustainability.

The participatory research explored in this thesis focussed on how processes like those involved in the WA Collaboration could allow for greater opportunities for transactional level exchange. It is important to foreshadow here that I was somewhat constrained in the amount of research I could conduct with the Steering Committee and Coordinator of the WA Collaboration by the limited time available to them. While the participants expressed their appreciation of the value of the intensive process and went on to develop ways to expand opportunities for in-depth discussion and reflective dialogue in the initiative, at the same time they helped to reveal the ongoing tension of a lack of time vis-a-vis the necessity for such work. This is an example of what Cherry highlights as the “doing trap” (1999, 42) that many organizations face when they feel the need to see
results in short time frames but fail to make the time for the reflection and dialogue that can support these aims. Despite this challenge, this thesis will show that the research that was accomplished with the WA Collaboration was effective in generating a number of positive outcomes as well as lessons relevant to other situations.

**Thesis structure and outline of chapters**

This thesis can be seen as forming three distinct parts. In the first part (Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4) I explore important background and literature in the development of my argument for critical, reflective exchange or ‘transactional space’ in processes for sustainability. In the second part (Chapters 5 and 6) I discuss the research conducted with the WA Collaboration to help foster its potential for transformative exchange around sustainability. In the third and final part (Chapter 7) I reflect on the lessons learnt from the research with the WA Collaboration and the examination of theory and practice in order to distil key insights about developing transactional space.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the thesis explore the challenge of progressing sustainability and provide background to my focus on developing a depth of exchange in participatory and collaborative processes. In these chapters I consider the connections between a concern for sustainability and a renewed interest in democratic principles and governance, which have emerged over the past few decades.

In Chapter 1 I discuss the fluid and contested nature of the concept of sustainability, the complexity of the issues encompassed by it, and the necessity for reflective and critical dialogue in which richer understanding of issues and more shared approaches might be developed. In exploring the particular significance and potential of ‘sustainability’ I distinguish it from the discourse of ‘sustainable development.’ While there are differing approaches to the concept of sustainability, at the same time I argue that a distinct concept of sustainability can be identified that describes a holistic approach and can help to elucidate complex relationships between human and ecological systems. I also explore the interpretation and approach to sustainability I use in this thesis, which centres on the role of deliberative and dialogical participation.
Particularly promising for sustainability is the contemporaneous shift in interest towards developing more networked, participatory and deliberative modes of governance. In Chapter 2 of this thesis I explore this context and argue that despite some positive developments, much more attention needs to be given to the particular forms of participation and collaboration that can support sustainability. I argue that existing practice will need to be refined to address more adequately the tensions in values, perspectives and priorities that characterise so much of conversation around sustainability. The chapter discusses the potential of the deliberative model of democratic practice for this exchange, but at the same time highlights the challenge of ensuring consideration in these processes of all differently situated ‘others’ (both human and non-human). I also discuss the emergence of various collaborative initiatives that represent significant opportunities for furthering sustainability as spaces for multiple perspectives to meet. I raise some of the process challenges involved in such initiatives, and in particular discuss the role of reflective dialogue in developing greater understanding among participants. This provides important background for the case study chapters of the thesis which explore the WA Collaboration’s potential for expanding transactional space for sustainability.

Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis develop further my argument that a genuinely deliberative and dialogical participatory practice is conducive to forming holistic and shared approaches for its ability to encourage enlargement of perspective and more comprehensive understanding among participants. There is much to learn from participatory theory and practice regarding the processes needed to progress sustainability as a multi-interest context. The chapters explore this wealth of knowledge, arguing that participatory processes can become more conducive to sustainability if they develop greater capacity for transactional exchange, that is, for critical and reflective dialogue involving explication of experiences, beliefs, values and perspectives. Regular opportunities for this level of exchange can help participants experience the expansion and shifts in thinking needed for sustainability.

This thesis draws from a broad theoretical base. In developing a concept of transactional space and researching how such space could be expanded in organizations like the WA Collaboration, I was confronted with issues that related to a number of disciplines and that therefore attracted a vast range of literature. This was because of
the particular situation of the WA Collaboration operating at both a multi-
organizational or stakeholder level (its Steering Committee of a range of voluntary
sector organizations) and at a community or citizen level (individuals involved in the
Collaboration’s forums and other activities, either associated in some way with
organizations of various sectors or not). Furthermore, multi-organizational
collaboration itself remains an emerging field of inquiry, especially in the context of
sustainability, and thus necessitates learning from a range of relevant experiences and
research.

My discussion of the development of transactional exchange in dialogical and
deliberative processes—and its particular importance for the success of collaborative
initiatives—therefore draws on a range of disciplines and literature. These include the
following very loosely grouped areas of study:

- deliberative democratic processes;
- policy analysis and collaborative planning;
- social psychology of group processes; organizational management and
development;
- adult learning and the emerging literature about education for sustainability; and
- other literature related to reflection and learning in group contexts and policy
debate.

These areas of literature are relevant because they relate in various ways to the
engagement of individuals or groups in policy-making processes, and to the challenges
involved in participatory and collaborative work. Each is well-established and varied,
and it is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss them at length or delineate their
main threads. Instead I draw on the key ideas and theories relevant to the issue at
hand—the outstanding need to address how knowledge and perspectives may be
expanded in dialogue and deliberation so that these processes can be more conducive to
progressing understanding of sustainability and the issues related to it.

Chapters 5 and 6 constitute the case study of this thesis. In Chapter 5 I discuss the work
of the WA Collaboration, including the regional workshops and summit it held to foster
wider community engagement with the development of the State Sustainability
Strategy, and its email network, regular community sustainability forums and
Sustainable September promotion. Through this discussion of the WA Collaboration’s various activities I explore its potential to create space for the expansion of perspectives required for sustainability, some of the barriers and difficulties, and the need to develop this potential by better accommodating opportunities for in-depth discussion and reflective dialogue. Chapter 6 then presents the research I undertook with the organization to help realise this potential, and explores the way in which it led to practical initiatives for expanding reflective dialogue such as the Collaboration’s Conversation Cafés and modified Steering Committee meeting procedure (the addition of exclusive time for news sharing and policy discussion). In this chapter I will demonstrate how a collaborative research approach enabled me to develop an intensive process that was relevant and useful for the Steering Committee in that it provided a much needed opportunity to take stock of the diversity the members brought to the collaborative initiative and the commonalities and differences that affected their work. I will discuss how the process also helped the Steering Committee members consider their respective expectations of the collaborative initiative, and raised some important process issues for the future development of the initiative.

From the research with the WA Collaboration and the examination of theory and practice related to developing reflective exchange, the final chapter of the thesis draws together insights and lessons learnt regarding the development of more transformative forms of dialogue and deliberation in processes for sustainability. Following this discussion I distil principles and practical considerations for developing transactional space relevant for practitioners concerned with developing a depth of exchange among diverse participants—whether in the context of community-driven participatory and collaborative processes, or government-hosted stakeholder and community engagement processes. The chapter also provides a discussion of contexts in which transactional space would be relevant and beneficial, including partnership initiatives, policy development processes, the development of sustainability indicators, sustainability assessment processes and engagement over local planning issues. As closure to the thesis, the chapter returns to the bigger picture of progressing sustainability through participatory processes and outlines the way in which the thesis addresses the need to create a richness of knowledge and perspective in discussions of complex policy issues.
Chapter 1
Conceptualizing sustainability

...the concept of sustainability 'needs to be understood as a discursively created rather than authoritatively given product' (John Barry cited in Eckersley 2004, 119).

This chapter and the next set the context for the main thesis discussion of the dialogical processes that can enhance deliberation and collaboration around sustainability. Drawing on a range of thinking about sustainability in the literature, the chapter explores the contested and fluid nature of the sustainability concept and approach. It discusses the context in which the terms ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’ have emerged, and the meanings that have been associated with them. The terms have often been used interchangeably but I argue that they are nevertheless distinct discourses, and that a focus on ‘sustainable development’ has tended to shift attention from and neglect the core concern for ‘sustainability.’ While both concepts have the potential to encourage more integrative thinking, I argue that there is a need to reconceptualise the debate through processes that are genuinely deliberative and approaches that are holistic in nature. I contend that there is greater potential for such approaches in the notion of ‘sustainability,’ which, although inherently contested and discursive, can be seen as better capturing the complexity and interrelatedness of social, economic and environmental problems, and the imperatives of social justice and ecological integrity.

ORIGINS OF THE CONCEPTS ‘SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT’ AND ‘SUSTAINABILITY’

‘Sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’ represent responses to environmental challenges. The concepts emerged in the concluding decades of the last century at a time when environmental problems had come to a head. A concern for the environment emerged in the 1960s and grew steadily in the next two decades (see for example Van Den Bergh and Van Der Straaten 1994; Lafferty 1999; Dresner 2002). During this time a number of seminal texts contributed to this concern including Carson’s Silent Spring (1962) and Meadows et al.’s The Limits to Growth (1972). Silent Spring drew attention to the destructiveness of the use of the pesticide DDT on wildlife and revealed the unintended and unpredicted consequences of this ‘quick-fix’ technology (Dresner
2002), while *The Limits to Growth* challenged the notion of endless growth and encouraged an understanding of ecological limits (Dovers and Handmer, undated). A series of widely publicised environmental disasters, such as nuclear, oil and toxic chemical events, also fuelled environmental concern (Lafferty 1999). It was becoming increasingly apparent that human activity could have devastating impacts on the environment and that the earth was smaller and more interconnected than had previously been thought (Dovers and Handmer, undated; Dresner 2002; Hopwood et al. 2005).

According to Lafferty (1999), the sheer force of environmental problems facing the world has been a major contributor to the emergence of interest in environment and sustainable development. These problems in general terms relate to depletion of resources and decline in quality or pollution of water, soil and air; in particular they include deforestation, soil erosion and salinity, desertification, ecosystem and species decline, and accelerated global warming.¹

Many commentators suggest that problems such as these have stemmed from decisions which have largely focussed on economic factors rather than the range of complex and interrelated layers of systems that require consideration in individual and collective decision-making (see for example Kane 1999 and Suzuki 2003). Indeed, Dryzek argues that environmental problems are complex in that they “tend to be interconnected and multi-dimensional” (1997, 8). He explains this complexity as resulting from the fact that “environmental problems by definition are found at the intersection of ecosystems and human social systems” (8), which themselves are complex and challenging. He suggests that “the more complex a situation, the larger is the number of plausible perspectives upon it—because the harder it is to prove any one of them wrong in any simple terms” (8).

A central tenet of sustainable development and sustainability approaches is consideration of the complex and interconnected nature of not only environmental but

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¹ There are many sources of information about the state of problems such as these; important ones include the State of the World reports from the Worldwatch Institute (available at http://www.worldwatch.org/), and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/Index.aspx) which found there to be severe degradation of ecosystem services.
also social issues. Hopwood et al. (2005) describe this as the key driver in the emergence of sustainable development:

The concept of sustainable development is the result of the growing awareness of the global links between mounting environmental problems, socio-economic issues to do with poverty and inequality and concerns about a healthy future for humanity (39).

In this way, sustainable development represents a shift from a paradigm that separated environment from socio-economic issues, to an outlook that considers relationships between people and nature (Hopwood et al. 2005). Such an approach involves consideration of how environmental problems are socially and structurally embedded and therefore need to be addressed by “a more integrated and dynamic analytical approach” (Van Den Bergh and Van Der Straaten 1994, 4).

Inextricable from the development of more integrative and holistic approaches to addressing social and environmental problems is the involvement of a range of knowledge and perspectives, including those of stakeholders and citizens.² In recognition of this, participatory and collaborative/partnership processes have featured as key themes in the literature related to sustainable development and sustainability.

**THE DISCOURSE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: CONTRIBUTION AND DEFICIENCIES**

The concept of sustainable development emerged in international politics in the 1980s and can be seen as a response to radical environmentalism and a way to reconcile those worldviews aligned more with conservation and those more with development. It represented an attempt by international intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies to integrate problems of development with problems of the environment (Lafferty 1999). In Castro’s view it provided a “political compromise between growth and environmental sustainability” (2004, 196), and in Sachs’ a bridge between what was previously “two camps of political discourse,” that of “environment” and that of “development” (1999, 28). Sustainable development in general represented an approach that sought to reconcile environmental preservation with social objectives such as economic development and reduction of poverty, and in so doing ensure equity and quality of life for current and future generations.

² “Stakeholders’ often refer to people or organizations with a strong interest in the issue at hand and with important knowledge to contribute, or to people who might be directly affected by the outcomes (as I discuss further in chapter 3).
Sustainable development quickly became an internationally recognised concept, albeit one that was largely open to interpretation. The World Commission on Environment and Development’s report *Our Common Future* (1987) was instrumental in this, as were major events that followed. These included:

- the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)—also known as the Earth Summit—held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, at which leaders from more than 178 countries committed to action towards sustainable development by signing the Rio Declaration and endorsing Agenda 21 (a comprehensive framework for action across a range of areas);
- the establishment by the United Nations of a Commission on Sustainable Development to monitor implementation of Agenda 21;
- the ongoing development of Local Agenda 21 (LA 21) action plans and processes at the regional and local level in many countries of the world; and
- the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.\(^3\)

By the turn of the millennium many institutions in the Western World were making reference to the concept and a plethora of reports, strategies, organisations and manifestos had emerged on the subject internationally.\(^4\) Indeed, in 1997 Dryzek claimed that sustainable development had become “arguably the dominant global discourse of ecological concern” (1997, 123), and in the same year Frazier claimed that sustainable development was not only “fashionable” but had become “institutionalized” (1997, 183).

*Our Common Future*, otherwise known as the Brundtland report, offers possibly the most well known and broadly accepted definition of the sustainable development concept:

\(^3\) Another key event was the United Nations Millennium Declaration adopted by world leaders in 2000 in which there was a commitment to addressing eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Although the Goals relate explicitly to sustainable development and environmental sustainability, they centre around human rights and refer to environment chiefly in terms of addressing the needs of the world’s poorest.

\(^4\) For more information about the range of activity that surrounded sustainable development at the international level in its first few decades see chapter 1 of Van den Bergh and Van der Straaten (1994), chapter 7 of Dryzek (1997), and Frazier (1997), which lists numerous examples of commissions and organisations that relate to policies for sustainable development. The WA Collaboration website (www.wacollaboration.org.au) provides a useful reference point for more recent initiatives that have surrounded sustainable development and sustainability, particularly those in the non-government sector.
Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, 43).

Although this definition may be regarded as overly general and broad, and therefore difficult to implement, it is nevertheless visionary in its foregrounding of the fundamental principles of intragenerational and intergenerational equity.

According to Dryzek, the Brundtland report’s main achievement can be found in its systematic combination of “a number of issues that have often been treated in isolation, or at least as competitors: development (especially of Third World countries), global environmental issues, population, peace and security, and social justice both within and across generations” (1997, 126). It highlighted interconnections between ecology and human economy from local to global level, the dependence of humans on the environment for long-term security and well-being, and the mutually reinforcing relationship between environmental degradation and poverty (Hopwood et al. 2005; Dryzek 1997). This vision was seductive, and according to Dryzek (1997) the report stopped short of analysing its feasibility and of identifying the practical steps required.

The report is also significant for its emphasis on nested systems ranging from the global to local level (Dryzek 1997). These social and biological systems are seen as connected rather than separate: “[t]he environment does not exist as a sphere separate from human ambitions, actions, and needs…the ‘environment’ is where we all live” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, xi, cited in Dryzek 1997, 129). However, although the report recognises that environmental systems and resources should be used wisely to minimise environmental stress, Dryzek argues that it is ambiguous when it comes to identifying actual limits: it suggests that limits to growth cannot be set because “accumulation of knowledge and development of technology can enhance the carrying capacity of the resource base,” and then follows by saying “[b]ut ultimate limits there are” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 45, cited in Dryzek 1997, 129-130).

Dryzek highlights another major concern with the Brundtland report and with the mainstream sustainable development discourse in general (that is, the discourse commonly espoused at the international level and particularly by the United Nations system). Sustainable development, by failing to include respect for nature in its
definition, sets up a hierarchy in which humans beings are placed above the natural world: “[i]t is the sustainability of human populations and their wellbeing which is at issue, rather than that of nature” (1997, 130). He thus argues that “for the most part sustainable development remains anthropocentric” (130).

Although the sustainable development discourse might be seen as in some ways weakening environmentalism, at the same time it can been seen as having helped give greater currency to environmental issues by putting them in terms more acceptable for the prevailing worldview of progress and development. Furthermore, sustainable development is significant for shifting the emphasis towards “cooperative rather than competitive effort” (Dryzek 1997, 130). At the very least it has brought the beginnings of a more participatory and integrative approach to policy- and decision-making. Becker et al. (1999) point to these aspects in their claim that sustainable development is “a contested discursive field which allows for articulation of political and economic differences between North and South and introduces to environmental issues a concern with social justice and political participation” (1). Dryzek argues that “sustainable development has become hugely popular as an integrating discourse covering the whole range of environmental issues, from the local to the global, as well as a host of economic and development concerns” (1997, 121, emphasis added).

UNCED and Agenda 21 were particularly significant for emphasising the importance of collaboration across sectors and public participation in decision-making for the implementation of sustainable development. This is something that Dresner (2002) highlights:

The entire tone of Agenda 21 is about participation and open government. UNCED had an unprecedented degree of NGO involvement, and this was institutionalized in the document. Agenda 21 also emphasizes the role of the market, trade and business in bringing about sustainable development (41).

This emphasis on participatory and partnership approaches pervades the sustainable development discourse and imbues it with integrative potential. It encourages participants of policy processes to consider the relationships between various issues and concerns rather than treat them as isolated.

However, significant deficiencies in the sustainable development approach have been noted by many commentators. Although sustainable development is a wide discursive
field with which many people identify, at the same time it is a discourse that gets
stretched and modified to suit particular agendas. Indeed, Dryzek (1997) argues that
astute actors have recast the sustainable development discourse in terms more
favourable to them, such as environmentalists building in respect for intrinsic values in
nature, and Third World governments and advocates stressing the need for global
redistribution. He notes that the business world was quick to join the “sustainability
bandwagon” and points out that there have been some corporations with dubious
environmental records associated with the World Business Council on Sustainable

This divergence of perspective surrounding sustainable development has been possible
because it “involves a rhetoric of reassurance” (Dryzek 1997, 132). It suggests “[w]e
can have it all: economic growth, environmental conservation, social justice; and not
just for the moment, but in perpetuity. No painful changes are necessary” (132). As
Lélé rather cynically comments, it has the tendency to offer “a ‘metafix’ that will unite
everybody from the profit-minded industrialist and risk minimizing subsistence farmer
to the equity-seeking social worker, the pollution-concerned or wildlife-loving First
Worlder, the growth-maximising policy maker, the goal-oriented bureaucrat, and
therefore, the vote-counting politician” (Lélé, cited in Davison 2001, 37). Dovers and
Handmer argue that sustainable development was defined by the World Commission on
Environment and Development in a manner that would attract “wide attention and
endorsement,” but believe the definition is, as a result, essentially “vague and
inoperative” (undated, 1). Dryzek similarly comments “just what sustainable
development means in practice is a matter of some dispute, as is the question of whether
it can actually deliver on some, most, or all of its promises” (1997, 121). Furthermore,
some commentators have found the phrase contradictory and confusing, causing them to
label it an ‘oxymoron’ (see for example Sachs 1999, and Dovers and Handmer,
undated).

Although the discourse of sustainable development has suggested greater attention to
social justice and ecological limits, in practice it has largely meant instrumental and
often minimal mitigation of environmental and social pressures, rather than a genuinely
precautionary approach or real change to patterns of development. Furthermore, despite
the original intention of integration of a broad range of issues, sustainable development
has often been reduced to furthering of narrow objectives and a simple checking of these against a ‘triple bottom line’ of social, environmental and economic. This is largely because it has been situated within and restricted by the prevailing paradigm of progress and growth. Rather than real realignment of systems and cultural shift, it has tended to be constrained by conservative business and political agendas and been formulated in numerous ways to suit particular political interests.

Sustainable development’s general “ecomodernist pursuit of sustained growth in the global marketplace” (Davison 2001, 31) and reliance on technology for solutions to problems (Fischer and Hajer 1999, 5) have dominated environmental and development discourse. This has been relatively attractive to businesses and governments relieved by the apparent possibility of both alleviating persistent environmental and social concerns among consumers/voters, and maintaining conventional economic approaches and patterns of growth. From a business perspective, “the cornerstone of sustainable development is a system of open, competitive markets in which prices are made to reflect the costs of environmental as well as other resources” (Schmidheiny, cited in Davison 2001, 21). In this worldview, techno-economic optimism and notions of eco-efficiency and sustained growth permeate discourse (Davison 2001).

Such prominent discourses and claims have overshadowed alternative, localised and cultural interpretations of the ideas that underlie the sustainable development approach, and have thus narrowed the concept and restricted the development of fuller perspective. Different aspects of the sustainable development approach, and likewise of sustainability, are illuminated by different groups of people due to their particular perspectives and areas of work or concern. Some people focus on social justice and alleviation of poverty and disadvantage, while others are concerned more with the rights of nature and preservation of ecological life support systems. Some focus on the processes needed for developing sustainable futures, including multi-stakeholder and community engagement in policy-making, citizen ownership and responsibility, and building of community.

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5 According to Dryzek (1997), the ecomodernist discourse bears many similarities to the sustainable development discourse but focuses on the particular restructuring of the capitalist political economy needed for environmental conservation and economic growth to support one another. Ecomodernism is discussed further in chapter 3 of this thesis where I discuss reflexive modernisation.
According to Fisher and Hajer, the apparent commonality of global discourses surrounding the language of sustainable development has not necessarily meant unity of discourse and purpose ‘on the ground.’ They suggest that sustainable development is in fact highly culturally-specific and contested:

One thing that has become clear over the last decade is that even though sustainable development has created joint global discourses on environmental politics, we cannot assume that this will in itself produce better outcomes. Behind all the consensus are different frames of reference that inspire the way in which different cultures take up the challenges implicit in sustainable development. Such differences in cultural frames of reference now lead to new sorts of conflict in environmental politics… (1999, 7).

In “Sustainable Development: Business as Usual or a New Way of Living?” Davidson suggests that the real impacts of the sustainable development approach will be seen when people contest it and then decide in each context how to incorporate it into practice:

Whether sustainable development is conceived as mere rhetoric, a cloak for business as usual, or as an ethic which forms the basis for restructuring human productive activity and its relationship to ecological integrity, its contestability as a political subject is involved…the contestation revolves around how it should be interpreted and implemented in practice (2000, 29-29).

Frazier’s curiously titled article “Sustainable Development: Modern Elixir or Sack Dress?” (1997) also provides some insights. He claims that because sustainable development purports an integrated approach, it calls for collaboration, but that a lack of definition of the concept has meant “confusion, contention and even deception” (1997, 182). He discusses the way in which sustainable development has promised miraculous answers to many of the world’s problems, has provided a “sack dress” to cover a multitude of issues “of diverse shapes and sizes,” and has largely worked as a “myth”—“an untestable construct that conveniently explains away human apprehensions” (189). Underlying this ‘myth’ are assumptions about development and progress being goals that everyone would wish to strive for and “sustainability for its own sake [being] a universal obligation” (189). Worse still, he says, is using sustainable development as a “ghost shirt” in a dreamlike or rather nightmarish pursuit of unlimited growth (190). He argues that the term will remain a “statement of desire” or “slogan,” rather than “an operational alternative,” unless people seek to form a clear understanding of its meaning in an inclusive way and provide means of evaluation (190). He acknowledges that this could mean variant approaches being developed according to different value systems and for different cultural groups (Frazier citing Lélé and Norgaard 1996, 190), and suggests that if these approaches include respect for “the limits of our unique world,” they “need not derive de novo from modern, industrialized societies” (190). Like other
authors, Frazier espouses the value of groups working out their own understandings and approaches and at the same time puts forward his own view: “…the recognition that there are limits to our resources and to our technologies, that we have limited understanding of, and ability to predict Nature, and that we are not in control of Nature” (191).

Another view is offered by Davison (2001). He likens sustainable development to a technocratic illusion that purports “consensus or intellectual clarity” (37) in its discourses, while overshadowing any divergent voices: “sustainable development gives voice to the Promethean⁶ promise that the earth can be effectively managed as a device capable of ensuring the indefinite survival and moral well-being of humanity” (36). He argues that “the language of sustainable development coopts, marginalizes, and oppresses cultural discourses and practices of sustainability not defined by the technocratic agenda of ecomodernism” (36). In enshrining all in its path with the idea of efficiency, sustainable development has transformed the ecological crisis into a techno-economic opportunity and effectively “led to the emptying of environmental discourses of their cultural content” (Davison 2001, 38).

It is debatable whether sustainable development is as compromised as some suggest and is simply a domesticated and diluted attempt at environmental and social responsibility by conservative business and government. What is certain is that the sustainable development concept and approach has been highly significant for initiating a more integrative discourse and more participatory and collaborative approach to policy-making.

Nevertheless, sustainable development seems to have promised more than it has delivered so far. However sustainable development began, it has become associated with a reformist rather than transformative approach. Although both sustainable development and sustainability are very fluid and contested notions—having been conceptualised in various ways and covering whole spectrums of understanding, from shallow to deep, and reformist to radical—the discourse of sustainable development has largely failed to transform practices such that they can properly alleviate and prevent

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social and environmental problems. This was abundantly clear at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) at Johannesburg in 2002 at which “it was hardly a secret—or even a point in dispute—that progress in implementing sustainable development [had] been extremely disappointing since the 1992 Earth Summit, with poverty deepening and environmental degradation worsening” (official United Nations website for WSSD: http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/). ‘Sustainability,’ on the other hand, offers a potentially richer concept and more radical and transformative vision. While many individuals and organisations continue to use the term ‘sustainable development,’ ‘sustainability’ is emerging as an alternative concept for describing what sustainable development has failed to deliver, and as one that can engender the approaches needed to see positive change occur in our human and ecological systems for the long term.

**SUSTAINABILITY: POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES**

‘Sustainability’ has recently gained currency in the international political arena, and been used in countless policy documents of public, private and voluntary sector organisations around the world. As a concept it is based upon a recognition of the complexity and interrelatedness of social, economic and environmental objectives, and of the associated problems societies face. It tends to be associated with a concern that human development should meet the needs of current and future generations while at the same time ensuring the integrity and diversity of ecological systems and the continuance of the resources they provide.

Although there is a plethora of definitions, and sustainability has been described as an “elusive” concept to define (Kane 1999, 15), I will offer a few definitions here to illustrate how the concept is variously understood. In its State Sustainability Strategy, the Government of Western Australia defines sustainability as “meeting the needs of

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7 The term ‘sustainability’ is not exactly new. For several decades it has been noticeable in the key literature and events surrounding sustainable development at the international level. Furthermore, it is said to have been used as far back as 1974 by the World Council of Churches (Dresner 2002). Lumley and Armstrong (2004) have looked further back in time for the essence of the concept and provide an interesting discussion of notions related to sustainability that can be found in the thought of 19th century intellectuals from a range of disciplines. However, as an indicator of its current use, a search conducted on the Internet in March 2006 retrieved 113,000,000 hits for ‘sustainability’ and 11,500,000 hits for the search terms ‘sustainability’ and ‘definition’ (granted not all are mutually exclusive or used in the sense discussed here). The influence of the Brundtland definition for ‘sustainable development’ was evident in a considerable number of these definitions, but overall I found there was a diversity of perspectives among the definitions.
current and future generations through an integration of environmental protection, social advancement and economic prosperity” (Government of Western Australia 2003b, 4). Stakeholder and public consultation contributed to the development of this definition, as did the WA Collaboration.8 Sustainability has been described in other ways: it has been seen as “a vision and a process” (Newman and Kenworthy 1999, 5), as demanding “a shift in personal consciousness—from being self-centered to being other-centered” (Maser et al. 1998, xx), and as involving “coevolutionary agendas for social development and ecological flourishing” (Davison 2001, 63).9

**Distinguishing sustainability from sustainable development**

The term ‘sustainability’ has often been used interchangeably with ‘sustainable development’ or to refer to the goal or vision of sustainable development. Dovers and Handmer (undated) argue that rather than using ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’ interchangeably, sustainable development should be seen as the process (which they say has so far been poorly defined and vague) and as therefore subsidiary to the overarching concept of sustainability, which they describe as the “long-term and difficult goal of reaching an ecologically sustainable state” (1). This distinction is not uncommon. Numerous authors refer to sustainability as the goal and to sustainable development as the process to move towards that goal (see for example Doppelt 2003 and Dryzek 1997). There are other versions, however. Langhelle insists that it is more grammatically correct and logical to see ‘development’ as “the process in question” and ‘sustainability’ as “the conditions under which development should take place” (Langhelle cited in Lafferty 1999, 123).

While I agree that the key issue is making human development more sustainable, and that sustainable development can be seen as a process for moving closer towards the visionary goal of sustainability, sustainable development has, until recently, tended to overshadow and marginalise the original concern for sustainability. As highlighted in the preceding section, ‘sustainable development’ has become somewhat co-opted and

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9 For further examples see the website of the South Australian Government’s Office of Sustainability which has a useful compilation of various definitions: http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/sustainability/definitions.html
politically compromised such that it tends to carry a technocratic, reformist approach to reducing inefficiency of resource use and inequity among the people of the world. The concept and discourse of sustainable development has failed to challenge significantly the status quo and ‘business as usual’ mentality.

A shift to the term ‘sustainability’ is in many ways a response to the deficiencies of, and a way of re-conceiving and re-radicalising, the sustainable development concept and approach. It is a term that can help to recover and strengthen the original intentions of sustainable development for multidimensional and integrative thinking that foregrounds the interconnectedness of the environmental, social, cultural and economic aspects of problems. Davison (2001) argues that “sustainability is an essentially contested and culturally rich discursive domain” (41), whereas “the language of sustainable development is conceptually incoherent and politically compromised” (41), and contorts rather than procures a wealth of plural voices.

Sustainability can be seen as a more radical approach to practice than that which has surrounded sustainable development. Milani argues that a true sustainability approach “calls for a diverse mix of positive grassroots actions, guided by a new paradigm of holistic development” (2000, xvii), and that it is a delusion to treat it as a “gray area . . . where humanity is neither hurting nor helping nature appreciably” (xvi)—something that the sustainable development approach has tended to do. He claims that we are deluded if we think we can solve long-term problems “simply by limiting or restricting the industrial economy” and believes we must consciously choose between activities that destroy and activities that regenerate communities and ecosystems (xvi). In other words, he argues that rather than simply limiting development we must transform it, and in doing so create a qualitative and holistic approach to development that does more than simply mitigate environmental destruction (xvi).

This view resonates with what Eckersley (1992) calls the ‘emancipatory phase of ecopolitical theory,’ which she argues emerged in the late 1970s and 80s in ‘Green’ politics. Emancipatory ecopolitical thought sees the importance of democratic processes, cooperation, distributive justice and a more egalitarian society, but with an ecological perspective or, at the very least, respect for ecological limits. Eckersley claims that “emancipatory ecopolitical theorists are concerned to challenge and
ultimately transform existing power relations, such as those based on class, gender, race, and nationality, to ensure an equitable transition toward an ecologically sustainable society” (22). She sees two distinct streams within this thought—ecocentric and anthropocentric—but stresses that these “merely represent the opposing poles of a wide spectrum of differing orientations towards nature” (33). They are nevertheless useful distinctions for considering the differing perspectives that become involved in conversations about sustainability. Eckersley describes the anthropocentric ecological approach as articulating “new opportunities for human emancipation and fulfilment in an ecologically sustainable society” (26), a valuing of the nonhuman world for its resources or instrumental value. In contrast, the ecocentric ecological approach “pursues these same goals in the context of a broader notion of emancipation that also recognizes the moral standing of the non-human world and seeks to ensure that it, too, may unfold in its many diverse ways” (26), a valuing of the nonhuman world for its own sake. This latter approach I regard as indicative of a strong conception of sustainability.

Sustainability provides a context for a range of perspectives and orientations to meet, including those that Eckersley describes. As a word referring to a quality, condition or vision, sustainability is largely non-specific in nature until it is discussed and defined. This dynamic, context-specific and iterative nature of the concept causes sustainability to stimulate dialogue and take on meaning as people deliberate over issues and the knowledge and perspectives surrounding them. Because it represents an overarching vision or guiding principle for making human activity more sustainable, sustainability encompasses a range of issues, and a vast array of concerns related to those issues. Sustainability necessitates deliberation because of its intangibility, complexity and dependency on what is individually and collectively valued.

Sustainability may be subject to similar problems as discussed earlier regarding sustainable development, but when understood and approached as a contested concept it is more likely to be interpreted and formulated by a range of actors in a meaningful way and with genuine intent. Although some people find the word ‘sustainability’ somewhat abstract and elusive,\(^{10}\) when engaged with in a meaningful way, the concept has the

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\(^{10}\) In “Dealing with Misconceptions on the Concept of Sustainability,” Leal Filho discusses the lack of understanding of the concept of sustainability in the higher education sector and the barriers to its uptake,
potential to focus attention on holistic thinking and positive cultural change, rather than on simply adjustment within the current paradigm and system. The very contestation and elusiveness inherent in the word makes it attractive because it engenders critical but productive discussion about its meaning and what should be sustained and why.

It is this critical dialogue stimulated by sustainability that helps to make it a concept associated with transformation rather than simply adjustment—looking beyond current practice to other possibilities. The debate that the vision of sustainability initiates has the potential to lead to richer and more far-reaching and collective approaches to making human activity more just and sustainable. Although notions of sustainability can vary markedly throughout sectors, sustainability tends to be associated with environmentally and socially deeper approaches than sustainable development because of the critical and holistic thinking it encourages. It provides a focus on the interconnectedness between and within human and ecological systems. Apprehension of this complexity can inform the way we deal with persistent, multi-faceted public policy issues. Sustainability highlights the need for integrative, synergistic thinking and is more than a mere checking against a triple bottom line.

‘Sustainability’ is used in this thesis because implicit in the term is this reflective, critical and holistic approach. While the terms ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’ are not always distinct, I argue that, as a concept, sustainability tends to better convey a sense of richness and integration. Furthermore, ‘sustainability’ rather than ‘sustainable development’ is the term used by both Western Australian State Government and the WA Collaboration, albeit with differing emphases.

The central role of democratic participation
A number of principles of sustainability have emerged from the literature related to sustainable development and sustainability, including from the reports and policy documents of public, private and community sector organisations. Principles that commonly feature include

- equity and social justice within and across generations;
- **biodiversity and ecological integrity** (such as environmental preservation and respect for nature);
- **integration and holism** (appreciation of the complexity and interconnectedness of social and environmental systems and their component parts, and a desire for mutually beneficial outcomes across these with minimal tradeoff); and
- **precaution and responsiveness** (appreciation of the incompleteness of our knowledge and the possibility of unforeseen consequences, and thus an understanding of the importance of taking a precautionary, iterative and adaptive approach).\(^\text{11}\)

Participatory and collaborative approaches to decision-making have become core themes in both sustainable development and sustainability discourses, and *good governance and democratic participation* are together typically described as a fundamental principle of sustainability. Because sustainability thinking involves consideration of a wider ‘picture,’ broad participation is central to it; the involvement of a range of people helps to inform and gain commitment to sustainability approaches, and affords people their right to participate in the decisions that affect them.

Democratic participation has practical value in terms of informing policy-making, and in terms of developing understanding and support for sustainability among stakeholders and members of the public. However, democratic participation is not only instrumental to sustainability but also intrinsic and an end in itself. Inclusive democratic practice, that is, ‘good governance,’ has the potential to foster social justice and better outcomes for everyone.\(^\text{12}\) A belief in good governance assumes that people have the right to be involved in the decisions that affect them, and therefore need access to information. It means that governments need to be accountable and transparent, and encouraging of public and stakeholder engagement.\(^\text{13}\) Good governance involves a sense of moral

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\(^\text{11}\) See the Bellagio Principles in Hardi and Zdan (1997) for a useful discussion of principles related to sustainability.

\(^\text{12}\) Governance has been described as “the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs” (Commission on Global Governance 1995, 2, cited in Hemmati 2002, 40). *Good governance* qualifies this with an emphasis on enabling open processes and equitable participation of citizens and stakeholders for the formation of outcomes that are in the common public good (see for example chapter five of Knight et al. 2002). ‘Good governance’ is the term used in the Western Australian Citizenship Strategy (Government of Western Australia 2004a) available at http://www.citizenscape.wa.gov.au/index.cfm?event=ccuPublications.

\(^\text{13}\) The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters
obligation to people’s innate need to be part of a community, and this can occur when people have the ability to participate and contribute. The notion of ‘quality of life’ that features in the discourse of sustainability is in this way not simply about meeting basic material needs but also about fostering a sense of connection, belonging and wellbeing. The relationship between democratic participation and sustainability is often discussed in the literature around sustainability (for example Maser et al. 1998, Roseland 1998 and Warburton 1998a) and is explored further in the following chapter.

The challenging nature of sustainability discussions

When approached from the standpoint of sustainability, policy problems encompass a breadth of issues, concerns and interests. Dialogue around sustainability tends to be challenging because of the diversity of perspectives it attracts and because of the need for integration. A sustainability approach places extra demands on the policy-making process because of the difficulty of integrating various knowledge and perspectives on issues, and because of the inherently ‘wicked’ (complex and contested) nature of many of these issues.

For example, there can be significant difficulties in developing policies for, and implementing, more sustainable management of forests, water, energy resources and urban growth because of competing interests and different values. As an illustration, in the case of preservation of old growth forest, the various economies, livelihoods and communities built around them need to be considered, all of which are valued differently from different perspectives. Changes to regulations and landuse must therefore involve the engagement of the full suite of stakeholders who would be affected.

Similar complexities arise in the case of urban development or redevelopment. Higher density, mixed use development around activity centres and transit-oriented development have obvious benefits for access to and utilisation of public transport and other services, but nevertheless modify landscapes and neighbourhoods. Coastal development and redevelopment can in particular spark divergence of opinion because

(associated with the Aarhus Convention) adopted in 1998 stressed the role of interactions between the public and public authorities, involvement of stakeholders and government accountability for environmental protection in the journey towards sustainable development. It is available at http://www.unece.org/env/pp/.
people tend to value beaches and coastal landscapes but for differing reasons and uses. Many people recognize that development near the beach can bring opportunities in terms of revitalisation of run-down areas and public open space, but conflicts tend to arise over the level of density that should be implemented, with some people claiming negative impacts of high rise regarding amenity and access, and others claiming greater business and tourism opportunities.

On a wider level, tensions frequently arise over the development of clean energy policies. In particular, there have been divergent claims about the value or otherwise of nuclear energy, both among policymakers and scientists, and the general public. Some people claim that ‘green’ renewable resources such as solar and wind will be inadequate to meet energy demands into the future and argue that nuclear energy will be a necessary part of the energy mix needed to address climate change. Others claim that alternatives to nuclear power can be developed that are renewable, do not create dangerous waste products, are less costly and involve less greenhouse gas emissions in the process.

Management of water resources is another fundamental issue that stimulates divergence of opinion, particularly in the context of water shortages, which has been the case across much of Australia. In Western Australia, for example, there has been considerable controversy over the costs and environmental and social impacts of various water source options. Managed aquifer recharge or groundwater replenishment has been proposed as one option by State Government and is currently undergoing a trial, yet there are concerns of potential environmental and health risks such as chemicals passing through the reverse osmosis process and being injected into the aquifer. Further tensions include environmental groups claiming that such a process is costly and energy intensive, and negative public perception of drinking recycled water, albeit indirect. Tapping into the vast and ancient South West Yarragadee Aquifer has likewise attracted conflicting views and in particular environmental conservation concerns. On the demand management side, calls for domestic water price increases have been accompanied by claims of efficiency and valuing of resources, but also concerns from social welfare groups that such changes would penalise large, low income families, and that incentives and support through water efficiency programs, and targeting of large
water users in the industrial and commercial sectors, would be better alternatives to domestic price increases.

While the above discussion has merely sketched some key issues and the possible tensions surrounding them (which tend to arise over specific recommendations for action), it is nevertheless illustrative of the ways in which such issues are complex and contested when approached from the standpoint of progressing sustainability. Working out sustainable pathways to addressing problems such as the above clearly requires critical dialogue in which both the value and limitations of various knowledge and perspectives can be understood. For such rich and comprehensive discussion to occur, an array of official and ‘expert’ knowledge must be coupled with that of a range of stakeholders and citizens. In order to utilise the creative tensions present, dialogue around sustainability must involve processes of deeper exchange in which underlying differences are made explicit in deliberation through mutual reflection on backgrounds, beliefs and perspectives. This exchange can contribute to the expansion and transformation in perspective that is central to the development of integrative, robust and genuinely holistic approaches to policy issues.

Some of the difficulties presented by sustainability regarding policy-making processes and practical implementation are considered by Dovers and Handmer in their article *Contradictions in Sustainability* (undated). They provide a useful discussion of the ambiguities, paradoxes and tensions inherent in the concept of sustainability that have implications for identification of directions to take. In their discussion of sustainable development and sustainability they raise some important issues including the place of technology and how much certainty there is regarding its ability to deliver positive change, the growth versus limits debate, reconciling individual and collective interests within local and global communities, and possible conflicts between the objectives of *inter*generational and *intra*generational equity. Importantly, they conclude by suggesting that the innate ability of human beings to hold contradictory beliefs and live with paradox “may ultimately prove to be a great strength” and enable us to overcome the formidable conflicts and make the shifts in thinking that will lead to positive change (9).
Another important issue regarding the concept of sustainability is the influence of values. Tainter (2003), for example, argues that sustainability is “a matter of values” (213); what becomes sustained very much depends on who is involved and what their values and interests are, which for example could be “an accustomed way of life, opportunities to improve one’s situation, or environmental conditions that match an idealized concept of nature” (213). Besides conflict between different values, a major problem implicit in this is that ‘sustainability’ could become almost any version of what is collectively most valued. Tainter suggests such problems can be rectified through dialogue and deliberation in which the underlying perspectives and values participants bring to sustainability discussions are made explicit. He proposes key strategies such as (a) being aware of sustainability’s relativity and making explicit the values underlying sustainability discussions, (b) being rigorous in the definition and monitoring of it (presumably through a range of information sources and perspectives), and (c) “focussing on the contexts that produce sustainability rather than the outcomes of sustainability programs” (213-214).

I share Tainter’s view that the development of sustainability approaches must be participatory and dialogical. Tainter points out that it is the process of defining sustainability that is fundamental to the formation of strong approaches:

The least useful conceptions of sustainability are narrowly focused within specific disciplines… By focussing on values it forces one to approach sustainability through the goals of a community or group… Articulating the sustainability goal is the first step toward clarity, negotiation, consensus, and implementation (215-216).

He offers some final points in his conclusions regarding the tension and conflict characteristic of discussions about sustainability due to the differing values of people, and the consequent need for these to be made explicit in deliberation:

Sustainability will never achieve mechanistic certainty. What to sustain and how to sustain it will always generate conflict and require negotiation… We can reduce the cost of conflict by making values clear, so that debates are productively focused (221).

He adds that while one part is about identifying underlying values, the other requires intellectual and scientific rigour, the combination of which contributes to making the approach so challenging (221).

Tainter’s discussion of sustainability raises questions about the extent to which sustainability has distinct meaning, and the degree to which it is fluid and contingent upon discussion. As Tainter suggests, people value different things, in different ways
and for different reasons, yet none of these should be assumed or taken to be self-evident truths. The development of sustainability approaches is therefore greatly dependent upon building understanding of what is valued by people in a particular context. However, while sustainability is fluid in the sense of taking on meaning through deliberation, the assumption underlying this thesis is that sustainability at the same time represents certain values that have emerged internationally and that are therefore, to a degree, universal, such as social justice and ecological integrity. I also believe that sustainability generally represents a visionary understanding of a world where humans and their environment are inextricably bound and interdependent. This involves a conception that our environment has real limits and that environmental resources should therefore be used carefully and ethically. In sum I argue that rather than sustainability simply being reduced to the sum of what is valued among participants, an intrinsic, immovable part of sustainability thinking should be recognised regarding our responsibility to rights—to the rights and wellbeing of all life on earth, human or otherwise. This implies respect for the existence of all life and valuing of it for its own sake rather than simply its utility. In this way sustainability should not be seen as a value-neutral concept.

A tension therefore exists between having a clear sense of what we want to do when we talk about ‘sustainability,’ and forming this through the learning opportunities of participation, collaboration and deliberation. I argue that sustainability must and can only be developed through discussion that is explicit in nature because through this the values and perspectives that underlie issues can be brought to the fore. Sustainability therefore requires working together through our interests, concerns, experiences, beliefs, values and aspirations. Furthermore, the local or particular knowledge brought by ‘citizen’ and ‘stakeholder’ participants must meet with wider knowledge through the provision of information from a variety of scientific, technical and other sources. This is why there are great benefits in bringing together different forms of knowledge, such as ‘citizen,’ ‘stakeholder’ and ‘specialist,’ in interactive forums.14

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14 Brown (2005) emphasizes the importance of bringing together different knowledges and a “cross cultural learning process” (1) in the development of integrated sustainability assessments. See this paper as well as Brown and Pitcher (2005) for an identification of the various knowledge cultures affecting decision-making.
The WA Collaboration’s open forums exemplify such a mix of participants and the associated opportunities for mutual learning and expansion of perspectives. The WA Collaboration’s involvement of a diversity of organisations and individuals means that rather than a “special-interest-group approach to sustainability” (Tainter 2003, 217), where each group struggles to have its issue included in an initiative, it creates deliberative opportunities in which a range of interests and knowledge can be integrated into new and innovative approaches. Instead of being a ‘parking ground’ for various interests, the Collaboration aims to facilitate learning and integration for the development of more informed and cohesive approaches. The process conducted with the Steering Committee of the WA Collaboration that I explore later in this thesis focussed on how they could build a better understanding of their respective values and views of sustainability for the formation of collective approaches.

**CONCLUSION**

Various approaches, whether emphasising ‘sustainable development’ or ‘sustainability,’ have pointed to the need to redirect development and have provided a new focus for policy-making. The concepts of sustainable development and sustainability, however, exist in a wide spectrum of thought ranging from reformist and technocratic to radical and emancipatory. A plethora of interpretations and definitions surround them. Defenders of the concepts argue that this contestation, rather than signifying the concepts are meaningless, simply suggests the concepts are hotly debated like other important concepts such as democracy and justice (Dryzek 1997; Dresner 2002).

Although the concepts have developed through fluid, overlapping and contested discourses, this chapter has demonstrated that they are nevertheless distinct. I have argued that sustainability has emerged not only as the goal or vision of sustainable development but also as a concept in its own right that reaffirms the original intentions surrounding sustainable development for a genuinely integrative approach. I have argued that in spite of its initial broad and holistic conceptualisation, sustainable development has been colonised and domesticated by economic rationalist politics such that it no longer challenges the status quo of global capitalism and suggests ‘business as

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15 Hopwood et al. (2005) provide an interesting graph that attempts to map the diversity in views regarding sustainable development and sustainability. They use it to highlight the contestation surrounding the concepts and the huge variety of approaches; they further illustrate the range of approaches by providing some general categories: status quo, reform and transformation.
usual’ is acceptable. It has also tended to be reduced to a ‘triple bottom line’ approach. The original concern for the vision or goal of ‘sustainability’ has been weakened at the level of practice. The sustainable development discourse has been constrained by a dominant neo-liberal paradigm focussed largely on reform through market mechanisms rather than on fundamental change. It has been deficient in the ‘reflexive’ or ‘adaptive’ learning capacity that Eckersley (2004) argues is necessary for tackling fundamental problems, as I discuss in the next chapter. Despite this, sustainable development should not be dismissed as a meaningless concept. It has simply become less meaningful in terms of its original articulations, and to a considerable extent co-opted and politically compromised.

Sustainability and sustainable development discourses have emerged concurrently and both have integrative potential, but this chapter has argued that a conception of sustainability holds greater potential for the development of holistic approaches and is increasingly being recognised as such. Sustainability as a term can be seen as an attempt to recover and reconceptualise the original articulations and multidimensional character of sustainable development. Sustainability represents a holistic notion because it is not about trading off or privileging any objectives across environmental, social or economic dimensions, but rather about foregrounding and seeking to understand the interconnectedness and interdependency of these elements and acting accordingly. Indeed, Boron and Murray (2004) argue for a sustainability approach that seeks “simultaneous solutions to economic, environmental and social goals rather than trade-off…[and] life-cycle thinking from cradle to grave” (66). Use of the term ‘sustainability’ and broadening of understanding of the concept can shift the focus to a more integrative notion that involves critical dialogue of its inherent tensions and brings effective engagement. Such a concept can better reveal the level of change required to make societies more just and sustainable.

This chapter has sought to illuminate what such a concept represents and involves, and at the same time how it is inherently discursive and dependent upon participation. There are many ways to approach the concept of sustainability but the central themes pervading the literature and the many discussions I have experienced are the desire for positive outcomes across social, economic and environmental objectives, the need for integrated and holistic approaches in the creation of these outcomes, and the key role of
democratic participation. Furthermore, an underlying theme of the sustainability approach is a belief in the rights and value of all life on earth, human or otherwise. I therefore argue that developing understanding of sustainability and policy approaches necessitates working through what people value, but at the same time contend that because of a poor history regarding social justice and the environment, progressing sustainability will require considerable social learning and rethinking of cultures and practices, including rethinking of values, beliefs and lifestyles.

This learning is possible through deliberative and dialogical processes. Democratic participation has emerged as a central tenet of sustainability, but I argue in this thesis that critical and reflective dialogue has a key role in this participation. This dialogue is crucial because, like sustainable development, ideas around sustainability can be manipulated for particular purposes. Sustainability approaches are more likely to be genuinely integrative and holistic when they are developed through careful consideration of a range of knowledge and perspectives.

Sustainability requires deliberation if the approach it represents is to be engaged with, developed and progressed. At the same time, to retain its integrity and potential as a distinctly greener and socially deeper concept than sustainable development, it requires the active development of understanding about the complexities of social, cultural, environmental and economic issues, and in particular about the ecological processes that support human well being. Thus deliberative processes are required that foster engagement with both what sustainability represents and what the participants involved aspire to. It is this tension between integrity and responsiveness that makes sustainability both challenging and promising.
Chapter 2
Progressing sustainability through deliberative and collaborative governance: the need for transformative exchange

INTRODUCTION
An increasingly worldwide concern with sustainability is reflected in the number of countries that have been establishing national councils and strategies related to sustainable development and sustainability.\(^\text{19}\) Within these and other countries, many local authorities are in the process of developing Local Agenda 21 action plans and programs through engagement with local communities. For example, over a third of Australian local authorities are involved in LA 21 and its associated processes (Tilbury et al. 2005). Many formal partnerships have been developed around sustainable development and sustainability since the early 1990s, and together with these, over 290 voluntary or self-organising partnerships between government, NGOs and the private sector have registered with the United Nations (Tilbury and Wortman 2004, 64-65).

Although there has been a great deal of progress, there has also been considerable disappointment over time. Fischer and Hajer argued in 1999 that sustainable development “has not produced the sort of institutional restructuring that appears to be necessary” (1999, 3). Davison in 2001 questioned the state of the implementation of the concept at various levels: “[j]ust as with international and national sustainable development strategies, however, we must note that while changes to the political rhetoric of local governments are certain, strategic change in policy is not” (2001, 21). In 2000 Harris lamented that carbon emissions continue to rise, species decline continues and so too does resource depletion, fossil-fuel and car dependence, and inequality of wealth and opportunity (Harris 2000). The Worldwatch Institute’s yearly

\(^{19}\) According to some reports, these number more than 100. For further information see http://www.earthvoice.org/sustainable.development/agenda.for.the.21st.century.htm and http://www.earthsummit2002.org/es/national-resources/nssd.htm. The federal government of Australia released its National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development (NS-ESD) in 1992 (for discussion of the Australian process see Barns 1992, Dryzek 1997, and Diesendorf and Hamilton 1997). Since the National Strategy many state and local governments in Australia have been developing frameworks and strategies based around the notion of sustainability, albeit with differing emphases.
Vital Signs and State of the World reports indicate continuing poor performance regarding such problems.20

There are many ways in which people and organizations are working towards sustainability, but challenges remain such as developing:

- awareness raising, educational and behaviour change processes;
- legislation and regulatory incentives;
- sustainability-based assessment of policies, plans and projects; and
- sustainability indicators and state of sustainability reporting.

Such challenges call for the development of participatory and collaborative processes to support decision-making and the formation of effective strategies. In particular, strong forms of dialogue and deliberation need to be embedded in these processes if they are to generate holistic thinking and shared approaches.

From the outset of the discourse of sustainable development, participatory and partnership approaches to solving policy problems have been recognized as central to achieving sustainability, with a renewed focus on this at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (Tilbury and Wortman 2004). Because sustainability represents an integrative approach to development, a necessary condition is engagement of a range of knowledge, experience and perspective. Relevant actors therefore exist at many levels, from official to grassroots (Dryzek 1997). Participatory and collaborative processes can encourage involvement of the range of knowledge and perspectives needed to address complex policy issues, as well as the particular, local knowledge vital for informing strategies in specific contexts. They can foster the exchange and social learning required for the development of innovative strategies, and commitment and ownership.

This chapter develops the case for deliberative approaches to sustainability that create spaces in which critical dialogue, reflection and learning can occur. It explores the potential for sustainability of a more participatory, networked and collaborative governance, but argues that greater attention needs to be given to the forms of dialogue and deliberation in which people’s perspectives are integrated, expanded and transformed. After discussing the renewed interest in participatory democratic process

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20 These reports can be ordered through http://www.worldwatch.org/.
and the indications of a more networked governance, I turn to collaborative initiatives and their potential to augment core public policy development by bringing together different interests and constituencies into more integrative approaches. I argue that a fundamental challenge remains for such initiatives to develop processes that foster deep exchange among participants of their respective concerns and values. In the final section of the chapter I explore the emergence of deliberative democratic processes and their particular potential for sustainability, arguing that opportunities for dialogue and reflection will need to be expanded and strengthened in such processes if they are to create the enlargement of thinking required for holistic decision-making.

**SUSTAINABILITY, THE RENEWED INTEREST IN PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND EMERGING NETWORK GOVERNANCE**

The past few decades have been marked by a sense of questioning of institutions—whether those in authority are acting in citizens’ best interests and making sound decisions with regard to the range of social, economic and environmental considerations. During this time, concerns regarding the sustainability of human development have emerged concurrently with people’s concerns for greater involvement in the decisions that affect them and their communities. Democratic participatory processes have become recognized as fundamental to sustainability because of the need for a diverse knowledge base for integrative and inclusive decision-making. These processes are central to the very identification and understanding of sustainability issues, and to the creation of an approach that can be collectively supported and implemented.

**Public participation and a renewed interest in democratic practice**

A marked interest in participatory democratic process and more active citizenship has been apparent since the protest movements of the 1960s that occurred in several parts of the world. These movements essentially called for greater involvement in decision-making processes to address issues such as racism, lack of civil rights, gender inequality, problems with the higher education system, lack of accountability of governments, war and environmental problems (see Pateman 1970 for further discussion of this). “[M]ore assertive and more assertively diverse publics” emerged
demanding the attention of policy and decision makers (Hillier 1999, xi). This contributed to a situation where policy practice and governance were increasingly called into question by individuals and interest groups.

Coleman and Gøtze (2001) claim that a loss of legitimacy of traditional structures of government has marked recent decades. They argue that “it is undoubtedly the case that most developed democracies are experiencing a collapse of confidence in traditional modes of democratic governance” (2001, 4). This apparent lack of faith and loss of trust in decision-makers, institutions and authorities have been highlighted by other commentators. Citing Blaxter et al. (2003), Rawsthorne (2004) argues that individualism, fragmentation and embedded poverty over the last few decades have had negative effects on civil society and contributed to loss of legitimacy of political processes. Keating (2000) similarly claims there is a “crisis of confidence and trust in the policy elites” and that “individuals and communities should be able to participate and feel that they have sufficient control over their lives that they can realise their aspirations for themselves, their families and the type of society they live in” (8). He argues that they should be able to feel that their decision makers are addressing the mounting problems societies face (8).

Public trust was the subject of the 2002 Reith Lectures by British ethicist and social commentator Onora O’Neill.21 The lectures highlight the point that while there has been a widespread preoccupation with accountability and increasing flows of information, this has not resulted in greater levels of public trust in authorities. O’Neill suggests that lack of genuine transparency, misinformation and even deception greatly affect levels of trust and must be addressed. She argues, however, that it is impossible to determine whether there is indeed a ‘crisis of trust’ and suggests that instead the case may be that there is a ‘culture of suspicion.’

These trends can be contextualised within the emergence of postmodernist thought in the last 50 years which, in its focus on the constructed nature of ‘truth,’ ‘reality’ and knowledge, has been critical to the challenging of authority and institutions in recent times (see for example Barney 2004, 16-17). A major feature of these trends has been a questioning of scientific expertise, which, with the evidence of mounting environmental

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21 The lectures are available online from the BBC website: http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/.
problems, has shown itself to be fallible. Some commentators have attributed failures in the governing of our societies, such as negative social and environmental impacts, to a paradigm of decision-making and development founded upon modernist and reductionist thought rather than on appreciation of the interdependence of human and ecological systems (see for example Davison 2001 and Suzuki 2003). Many concerns have been raised about the reliance of policy makers on scientific expertise, and arguments have been made for better inclusion of local experience and knowledge (‘lay expertise’) in policy and decision-making. Nelkin (1975) comments that technical expertise has often become politicised and used by various interest groups for particular purposes. In this way it becomes a “subjective construction of reality” involving value judgements and is chosen for its utility rather than its merits (1975, 54). The issue then, according to Nelkin, is who has access to this expertise. Winner (1992) similarly raises issues about the distinction of ‘technical expertise’ and is concerned that citizens have been isolated from the technological policy-making that affects them.

The research report, *Wising Up: The Public and New Technologies* by Grove-White et al. (2000), discusses the political and scientific controversy in the UK and other European Union member states in 1998-2000 regarding the introduction of genetically modified (GM) crops and food. It focuses on the lessons learnt regarding the ways industry, government and the media should handle public controversies about such technology. Grove-White et al. highlight the way in which official denial of “scientific uncertainty and ignorance” (2000, 6) and preoccupation with “one-way information provision” (6) has tended to inflame mistrust and scepticism. They argue that trust is usually built through experiences and over time and requires processes that foster “genuine honesty, humility, accountability, and mutual respect between institutions and publics” (35). New technologies should therefore be understood more in terms of social processes: governments and corporations will need “deliberative mechanisms for interaction with publics” (8) if they are to better evaluate the social implications of new technologies.

In the context of such developments several commentators have noted a renewed interest in democratic principles and practices (see for example Blamey 2001, 1; Buchy

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22 Similar controversy related to concerns about scientific uncertainty arose in the UK during the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) or Mad Cow Disease crisis of 1995-1996 and continued for several years after.
2001, 1; Knight et al. 2002, 82; Macedo 1999, 3). While apathy towards and lack of involvement in political processes has been reported by some commentators (see for example Coleman and Gøtze, 2001, 4; Knight et al. 2002, 1; Putnam 2000), at the same time, the strength in numbers of interest groups in recent times, and in particular NGOs, suggests that many citizens are demanding better ways to be included in the decisions that affect them (see for example Knight et al. 2002, 165 and Edwards 2004, 21-24).

Gillgren (2004) highlights the importance of public participation mechanisms in her discussion of environmental justice: “[a] fundamental tenet of environmental justice is that no community should be forced to shoulder a disproportionate share of exposure to the negative effects of environmental pollution or degradation due to a lack of political or economic strength.” She describes the way in which government procedures have often failed to give sufficient attention to this and have often devalued “local knowledge and understanding in favour of expert opinion, making communities dependent on expert or external assistance” (2004). Thus public participation should involve accessible and timely information for communities, and moreover “access to the process through which information and knowledge is generated” (2004). That is, public participation should involve “giving communities a say in the planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation of environmental policies and decisions that will affect them” (2004).

In her forward to Sarkissian et al. (1999), Hillier outlines the changes that have occurred in democratic participatory practice over the years and what public participation is able to achieve. Traditionally members of the public were merely informed about schemes and development plans rather than consulted (1999, xi). Later, when consultation became more commonplace, it took an approach that was based simply on publicity, that is, informing the public, rather than notions of democracy or accountability (xi). Nowadays authorities are starting to see the benefits of participation strategies and are designing participatory processes accordingly (xi). Hillier provides a useful summary of the many benefits of public participation processes: they can help:

- address the concerns of all who are potentially affected;
- utilise various sources of expertise and information;
- identify alternatives and resolve issues before plans become finalised;
- reduce opposition and increase ownership and support for the plan or project;
• increase accountability and credibility; and
• empower local communities (xii).

However, despite considerable development in the area of public participation (particularly regarding government resources and strategies), community consultation and engagement practices still require further development before they can satisfy many of the people involved, engage substantial numbers and a diversity of people, provide opportunities for genuine dialogue and engagement, and have considerable impacts on policy and decision-making. Common criticisms include that processes have been too top-down and centralised, have failed to involve a range of interests, and have been characterised by over and under consultation.

There have also been criticisms about conventional democratic practices in terms of the sustainability context. Dovers and Handmer (undated) challenge the assumption that democracy *per se* is conducive to sustainability. A tension exists between traditional democracy’s adherence to individual interests and the recognition that sustainability issues are “overwhelmingly *collective* problems, arising from the sum of individual preferences and consumption” (5). Many questions remain concerning which forms of democratic, participatory practice can deliver the most beneficial outcomes across the board as well as the most sustainable. This is a challenge I discuss later in this chapter with regard to the potential presented by a more *deliberative* approach to governance. Nevertheless, the indications are that “democratic governments are under pressure to adopt a new approach to policy-making – one which places greater emphasis on citizen involvement both upstream and downstream to decision-making (OECD, 2001 cited in Coleman and Gøtze 2001).

**Globalisation and the emergence of a more networked governance**

The effects of globalisation processes have been particularly significant for the sense of questioning of the practices of our societies and renewed interest in public participation discussed above. The concept of globalisation has been described in many ways, with a focus often being on its economic implications (Keating 2000, 9-10). Globalisation, however, has meant much more than this for communities and governance. Once primarily localised, human relationships are becoming part of a web of global networks with communities and social links arising through association rather than geography.
(see for example Davison 1997 on the cultural effects of globalisation and Gilchrist 2000 on the changing nature of social networks). Globalisation has been described as “the process of increasing interdependence and global enmeshment which occurs as money, people, images, values and ideas flow ever more swiftly and smoothly across national boundaries” (Hurrell and Woods, 447 cited in Keating 2000, 10). This has meant in many cases a fragmentation and dispersal of social relationships, and in some cases a decline of social networks (see for example Cox 1996 and Putnam 2000), but nevertheless different ways of associating, such as online communities.

The prolific exchange of information and ideas across borders, enabled through continuous developments in information and communication technology, has had significant ramifications for governance, citizenship and the way we choose to shape our societies (see for example McMahon 2001 and Barney 2004). Keating argues that “cultural pluralism and dissent” have accompanied recent times (2000, 13). He suggests that the accelerated meeting of ideas and cultures through globalisation processes have contributed to questioning and reshaping of worldviews and values, and in turn questioning of the way our societies are being governed.

The complexity of the effects of globalisation processes—“processes of interaction” (Keating 2000, 15)—means the impacts of these processes on societies and the environment have been perceived in a number of ways. On the one hand, the shift towards policy coordination among many national governments can be seen as positive, in terms of a recognition of the environmental and human rights issues that transcend national boundaries and require a coordinated approach, as well as increased access to new information, ideas and perspectives for policy-making. On the other hand, powerful nations, corporations and international organizations have the potential to influence nation states towards goals that may not be in their best interests and may undermine their autonomy and in turn their democratic accountability.

Keating makes some other important points about the range of potential effects. Interest groups have found support in international networks and agreements, and access to information has improved and has the potential to strengthen democracy. Furthermore, while the interaction of international and national cultures has the potential to homogenise culturally, it may also provide richness and lead to what can be described
as a “global civil society” (13). Indeed, sustainable development and sustainability have been able to develop as internationally recognized concepts because of this very global networking and communication.

Barney (2004) in his book *The Network Society* makes similar arguments to Keating in his description of the decline in the ability of nation states to contain their political, economic and cultural affairs due to factors such as increased migration, media technologies and interpersonal communication across vast distances through digital technologies (24). Barney suggests that the “open-ended cultural cross-fertilization embodied in globalization” could be a positive development for global relations (25). These effects can be aptly described as contributing to a “network society” or society characterised by what Castells describes as a “spirit of informationalism” (1996, 199, cited in Barney 2004, 33). This society is marked by networked information communication systems that mediate “an increasing array of social, political and economic practices” (25); it is also marked by “the reproduction and institutionalization throughout (and between) those societies of networks as the basic form of human organization and relationship across a wide range of social, political and economic configurations and associations” (25-26). While access to these networks can create “inclusion and exclusion” and “power and powerlessness” (30), digital networks can be used by civil society groups and social movements to perform a range of functions, such as global publication and promotion of information and events, awareness raising, encouragement of political action, internal organization and online discussion.

Rees (2002) provides a different view of globalisation. He argues that globalisation processes have been fundamentally in conflict with sustainability because they have encouraged excessive consumption of resources, and erosion of nation states and local communities’ control over their lives and environments. He claims that “[g]lobalization is on a collision course with sustainability” (Rees 2002, 264). Rees argues that globalisation and sustainable development discourses have represented global myths based on continuous economic growth and freer trade; they have procured dysfunctional behaviour by humans towards the biosphere and hidden truths about the state of world resources that will ultimately need to be faced. He suggests ‘sustainability’ represents
the potential for a more enlightened cultural myth but that “[t]he vocabulary for a new cultural myth for global sustainability has yet to be fully articulated” (266).

While Rees provides a strong argument for the incompatibility of the current global economic system with sustainability, globalisation provides opportunities for sustainability in terms of knowledge exchange and international cooperation. There is potential on an international level to share knowledge, resources and ideas, build understanding of cultural differences and forge international governance and accountability so that responsibility is taken globally. Rees alludes to this in the conclusion of his article where he suggests the need for international governance to address globally shared problems: “the fundamental values of global society must shift from individualism, narrow self-interest, and competition toward community, protecting our mutual interest in the global commons, and cooperation” (2002, 265).

The changes occurring through globalisation processes present challenges in terms of complexity of problems and competing interests, but also opportunities in terms of creating more appropriate and effective forms of governance such as greater involvement of civil society actors and citizens in general, and partnerships across sectors. In conventional policy-making processes, stakeholders have tended to be included only to the extent that they reinforce government objectives (Dryzek 2000 cited in Eckersley 2004, 60). Business interests are typically well represented as they usually coincide with government economic objectives, while those of civil society have been under-represented. Where a range of interests has been considered, these interests have often had to compete and bargain for the outcomes they seek, whether socially, economically or environmentally oriented—a situation that has led to inadequate outcomes for many. This interest-based model has tended to create competition between preferences rather than discourse about the common good. Such democracy is ‘thin’ rather than strong and transformative; it leaves people as it finds them, because it demands of them only self-interested bargain (Barber 1984). This situation results in displacement of risks and generally inadequate approaches to

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23 Rees sees myth-making as a “universal property of human societies” and argues that it “plays a vital role in every culture” (251). In early human societies it appears that myths helped people make sense of the world and provided “representations of reality” that “gradually became essential social glue” (251). Myths can be “comprehensive visions that give shape and direction to life” (Grant 1998, cited in Rees 2002, 251). However, while myth-making can be necessary and benign, “there is also a darker side in which our shared illusions amount to little more than deep denial in the service of nefarious ends” (251).
addressing complex and collective problems, especially in terms of the interrelated nature of sustainability issues that require integrative thinking on the part of those involved. To move away from this often unproductive and at times destructive situation, a more participatory, networked and deliberative governance is needed.

**Civil society and network governance**

In his book *Civil Society*, Edwards (2004) discusses the importance for governance of a focus on the notion of ‘civil society’ and describes it as a “powerful leitmotif in politics and practice” (17). He writes that “[c]ommonly referred to as the ‘third’ or ‘non-profit’ sector, civil society in this sense contains all the associations and networks between the family and the state in which membership and activities are voluntary” (20). Like many of the terms discussed in this thesis, however, “[c]ivil society has become a notoriously slippery concept…[It means] different things to different people, plays different roles at different times, and constitutes both problem and solution” (vi). “[E]xaggerated claims” about the potential of the idea have created criticisms that have threatened to “throw the baby out with the bathwater,” so there is a need to be “more nuanced about it” (vii). Civil society can play an important role in creating a better world (vii) and “when subjected to a rigorous critique, the idea of civil society re-emerges to offer significant emancipatory potential, explanatory power, and practical support to problem solving in both established and emerging democracies” (vi).

Civil society organizations provide an important vehicle for social exchange and learning as well as for public involvement in decision-making. Edwards (2004) states that interest in civil society has risen in the last few decades due to a recognition of the important roles associational life plays economically, politically and socially. He argues that, economically, civil society organizations (especially religious organizations, NGOs and other groups) have always been important for service delivery but are increasingly becoming preferred as service providers in areas where government and the market are weak. Politically, “voluntary associations are seen as a crucial counterweight to states and corporate power” (14) and as crucial for “promoting transparency, accountability and other aspects of ‘good governance’” (15). Furthermore, recognition and support of civil society on the part of government and industry sectors has also proven to be ‘good for business’ since it legitimises actions through the greater public trust that civil society organizations typically enjoy. This
association with civil society groups can foster mutual support and prevent conflict and
criticism, but can also lead to co-option of groups by government and industry.
Socially, civil society can be seen as providing “social capital” or a reservoir for civic
engagement, learning and support, citizenship, culture and values and the “positive
social norms that foster stability” (14). This social capital is essential for collective
action for common purposes which can provide new solutions to issues.  

The concept of social capital has been discussed in connection with civil society by
many other authors. Putnam (2006), for example, describes social capital as “the
collective value of all ‘social networks’ (who people know) and the inclinations that
arise from these networks to do things for each other (‘norms of reciprocity’).” The use
of the term ‘capital’ suggests that social networks have value and importance, and
Putnam explains there is “a wide variety of quite specific benefits that flow from the
trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks.”
According to Cox (1996), “social capital,” or alternatively “social fabric or glue” refers
to “the processes between people which establish networks, norms and social trust and
facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit” (15).

Social capital is essentially about the relationships and trust developed between people
and about creating connection, cooperation, and a sense of belonging or community.  
Roseland (1998) describes how this is fundamental to sustainability. Social capital
provides the store of knowledge, connections and trust needed for a shared activity. It
creates social responsibility and commitment, and this sense of common good or “social
caring capacity” is central to the development of more sustainable communities (10).
Civiness in a community can enhance productivity, facilitate action and provide a
proxy for policy implementation. It is also important for developing a sense of place,
and this sense of connection and caring for a place can foster more sustainable activity.
Social capital can be developed through formal and informal social networks, from

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24 While some civil society organizations invoke racial intolerance and/or violence, I focus here on the
way in which many civil society organizations contribute in a positive way to the social fabric of
communities and societies.
25 According to Warburton (1998b), ‘community’ refers to both the relationships between people, and
between people and the place in which they are located. She describes community as “a common feeling
based on sharing a place which creates a particular type of relationship” (17). Warburton reminds us that
the concept of community should not be overly romanticised and that we should be aware of the
challenges involved in people working together in a community such as lack of time, power differences,
conflict and exclusion.
friendship circles and interactions between neighbours, to environment groups, sports associations and book clubs. It accumulates with regular practice, but takes time to be developed and deteriorates rapidly if neglected.

Civil society organizations are crucial not only for building social capital but also for stimulating debate and dialogue. Many foster deliberation and learning around policy issues and organize the concerns and interests of citizens into defined approaches. As such, they are crucial for a healthy democracy. When civil society or community organizations form alliances, partnerships and collaborations, as discussed later in this chapter, they provide a way to bring together and simulate dialogue around overlapping concerns and interests.

Edwards (2004) highlights the networking capacity of civil society. He argues that civil society organizations are more effective when they build links within the sector both vertically and horizontally; they then can “form cross-cutting networks and federations that can take the struggle to the next level, and alliances across the lines of class, race and religion that build from a strong grassroots base” (33). There are many examples of where this network-building has occurred in the United States, and NGOs have proven to be an important “connective tissue” for this (33). These networks have the potential to become significant entities when they seek long term connections. The WA Collaboration illustrates such potential as a multi-organizational association focussed on collective strength of advocacy, and at the same time, long-term change within the collaborating organizations.26

Drawing on social capital theory, such as that articulated by Putnam (2000), Edwards concludes that there is a need for “a balance between ‘bonding’ (connections within

26 While the changes that Edwards describes can be seen overall as an “associational revolution” or a huge “power shift,” he notes the complexity of trends regarding the strength of civil society (21). He highlights the danger of lumping all non-profit organizations into the single category of “associational life” (23-24) and of too much attention on NGOs, which are only one part of civil society. Although globally NGO numbers have increased dramatically, this trend has been influenced greatly by the huge increase in NGOs in developing countries fostered by foreign aid, which may not be a permanent situation. Furthermore, other civil society trends are debatable due to different circumstances and trends reported from various countries and data that only tends to cover NGOs or registered organizations. It is possible that, as Putnam (2000) has claimed, social capital and associational life have recently been under threat, but Edwards notes that much grassroots movement and community group activity could be falling “below the radar screen of academic research” (23). In any case, Edwards suggests that it may take some time before the increase in numbers of larger civil society organizations is reflected by significant structural changes in politics, economics and social relations.
groups), ‘bridging’ (connections across them) and ‘linking’ (connections between associations, government and the market)” (33). This need for balance is discussed later in this thesis in terms of the WA Collaboration’s various roles and expectations and the importance of internal bonding work that builds social capital in an organization.

The importance of cross-sectoral relationships is also highlighted by Latham (2001). He argues that the Information Age lends itself to networks of cooperation and that organizations will be successful if they are “multi-skilled and multi-disciplinary” (2001, 21). In tackling social problems, policy makers will need to draw alliances and collaborations into their work, a situation that will require discovering new skills of networking and collaboration (21). Rather than trying to control network relationships, governments should “place organisations in a position where the prospect of collaboration becomes more likely” and “use the allocations of public resources as a way of levering organisations closer together” (21). Thus this kind of “enabling state” “sees civic life as a powerful agent for social change” and “aims to bring the work of civil society and government into harmony,” because government cannot hope to address all public policy issues alone and would be foolish to try to micro manage all strategies (22). In this way the community sector can assume more responsibility and greater contribute to addressing public policy issues (22).

Goldsmith and Eggers (2004a & b) likewise describe a new model for governance where government is transformed from centralized control over public programs to facilitating services through networks of nongovernmental entities. They argue that there are significant advantages to governing by network, such as flexibility, speed, innovation and specialization. At the same time, however, there are challenges because “governing in this environment demands an entirely different set of competencies” and “becoming proficient in a host of new tasks, such as negotiation, mediation and contract management” (2004b, 6). They argue that “[b]alancing the need for accountability against the benefits of flexibility is one of the biggest challenges of this model,” and stress that “the most valuable relationships are dynamic, learning relationships” (2004b, 6). These are the types of relationships I focus on in this thesis and which I argue are fundamental to partnership and collaborative initiatives.
A more participatory, networked and collaborative governance involves sharing of knowledge and development of trust among government officials, stakeholders and citizens, and indeed requires developing such connections. This context is a supportive environment for sustainability because it encourages the collaborative work and learning needed to better apprehend the complexity of social, economic and environmental dimensions of policy problems. However, as this chapter argues, progressing sustainability will require processes that provide opportunities for dialogue and deliberation in which greater understanding can by developed among participants. As highlighted in the preceding discussion, traditional democratic practices have not always been conducive to sustainability and have often failed to address issues that are best dealt with through genuine citizen and stakeholder dialogue and integrative thinking. Deliberative, and moreover, transactional forms of democratic participation will be required to integrate interests and perspectives and develop more robust and long-term solutions to policy issues.

Partnership and collaborative initiatives have the potential to provide significant spaces for deliberative participation and integration of diverse perspectives, and as such present strong opportunities for progressing sustainability. They indicate movement towards a more networked governance, where new structures like the WA Collaboration have a role to play in policy development by providing opportunities to involve people in the decisions that affect them and the sustainability of their communities. The following section explores this potential of collaborative initiatives. It considers the changes that have occurred in the policy-making arena with regard to the developing role of the ‘community sector,’ the positive indications of interest group collaboration and the challenges involved. In particular, it discusses the ways in which such initiatives could benefit from greater attention to the actual processes of collaboration, deliberation and dialogue that are so crucial for building stronger working relationships and shared outcomes. It provides important background for the case study of the WA Collaboration discussed in the second part of this thesis and further elucidates my overall argument that greater knowledge, more robust approaches and potentially more sustainable solutions can be created through collaborative work and dialogue.
COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The emergence of collaborative initiatives
‘Civil society’ encompasses a vast range of communities of interest, associations, organizations and networks that exist as a result of the various interests, concerns, beliefs and values of citizens. Central to the functioning of ‘civil society’ is the profusion of organizations and associations that are often referred to as a ‘community,’ ‘non-government,’ ‘voluntary’ or ‘third’ sector.27 The role of third sector organizations in strengthening democracy has gained increasing attention “[a]t a time when many older industrialized counties are experiencing an apparent loss of faith in the formal democratic process, with decreasing political party membership and voting levels” (Taylor and Warburton 2003, 321). There is increasing recognition that as globalisation processes bring effects across boundaries, governments cannot address the range of risks and problems alone and that partnerships will need to be forged outside of governments to better protect the rights of citizens, including environmental justice (Brinkerhoff 2002, 20). In response, “a profusion of initiatives based on more democratic and locally determined change has been promoted by government at local, national and supranational level, and by public sector bodies and the voluntary sector” (Blair 1998 cited in White 2001, 242). According to White, “[p]olicy, strategy and accountability are now being developed within a complex network of different organizations drawn from the public and voluntary sector, aiming to govern or regulate the public sphere” (White 2001, 241, abstract).

27 This sector is ‘third’ because it broadens the focus to a recognisable sector additional to the public and private sectors. The use of terms varies within and across countries, with ‘voluntary,’ ‘community’ and ‘non-government’ sector frequently used in Australia. In the case of the WA Collaboration, ‘community sector’ and ‘community organizations’ are terms frequently used; the words help to emphasize that the Collaboration is working for and with the community, like the organizations involved in it. The area of third sector research is substantial and varied, as is evident from the development of the many centres and associations around the world for research in the area. The International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR) and the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), for example, provide international forums and reflect the growing worldwide interest in third sector research. The area is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary and is effectively shifting attention to the pluralism of structures, practices and interlinked activities that constitute the ‘public sphere’ and that have an important and legitimate role to play in public policy development and social change.
Unfortunately these shifts have not always meant due recognition of and support for often overstretched voluntary sector organizations (Melville and Perkins 2003). Competitive and output-based funding has partly discouraged collaboration across the voluntary sector and in many cases led to less long term outcomes (McClelland 2002, 86). Partnership approaches are yet to bring the equality of power they espouse, and McClelland argues that long term mutual support and respect will be needed to realise partnerships (92-94). Nevertheless, many authors are in agreement that the roles of government, nonprofit and business sectors have shifted as their boundaries of activity have become blurred, and so too have the relationships changed within and between these sectors (for example White 2001, 242; Fosler and Lipitz 2002, 3-4; McClelland 2002, 86; The Three Sector Collaborative Project 2000, 13).

New types of organizations and cross-sectoral initiatives have arisen to deal with these shifts and with the increasingly apparent complexity and interdependence of social, educational, health, environmental and economic systems (The Three Sector Collaborative Project 2000, 13; Brinkerhoff 2002, 20; Fosler and Lipitz 2002, 3). “[C]ross-sector collaborations, partnerships, and alliances are more important than ever in addressing the increasing number of complex public issues that spill over sectoral boundaries” (Fosler and Lipitz 2002, 3). The institutional environment has shifted to involve greater numbers of initiatives such as issue networks—“constructions of potentially reinforcing policy areas which serve to generate new political perspectives”—(O’Riordan 1998, 100) and policy coalitions—“coalescing groupings of interests who may not have talked to each other before, but find common interest in issue networks” (100).

**The significance and potential of collaborative initiatives**

A number of authors have discussed the prevalence of these emerging partnerships and what they signify and involve, with considerable focus on government-voluntary sector partnerships (see for example, Rawsthorne 2004; Brinkerhoff 2002; Taylor and Warburton 2003; McClelland 2002; White 2001; Lister 2000; and Macleod and McCulloch 2000). According to Rawsthorne (2004), the trend of governments seeking partnership relationships with the non-government sector is an international movement that is especially apparent in Westminster-based democracies such as Australia, Canada, Ireland and Britain. These partnership approaches “are, at least in part, a response to the
loss of legitimacy of political processes and an effort to reinvigorate active citizenship” (Woodward 2000, 236 cited in Rawsthorne 2004, 3). They signify recognition of the role of citizens and civil society organizations in policy debate and in solving community problems.

Marsh (2000) argues that the interest pluralisation that has characterised society in recent times poses a significant challenge for governance, and that in the face of this the political system needs “[e]nhanced capacities for integrating interests” (198). He argues for greater “strategic capacity and consent mobilisation” in policy processes (197), which would involve stronger engagement of interest groups and interest group coalitions (202). It would mean exploring contested and complex issues in a strategic phase so that a “more comprehensive reformulation of issues” can occur and accelerate the discovery of a better outcome or solution (197).

Partnerships between stakeholder groups are more attractive to government because they provide coordination of interests (Macleod and McCulloch 2000). Cooperation and ideally collaboration between groups mean they can be involved in policy processes in a way that is more mutually beneficial. This is preferable to the conflict and bargaining that often lead to unsatisfactory outcomes for all. A more coordinated and cohesive policy advocacy can help prevent conflict and tradeoffs in policy processes, make governments more receptive to stakeholder views at important points in the policy cycle, and lead to more informed and strategic policy-making. Outcomes that are conducive to sustainability are more likely to emerge when holistic, long-term approaches are taken by governments involving consideration of a range of interests and perspectives throughout the policy-making cycle.

Partnership approaches within the community sector are in particular significant because they have the potential to change the way these organizations operate and make them more effective. Partnerships among civil society organizations can foster the

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28 ‘Active citizenship’ refers to a more engaged citizenry where people take responsibility for contributing to the formation of public policies by participating in political debate and action (often through involvement in civil society organizations).

29 For further discussion of these aspects and how they relate to the WA Collaboration see Marsh 2000, especially chapter 7, and Hodgson, Bouselich and Halpin (2005). The co-authoring of this paper and other papers I worked on with these colleagues helped inform this chapter and others in this thesis. See also Into the Future: The Neglect of the Long term in Australian Politics (2004) by Marsh and Yencken, which can be ordered through http://www.australiancollaboration.com.au/reports.htm.
integration of interrelated issues and transfer of knowledge and resources needed to
develop stronger and more widely supported policy approaches, and can generally
inform and strengthen all activities. Especially important for sustainability is their
capacity to bring together different constituencies and at the same time overlapping
interests; in this way, partnerships have potential to facilitate the development of more
integrative and encompassing policy positions.

The central role of partnerships, within and between sectors, in progressing
sustainability, together with the challenges involved, has been noted by many
commentators (for example Hartman et al. 1999, Hemmati 2002, Maser et al. 1998,
Tilbury and Wortman 2004 and Tilbury et al. 2005). These and other authors argue that
sustainability will require collaboration at various levels of activity, and that multi-
stakeholder processes will be vital to building more comprehensive knowledge and
more widespread ownership of strategies to advance sustainability. In particular, they
contend that collaboration can help utilise the richness of different knowledge and
perspectives for the creation of innovative and synergistic outcomes. Tilbury et al.
(2005) explain that partnership and collaborative approaches are crucial for learning
around sustainability because they encourage partners to consider alternative
worldviews and assumptions.

Partnerships are essentially about collaboration, which can be defined as “a process
though which parties who see different aspects of a problem can explore constructively
their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of
what is possible” (Gray 1989, 5, cited in Hartman et al. 1999, 256). Collaboration
therefore “implies interdependence among stakeholders, constructive handling of
differences, joint ownership of decisions and collective responsibility of outcomes”
(Hartman et al., 256-257). Because of the various challenges involved in people of
diverse backgrounds working together towards a common purpose, collaborations
require “careful attention to leadership, decision-making, fairness and relationship
management” (Gray cited in Hartman et al., 257). Hartman et al. therefore conclude
that the partnership initiatives emerging around sustainability require consideration as to
how they might build more constructive exchanges.
This is a concern for the WA Collaboration in particular, which illustrates a new multi-stakeholder organization within the community sector with significant potential to integrate knowledge and perspectives around sustainability. It is not simply an alliance or coalition of organizations that have come together for a limited period of time and around a specific and immediate policy issue; rather, it is an ongoing collaborative structure working towards addressing multiple issues encompassed by the sustainability agenda through regular contact. The WA Collaboration is a network of organizations and individuals, but is equally a forum for exchange, dialogue and learning about sustainability, and as such provides opportunities for development of the relationships that can engender a cultural shift towards sustainability. It does not replace the work of the organizations involved, but rather adds an integrative and collaborative dimension to their work.

The WA Collaboration represents just one of the many types of initiatives emerging around sustainability that involve partnership approaches and collaboration. Appendix 1 provides an outline of the following selected examples, many of which are independent or community-driven.

**Large scale or national level initiatives**
- *Sustainable Communities Network* (US)
- *Communities By Choice* (based in North America)
- *Forum for the Future* (UK)
- *Cynnal Cymru* and the *Sustain Wales* web portal (UK)
- *Australian Collaboration*
- *Australian National Sustainability Initiative*

**Smaller scale or more locally based initiatives**
- Community-led sustainability indicators projects such as *Sustainable Seattle* and *Sustainable Calgary* (North America).
- *Sustainable Futures Society* (US)
- *London Sustainability Exchange* (associated with the UK Forum for the Future)
- *Groundwork* (UK)
- *Envolve* (UK)
• Sustainable Living Foundation (AUS)
• The Nature and Society Forum (AUS)
• The Change Agency (AUS)

In various ways, and to differing degrees, initiatives like these provide collaborative space by promoting exchange among organizations and individuals. Many involve collaboration in that they foster exchange of information, knowledge, experience and perspectives across different sectors of activity, and facilitate joint work towards common goals. The initiatives generally illustrate collaborative approaches that have the potential to engender fuller understanding of sustainability and more robust approaches to putting sustainability into practice.

The challenge of collaboration

Partnership and collaborative initiatives are highly conducive to sustainability because they provide spaces for multiple interests to meet in democratic dialogue and debate. They facilitate sharing of the diverse knowledge and experience needed to progress sustainability and have the potential to integrate and expand policy perspectives. However, despite the importance of these initiatives being noted widely in the literature, relatively limited attention has been given to how these approaches actually work in practice, particularly in the context of sustainability. According to Rochester (2004), there has been some recent examination of voluntary sector mergers, but comparatively little has been written about the “looser” forms of multi-organizational initiatives such as formally or informally collaborating voluntary sector bodies (Rochester, 2004, 51). In particular, more attention must be given to the challenges and work involved in partnership initiatives and how they can develop their communicative and collaborative capacity.

Many administrative, strategic and process challenges face voluntary sector organizations, such as competitive grants systems, short-term or episodic funding, lack of longevity of projects, limited and overstretched staff and resources, and volunteer burnout. These are regular themes of the literature about the non-profit sector and of the listserv hosted by the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA).
because of the presence of multiple and sometimes diverging agendas and expectations. Australian community sector peak bodies, as distinct from their overseas counterparts, have a dual constituency and play a dual role in terms of serving member organizations and advocating for the people (clients) who use the services provided by member organizations (Melville and Perkins 2003). When such peak bodies form partnerships, as in the case of the WA Collaboration, they assume an additional layer of roles and responsibilities. Because of this, collaborative endeavours are often relegated to the perimeter of the work of already busy partner organizations, tend to be task-based and action-oriented, and can suffer from intermittent participation and even drop outs. Furthermore, collaborative initiatives tend to receive short-term or project-based funding, which is not conducive to ongoing organizational development and can lead to a prioritisation of action and outcomes over process, learning and building stronger relationships (see for example Tilbury et al. 2005 and Mitchell and Drake 2005).

At the same time, collaborative initiatives bring together differing organizational values, practices and cultures, and can be affected by imbalances in power between participating organizations. These differences occur at an organizational as well as individual level. Collaborations, therefore, involve multiple layers of diversity where participants have not only differences in values, knowledge, abilities and personality, and identifications with particular ethic and social groups (within which there may also be considerable diversity), but also commitments to particular interest groups. In such ways, the views and commitments participants hold and bring to interaction are nuanced and sometimes even contradictory.

Inherent in the above challenges is a tension in the necessity for both action and dialogue. The limited time participants (both the partners directing an initiative and its wider community of casual participants) have available for collaborative endeavours means they are often concerned with responding to immediate issues and planning projects rather than dialogue and deliberation. The fundamental challenge of developing the collaborative process itself and creating capacity for a collaborative style of working is therefore often neglected in the face of immediate concerns. The

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31 A community sector peak body “is a non-government organisation whose membership consists of smaller organisations of allied interests” (Melville and Perkins 2003, ix).
32 Niemeyer and Dryzek (2006) refer to Elster’s (1986) concept of the ‘multiple self’ to describe the way in which an individual “can simultaneously subscribe to different, seemingly contradictory arguments” (2006, 3) during deliberation.
communication processes that help build understanding for joint working are often assumed as emerging incidentally; they are often overlooked among the administrative and strategic challenges of collaborations, such as clarifying goals, identifying and initiating pilot projects, and securing further funding or developing a stable funding base. This is despite dialogue being essential to the development of the very understanding and relationships needed for the success of a collaborative initiative. Dialogue is crucial for negotiating the diversity of views and approaches encompassed by such initiatives and for the collective learning and innovation that can potentially take place. It can help address barriers such as ill-founded assumptions and misunderstandings.

An endeavour is more collaborative when it seeks not only to exchange information and cooperate around issues, but also to foster a depth of engagement for the development of more comprehensive and shared approaches to problems. According to Gadja (2004), there is agreement among collaboration theorists that collaboration should be seen as a journey rather than a destination and that “collaborative efforts fall across a continuum of low to high integration” (4). This “level of integration is determined by the intensity of the alliance’s process, structure, and purpose” (4). An initiative is therefore collaborative when it is more of an integrative situation where regular work and dialogue facilitate closer understanding and policy positions. In this case participants engage at a deeper level and may experience shifts in their thinking and approaches. With respect to progressing sustainability, Maser et al. (1998) similarly argue that “the greater the movement of a partnership from cooperation through coordination into collaboration, the more effective and better able it will be to deal successfully with complex issues” (133). This is because collaboration goes beyond sharing resources and joint work to creating new systems that can accommodate the development of shared visions and decisions about the future (133). This process entails exposing biases, thereby developing “open, honest dialogue” and “a greater feeling of trust and sensitivity between and among partners” (133).

Collaborative initiatives offer a space where a considerable diversity of knowledge and experience can meet and be built upon and this wealth of opportunity for expansion of perspectives can take time to be realised. Frequent, in-depth dialogue based around critical reflection is crucial to developing the deeper understanding needed to progress
both collaborative initiatives and sustainability, and as such needs to be incorporated into action-based deliberation and planning.

A number of other authors have stressed the fundamental importance of attention to the process of collaboration, and the centrality of dialogue and reflection in this development. Hartman et al. (1999) assert that “[c]ollaboration requires stakeholders to build a common understanding of how problems appear by exchanging their points of view” (257). Citing Gray (1989) they argue that “[t]his shared understanding forms the foundation for selecting a collective course of action” (1999, 257). Coleman (2005) likewise argues that partnership initiatives must focus on the process of collaboration: “[i]t is the partnerships that focus on the process of engaging that are more sustainable and achieve higher levels of innovation and change” (7). Coleman refers to Schön’s (1987) views in her argument for members of partnerships to develop the skills to reflect critically both during (reflection in action) and after (reflection on action) an activity. In addition, she highlights the need for critical thinking in the early stages of a partnership “to determine openly and transparently the values that each partner brings” (12-13). This is a process of values clarification aimed at identifying values and understanding conflicts among them. “Further values clarification assists in revealing the layers of social, political and historical assumptions that shape decisions and actions,” and can allow for exploration of “moral and ethical boundaries” (13).

Similarly, in their scoping study of collaborations between large and small organizations, Mitchell and Drake (2005) found that “[p]erception of ‘the other’ and an understanding of the different values, strengths, weaknesses and working cultures of large and small organizations has a crucial influence on large small collaborations. These real or perceived differences act as significant barriers if not addressed early on in an open and transparent manner” (7).

Rochester and Woods (2005), in their report on collaborations in the UK, also draw attention to the importance of process in any collaborative endeavour, and highlight the difficulty in balancing the need to focus on outcomes and the need to focus on the process, that is, in managing “the tension between driving the project forward and developing the means of collaborating” (2005, 23). From their research they found that members of collaborations had “greatly underestimated the length of time required to work collaboratively” (20). They argue, therefore, that it is imperative that
collaborations allow time for dialogue around fundamental issues in the early stages and throughout the endeavour.

White (2001) similarly highlights the importance of managing the tensions between focussing on collaboration building and focussing on immediate tasks. He argues that conflict arises from tensions between tasks, which is “mainly due to a mismatch of values, where no clear-cut principle can be found” (2001, 244). What is needed then for the success of collaborative initiatives is a “mentality of governance” where the group “strives to balance a number of things such as strategy and mission, accountability, management, conflict and collaboration” (244). The solution for achieving this “lies in the working out of, or encouraging the emergence of, values that have significance for all members of the governing group” (244).

The process of dialogue, reflection and discovery described above is central to developing collective purpose and the interpersonal relationships to support this purpose, and therefore must be a core priority. From their study of multi-organizational settings, Eden and Huxham (2001) argue that “[d]espite the pressures in favour of collaboration, there is a great deal of evidence that collaborative ventures often fail to live up to expectations” (373). They state several contributing factors such as differences in aims, practices, cultures and power of the participating organizations, and the “sheer time required” for communications (374). They argue that negotiation of joint purpose is especially important for making collaborations work but that it is challenging because of the complexity of issues being dealt with and because collaborations involve multiple stakeholders who bring their own agendas and perceptions of the purpose of the initiative. The goals of a collaborative organization are often not made explicit enough in discussion, possibly because it is assumed members are already familiar with them or because there has not been time to discuss and clarify them. This is particularly significant because goals may change over time and be “influenced by the activities of the collaboration” (377). Eden and Huxham conclude, therefore, that the success of a collaboration is dependent on the capacity of group members to manage such tensions (385). Consistently, Gadja (2004) argues that collaborations need to take sufficient time out for dialogue to evaluate and review what the organization is trying to achieve and how well it has developed in terms of integration.
The arguments of authors such as those discussed above have in common a belief in the central importance of processes of dialogue, reflection and learning for the success of collaborative endeavours. At the same time many researchers have found that this fundamental aspect of operations is often neglected. The development of such processes is therefore a central concern of this thesis. I seek to contribute to addressing this issue through an examination of key literature related to developing reflective dialogue in deliberative and collaborative processes, and through a case study of research I undertook with the WA Collaboration to help foster a culture of reflective exchange in the organization. While there is a range of literature to draw upon to understand better the challenge of developing processes to support collaboration, much of the literature has tended to focus on organizational settings in the private sector. Nevertheless, a wealth of practical resources about developing collaborative organizations in the voluntary sector is emerging and becoming accessible on the World Wide Web. I contribute to this burgeoning knowledge about collaborative endeavours by providing insight into development of the process of collaboration in the context of a voluntary sector partnership around sustainability.

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND ITS ROLE IN PROGRESSING SUSTAINABILITY

Concurrent with the participatory, networked and collaborative context described above has been the development of deliberative democratic approaches to governance. Deliberative democratic processes have had limited use in our institutions to date, but have attracted considerable interest over the past decade, are developing rapidly and are increasingly being used in a variety of settings.

While the preceding discussion highlighted the changing nature of governance and shift in interest towards involving a wider public in policy and decision-making, it also raised

33 Organizational learning and development and social psychology of group processes are vast, well established and interrelated streams of literature that are continuing to expand into areas such as collaboration, complexity and adaptive management.
34 Based in North America, the National Network for Collaboration (http://crs.uvm.edu/nnc/) and Fieldstone Alliance (http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/), for example, produce and provide access to many useful resources covering different aspects of collaboration. In particular the Fieldstone Alliance has published Collaboration: What Makes it Work (2nd Edition) A review of Research and Literature on Factors Influencing Successful Collaboration, (Mattessich et al. 2001).
associated issues that remain barriers to moving toward sustainability, such as tokenistic
public consultation and participation processes, underdeveloped partnership and
collaborative processes, and in particular the challenges of integrating interests and
perspectives among disparate groups and individuals. The following discussion
explores the way in which deliberative processes can help to address such issues by
providing stronger modes of interaction and policy formation. It examines the potential
of deliberative democracy for progressing sustainability as a multi-interest context, and
argues that genuinely deliberative participatory and collaborative processes involving
critical reflection can create more holistic and collectively-supported outcomes. I
discuss the way in which the reflexivity of deliberative democratic process is especially
suited to sustainability because of the emphasis it places on learning and expansion of
perspective, and outline the key role of civil society in deliberative democracy.
Drawing on Eckersley’s (2004) ideas, I also discuss how deliberative practice might be
more precautionary in nature and might encourage consideration of all differently
situated ‘others’ (human or otherwise). Furthermore, the complex and sometimes
uncomfortable relationship between participation and sustainability is explored in
relation to the argument for developing transformative deliberative exchange in
participatory processes.

The deliberative model
Like sustainability, “the ideal of democracy is complex and contested, as are its
justifications and practical implications” (Gutmann 1993, 411). While “democracy”
originates from the Ancient Greek root demokratia simply meaning “rule by the
people,” and is “universally commended”, it is nevertheless understood variously (1993,
411). Numerous theories of democracy have been advocated in recent times (see for
example discussion of ‘populist’ and ‘social’ democracy in Gutmann 1993), and those
that tend to pervade discussions of sustainability are ‘participatory’ and ‘deliberative’
democracy. Participatory democracy advocates greater opportunities for citizens to
voice their views; it is based on the assumption that people will use these opportunities
if they involve meaningful participation, and that this in turn will build understanding
of, and interest in, political process (Gutmann 1993, 415). It is largely a response to the
perception that modern large-scale liberal, representative democracies face problems
due to a lack of information and political understanding, poor voting levels and
inadequate accountability on the part of public officials, and ultimately because they
tend to be non-participatory (415). However, the view holds the possibly unrealistic expectation that citizens will choose to sacrifice considerable private recreational time to participate in politics (415). Through the words of Oscar Wilde, Gutmann wryly concludes that it would simply “take too many evenings” (415). Nevertheless, “participatory democracy” has contributed the arguments that participation in public life is a central part of human fulfilment and would be “recognized as such under the right social conditions,” and that broad participation is necessary to prevent abuse of power in government and can build the “good life” and the “good society” (416).

The deliberative model of democracy recognizes the difficulty in achieving widespread participation and instead aspires to engaging ‘communities’ of deliberators at important times in a policy-making process, and to encouraging a deliberative culture throughout civil society. Gutmann claims that deliberative democracy addresses both populist (majority rule) and liberal ideals in that rational deliberation involves exercising personal and political freedom and consequently supports individual autonomy (417). This autonomy or ability to shape one’s life is possible through open deliberative processes where, rather than simply asserting their will and struggling for it, people relate to each other through reasoned argument and influence one another (417). This means that people “collectively shape their own politics” through public reasoned argument that involves evidence, evaluation, persuasion and providing reasons for a particular cause (417). Deliberative democracy is essentially about reflection on preferences and its influence on collective outcomes (Dryzek 2000, 2).

In relation to Barber’s (1984) views of democracy, the deliberative model represents a strong form of democracy. Indeed, Fischer (2003) describes deliberative democratic practice as “civic discovery.” This process is about more than simply seeking people’s views and finding the most effective way to satisfy these views; it is about public officials encouraging alternative visions and provoking re-examination of premises and values in order to “broaden the range of potential responses and deepen society’s understanding of itself” (Reich 1990, 9 cited in Fischer 2003, 207).

According to Dryzek (2000), the strong deliberative turn in the theory of democracy occurred in the final decade of the twentieth century. The focus shifted to how democratic legitimacy could be developed through the opportunity to participate in
effective deliberation around collective public policy issues. While there are numerous conceptions of deliberative practice, the notion of deliberative democracy generally refers to processes where citizens can participate in decisions that affect them in ways that allow for their preferences to be enlarged or at least developed through deliberation. In contrast to competing and bargaining of preferences or simple interest aggregation, the deliberative model involves a social process where “deliberators are amenable to changing their judgements, preferences, and views during the course of their interactions, which involve persuasion rather than coercion, manipulation, or deception” (2000, 1).

Thus underlying the deliberative approach is the central premise that perspectives are developed through dialogue rather than being fixed. Forester (1999) describes deliberative participation as a process of “coming to see”—“[p]articipants may come to see that what seemed unimportant is important, what seemed not feasible is feasible after all” (133, emphasis in original). This is “a matter of recognition—quite literally, re-cognition, that is, coming to see the very same thing in a new light, with new significance” (133). Fung and Wright (2003) provide a useful explanation of the motivation to engage in such activity and play by its ‘rules:’

By seeing that cooperation mediated through reasonable deliberation yields benefits not accessible through adversarial methods, participants might increase their disposition to be reasonable and to transform narrowly self-interested preferences accordingly (32).

Furthermore, they argue that citizens are likely to develop greater deliberative capacity through practice over time (Fung and Wright 2003).

In ideal terms, deliberative practice generates genuine consensus and innovative and transformative outcomes. However, in contemporary practice participants often simply generate outcomes that are relatively collective and mutually supported, or perhaps merely just acceptable to all. As such, a gap exists between deliberative theory and practice, as Niemeyer and Dryzek (2006) among others argue. The deliberative turn “has been successful to the extent that it has established principles about how democratic systems ought to encourage fair participatory procedures and competent political outcomes” (Niemeyer and Dryzek 2006, 1), but I argue in this thesis that there is a need to consider the way in which the transformative capacity of deliberative processes might be enriched through critical reflection so that they might allow for new possibilities, and more sustainable and genuinely shared outcomes.
Deliberative democracy and planning

Similar to the deliberative turn in policy analysis and democratic theory has been the ‘argumentative’ or ‘communicative’ turn in planning theory (Fischer 2003). The deliberative aspect of planning has increasingly pervaded the literature and raised questions about the extent to which the planning professional should be a facilitator of collaborative and deliberative processes that help build the base of knowledge in any planning process. Authors who have made significant contributions to the literature include Forester (1999), Healey (1997), Pløger (2004) and Innes and Booher (2003). Such authors have in common an advocacy of more collaborative planning processes engaging stakeholders and citizens in ways that encourage deliberation of issues and alternatives (Fischer 2003).

Based on a constructivist or postempiricist epistemology, this communicative turn in planning literature and policy analysis recognizes a multiplicity of ways of knowing; it accepts that rather than knowledge being the exclusive domain of experts, it is also to be found in “the local knowledge of the ordinary citizen” and thus must be engaged with in the process of planning (Fischer 2003, 222). The Aristotelian concept of phronesis and a focus on practice have also been part of this communicative turn. The concept of phronesis—‘practical wisdom’ or ‘prudence’—is used to emphasize “a practical rationality based on judgement and experience” and the value of the particular (Flyvbjerg 2001, 58). Flyvbjerg argues, however, that the concept must include explicit attention to power relations (2001), and conceives of a “phronetic planning research,” essentially analysis of “the ways in which power and values work in planning and with what consequences to whom” (2004, 283). Dryzek (1990) questions the usefulness of phronesis in the face of power and value difference in deliberation, but suggests these issues may be somewhat overcome if McIntyre (1984) “is right in claiming that practical deliberation can overcome abstract differences” and if participants strive to “understand the cultural tradition and/or conceptual framework of the other participants” (42).

The key role of civil society in deliberative democracy

Deliberative democracy can be time-consuming, and deliberative processes provided by government are necessarily limited. A key consideration must therefore be the various
spaces in which deliberative practice can be developed. What are the ways in which citizens can engage in deliberation besides the official processes offered by the state?

Gutmann and Thompson (1996) discuss the importance of civil society organizations, educational systems and the workplace in furthering the deliberative capacity of citizens. They make the following argument:

Unless citizens have the experience of reasoning together in other institutions in which they spend more of their time they are not likely to develop either the interest or the skill that would enable them to deliberate effectively in politics (359).

Dryzek (2000) similarly argues the need for deliberation to “extend more broadly throughout society” (100). He discusses the vital role of civil society organizations in creating space for policy dialogue and deliberation. According to Dryzek, civil society in its politicized sense, the “public sphere,” consists of “self-limiting political association oriented by a relationship to the state” (100). This sphere provides a counterweight to the state and a space where alternative perspectives can be forged. Dryzek argues that civil society provides an attractive site for democratic deliberation because it is a less restricted space than that encompassed by the state. While civil society has in common with the state many elements of human activity, Dryzek claims that there is more opportunity for “contestation of discourses rather than voting across alternative positions” (103); goals and interests are free to be expressed and need not be compromised or subordinated, and less coercion can mean greater opportunities for the “reflection on preferences” (103) that is central to deliberative democracy. Because pressure for democratization of the state usually originates from civil society, Dryzek stresses that the “discursive vitality of civil society” (114) is fundamentally dependent on difference and independency from the state.

As organizations that are open to the public and that encourage participation, civil society organizations can provide continuity of space for deliberation and learning. They extend deliberative processes by providing ongoing opportunities for expansion of knowledge and perspectives, and building of networks and collaborative relationships. Multi-organizational initiatives are particularly important for deliberation and learning because they encourage cross-fertilisation of ideas and integration of knowledge and perspectives. Organizations like the WA Collaboration bring together different constituencies and can broaden policy deliberation beyond official processes typically restricted to selected citizens and stakeholders, such as organized public participation.
processes and stakeholder roundtables. The WA Collaboration’s activities have supplemented government processes and generally extended community engagement with the sustainability concept and approach.

However, as has been highlighted in much of the literature, the success of deliberation—whether in the setting of officially run processes or forums hosted by civil society organizations—is subject to integration with decision-making processes and to the design of processes, particular methods used and facilitation. These and other issues affect the quality and impact of participation, in terms of the participants’ experience of the process and the outcomes generated.

**The significance of deliberative democracy for sustainability**

The important aspects of the deliberative democratic model for progressing sustainability are that it can lead to greater understanding between participants and transformation in perspectives, and in doing so more informed, collective and innovative policy-making. Because sustainability requires multiple knowledges for its holistic thinking, and broad support across sectors and communities for its implementation, the processes of knowledge sharing, reasoned argument and building of collective understanding in the deliberative democratic approach can further the sustainability of policies and decisions, and foster ownership of strategies.

As raised in Chapter 1, participation of a range of people in discussion of complex policy issues is fraught with challenges, especially in the context of sustainability where there may be tensions between environmental and social justice objectives in issues such as the pricing of public utilities and the sourcing of food locally versus globally (issues I discuss later with regard to the WA Collaboration). Deliberative processes offer a space more conducive to working through such issues and coming to closer understandings and positions. Deliberative democracy is central to progressing sustainability because it can encourage processes that facilitate integration and transformation of views for more collective outcomes, rather than individualistic approaches that tend to create negative social and environmental consequences. Deliberative democratic processes also allow for autonomy, or the ability to shape one’s life, because rather than the ineffective situation of simply asserting one’s will and
struggling against others, deliberative processes encourage people to interact through reasoned argument and contribute towards the development of collective outcomes.

Most importantly, the deliberative model represents a major vehicle for progressing sustainability because it is an iterative approach. Deliberative outcomes, like the knowledge and beliefs of participants, are not immutable: they are intended to be subject to further or ongoing deliberation. This provisional, “self-correcting capacity” (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 356) of deliberative democracy makes it particularly suited to the sustainability approach. Its “capacity for change” (1996, 356) means an openness to outcomes that can be increasingly more sustainable, in that sustainability can be understood as a constant learning process of developing in ways that are more beneficial for all life, human and otherwise, now and in the future. Gutmann and Thompson note “the political learning that reiterated deliberation makes possible” (1996, 356) and the need for “sequential consideration of proposals in which citizens and officials have multiple opportunities for criticism, revision, and reconsideration” (1999, 273). They also note the “moral progress” that can occur in society with continuous deliberation (1996, 356). This iterative nature of deliberative democracy links with my later discussion of Eckersley’s argument for the precautionary principle to be embedded in democratic practice. It complements the precautionary principle of sustainability because it is cognisant of the incompleteness of our knowledge and of the possibility for greater understanding to be gained though ongoing dialogue and deliberation.

**Complexities of participation, deliberation and sustainability**

Progressing sustainability requires participatory and dialogical processes because of the multi-faceted nature of the concept (its relation to a range of subjects and knowledge). Issues that emerge in relation to sustainability require deliberation because no one person, ‘expert’ or otherwise, has the complete knowledge to address the problems alone. The ‘wisdom of the group’ (the range of knowledge and perspectives present) allows the complexity and interrelationships between issues to be better apprehended, while a participatory and collaborative effort is required to carry out the actions needed to create a more sustainable society.
Although participatory processes have been widely recognized as central to sustainability, raised earlier in this thesis was the issue that they may not always lead to support for decisions that progress the sustainability of environmental or social systems. Participatory processes may be inclusive and may effectively engage participants, but if participants and organizers of participatory processes are not mindful of a holistic approach—of collective responsibility and appreciation of the interconnectedness of social, cultural, ecological and economic systems—outcomes of participation may not be particularly sustainable. By the same token, a participatory process may be explicitly situated in the context of sustainability, but when the outcomes of the participation are taken as a whole and aggregated, they may in effect be watered down and less sustainable than expected. Outcomes of participatory processes may also depend greatly on who is ‘at the table’—the interests and concerns present. Moreover, outcomes will be affected by the extent to which participants are encouraged to participate in a spirit of reciprocity and collective responsibility, that is, to be reflective of each other’s interests and concerns and to develop understanding of what would be mutually beneficial. This section therefore explores complexities in the relationship between public participation and sustainability and argues that processes that are genuinely deliberative and dialogical have the potential to foster more comprehensive understanding and thereby more shared and holistic outcomes.

In the foreword to the book *Community and Sustainable Development: Participation in the Future* (edited by Warburton 1998), Porritt argues that “sustainable development and community participation must go hand in hand. You can’t have one without the other” (Porritt 1998, xi). While their potential complementarity may be largely the case, the contingency of one upon the other warrants discussion. It suggests that ‘not having one without the other’ goes both ways: a) that community participation is unlikely to be successful (in terms of generating ‘common good’) unless it is placed in the context of sustainability; and b) that sustainability cannot progress without community participation.

Let us consider the implications of this. Community participation contingent on a sustainability approach would suggest that community participation is unlikely to be productive (that is, meaningful and transformative) unless it is placed in a sustainability framework. It suggests that participants would be unlikely to make decisions in the
collective spirit if they did not have some knowledge of sustainability and the holistic approach associated with it. What affects one person in a positive way and suits their interests may not be the same for another unless both parties appreciate how they can come to a more mutually-supporting position. The concept of sustainability encourages this. Likewise, awareness of the concept of sustainability can bring attention to the fact that decisions that are environmentally adverse will ultimately not be in people’s interests because they mean threatening the life support systems and resources on which people depend. The other side of the coin—sustainability contingent upon participation—suggests sustainability cannot be progressed unless people develop understanding of its significance through engagement processes and take up ownership.

This discussion begs the following questions. Is a sustainability framework necessary for participants to think beyond self-interest and appreciate the bigger picture and interdependencies of issues? Does participation and deliberation necessarily have to be explicitly placed in a context of a sustainable development or sustainability framework to be effective and transformative?

These issues are complex and require some clarification. Participation hosted explicitly in the context of sustainability has the potential to advantage or disadvantage such processes depending on the way in which they are designed and on the circumstances in which they operate (the political and cultural environment and depth of knowledge of sustainability present). If processes are genuinely deliberative and designed to allow participants the opportunity to develop (individually and collectively) their own responses both to the sustainability challenge and to the issues at hand, then explicitly framing the debate in terms of sustainability can ground the process in a holistic approach and at the same time allow for exploration and creativity. On the other hand, if a particular view of sustainability is imposed upon the process, it may distance participants and create cynicism about the process. There is also a danger that sustainability may be perceived as overriding or negating other claims to truth.

The other issue raised above is whether participation necessarily has to be placed in the context of sustainability to lead to transformative and sustainable outcomes. If organizers of participatory processes can successfully encourage a spirit of collective responsibility for outcomes, and stress the importance of reflection, learning and
solidarity (in the sense of all being in the same metaphorical ‘boat’), then these processes have the potential to generate outcomes that support sustainability without being run explicitly in the context of progressing sustainability. A genuine collective spirit of responsibility for nurturing our communities and the places we live in would mean appreciating the intrinsic value of all life, human or otherwise. Deliberative processes by their very design might therefore have the capacity to meet this challenge of generating collective responsibility towards often conflicting social, economic and environmental objectives.

Several authors have raised this possibility in their discussions of the ways in which deliberative practice might be more conducive to creating positive environmental as well as social and economic outcomes. Dryzek (1997), for example, questions the ability of democratic pragmatism to address ecological considerations effectively. Democratic pragmatism, which dominates current practice, “may be characterised in terms of interactive problem solving within the basic institutional structure of liberal capitalist democracy” (1997, 85). Although this approach recognizes the need for involvement of a plurality of knowledge and perspectives in addressing complex problems, its major limitation “is the simple existence of political power” (98). Rather than “disinterested and public-spirited problem solving in which a variety of perspectives are brought to bear with equal weight” (98), powerful interests with significant financial resources can skew outcomes in their favour and these may not coincide with ecological values. Furthermore, participants bring to deliberation different conceptions of what is in the public interest (such as economic efficiency, equity in society or ecological integrity) and can sometimes be motivated by selfish, material interests. Moreover, general interests such as the integrity of ecosystems and quality of commons resources tend to be less easily represented.

Dryzek argues that the concept of ecological modernisation has potential to address this conflict between economic and environmental values, but that it must go beyond a merely technical concept of retooling of industry and eco-efficiency to become a discourse that guides capitalist society into an environmentally enlightened era. This would involve commitments across society, not just industry, as well as “foresight, attacking problems at their origins, holism, greater valuation of scarce nature, and the precautionary principle” (143). Dryzek describes this approach in terms of Christoff’s
In his concluding chapter, Dryzek raises the question of how democratic politics might best promote ecological values. Whereas democratic pragmatism suggests that interests oriented towards the community as a whole rather than self-interest are the kinds of values that survive authentic democratic debate, the discourse of green rationalism reminds us that “existing liberal democracies typically frustrate such processes” (200); the influences of “power, money, and strategy need to be unmasked and countered, as does the degree to which human communities have lost any sense of their ecological foundations” (200). Dryzek argues that if democracy is about authentic communication, a major impediment has been an insensitivity to the existence of the non-human world. He suggests there is potential to combat this in “bioregional authorities governed by citizens with a thorough knowledge of local circumstances” (201).

Like Dryzek, Eckersley’s (2004) views are significant for their focus on how democratic processes might be more effective in terms of addressing environmental issues. Eckersley focuses on the potential of deliberative democratic practice to foster ecological outcomes and describes how this may occur through reflective discourse. She also discusses deliberative democracy in terms of its significance for reflexive ecological modernisation. Alongside a discussion of Beck’s work (1995 and 1998), Eckersley argues that the critical reflection of reflexive modernisation can lead to accountability regarding ecological risks, and thus a redefinition of responsibilities. Eckersley uses such thinking to look beyond ‘ecological modernization’ (which she

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35 According to Dryzek (2000), reflexive modernisation, as developed by Beck, Giddens and Lash (1994), among others, refers to a “questioning of previously taken-for-granted forces of social control—such as discourses” (2000, 163) and signifies “a future that is chosen, rather than a trajectory to which everyone must adjust” (164). In this situation “authority in general would be reconstituted in networks which cross over the traditional boundaries of the state, economy, and society. These networks would be the institutions of a reflexive modernity” (Dryzek 1997).
describes as the central discourse of the diffuse policy discourse of sustainable development) and to expand it into a stronger approach which she calls ‘reflexive ecological modernization.’

Ecological modernisation is primarily about regulating to raise environmental standards in ways that do not disadvantage industry, such as through competitive strategies (69). Rather than restricting economic growth, this regulation can further growth, especially in terms of environmental industries and efficiency savings (69). Eckersley argues, however, that while ecological modernisation has had a continuum of meanings and possibilities (77), it has largely provided a weak approach “concerned with mere ‘technological adjustments’” rather than a challenge to “existing institutions or dominant neoliberal economic policies” (Christoff cited in Eckersley 2004, 74). This weak interpretation should be contrasted with one that “places at center stage the ecological integrity of ecosystems and life-support systems” (75). A strong ecomodernisation approach would therefore involve changes to governance at multiple levels rather than simply adjustment of regulations and practices. Reflexivity would build in degrees and be a continual process involving changes in policy instruments, goals and paradigm, as well as in the role of the state (80).

Eckersley conceptualizes a ‘Green State’ with the role of “an ecological steward and facilitator of transboundary democracy” (3), a challenge to traditional ideas about nationhood and a demarcated polity. This kind of state would be more conducive to “reflexive societal learning” (16) than our current liberal democratic states because its transboundary approach would allow for better consideration of the extent of environmental and social risks. Forming a Green State would be a “dynamic and ongoing process of extending citizenship rights and securing more inclusive forms of political community” (16). It would involve social learning where actors, from government or otherwise, are reflexive in that they undergo transformation of their understanding of and relationship to the external environment (including other actors) through social interaction. These state and nonstate actors “engage not only in coercive or strategic action but also in deliberation and persuasion” (35).

Eckersley’s argument is for a fundamental shift in governance towards reflexivity. She notes that some key developments have begun this shift, such as the rise of international
environmental declarations and standards, the emergence of sustainable development and ecological modernisation as competitive strategies for industry and government, the emergence of environmental advocacy within civil society, and new democratic processes around impact assessment and policy and development proposals. She argues, however, that further transition will involve more than simply including civil society actors and that we must debate the very “role and rationale of the state—and how it might respond to global competitive pressures” (64). Instead of the trading-off of preferences that tends to lead to “unfair displacement of risks onto innocent third parties” (118, emphasis in original), we must move towards a critical and robust public sphere (60-64).

What is needed, according to Eckersley, is the incorporation and formalisation in governance of deliberative democratic processes that bring risk and precaution to the forefront, and emphasize moral rather than pragmatic deliberation. Such processes would involve decision rules and procedures encouraging moral consideration of risk to all ‘others’ (164-5). Embedded within these processes would be the precautionary principle to ensure “consideration of potential environmental impacts on differently situated others, including impacts on the interests of future generations and nonhuman species” (136).\(^{36}\) It would represent a decision rule for “presumption against” decisions carrying serious risks, and would place the onus of proof on proponents to provide evidence of the “absence of such risks” (135). It would be “interpreted and applied discursively” in order to determine its appropriateness to the case at hand (135).

Eckersley highlights three core ideals of the deliberative model that make it “especially suited to dealing with complex and variable ecological problems and concerns” (117): unconstrained dialogue, inclusiveness and social learning. Regarding the first, deliberation becomes distorted or constrained if reasoned argument is clouded by the status or authority of the speaker, force, deception or bribery, or limited by lack of information, time or representation. The principle of inclusiveness, “enlarged thinking” or what Arendt calls “representative thinking,” encourages people to regard all “others”

\(^{36}\) The precautionary principle has been adopted widely in sustainable development strategies and policies around the world and was stated in the Rio Declaration as the following: “Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation” (principle 15) (135-6). Eckersley claims this definition should have added to it the words “to present and future human and nonhuman communities” after the words “irreversible damage” to avoid narrow interpretations (135).
in their deliberations, that is, to respect their autonomy (117). Societal learning is about the educative potential of public deliberation and requires that “participants be open and flexible in their thinking” and enter the dialogue “with a preparedness to have their preferences transformed through reasoned argument” (116-117). Such features invite “reflexivity, self-correction, and the continual public testing of claims” (117).

Eckersley’s approach “aspires toward moral rather than pragmatic reasoning, since moral reasoning directs deliberations toward the widest possible constituency of affected parties” (164). Participants would engage in a process of expressing interests, but rather than mere interest bargaining would “at least strive to adopt ‘the moral point of view’” (165). The approach would employ “[s]urrogate forms of advocacy, and decision rules that bring neglected interest into view” in order to protect all significantly affected “others” (human or otherwise, living or not-yet living) from self-serving or exploitative behaviour (126-127).

Eckersley’s ideas are pertinent to my argument that deliberative forms of participation can further sustainability, particularly when they involve critical reflection. Her ideas are valuable because they provide a focus on how ecological considerations can be incorporated into deliberative democratic practice through emphasis on precaution regarding risks to all others (human or otherwise). They are significant for exploring the way in which reflexive discourse can further the development of collective purpose and responsibility during the process of participation. Eckersley brings to theories of moral deliberation a focus on environmental as well as social considerations. Authors like Gutmann and Thompson (1996) consider the significance of moral argument and reflection in deliberations over public policy issues, but their focus is on navigating difficult and sometimes intractable social policy issues, such as abortion, affirmative action and welfare provision, through awareness of moral disagreement in deliberation, or deliberation bringing to the fore “conflicts about fundamental values” (1996, 1).

Arguments such as Eckersley’s and Gutmann and Thompson’s can complement each other with regard to how moral difference and intractable positions might be addressed in deliberation. However, the specific ways in which value difference and moral disagreement are dealt with in practice bear further examination, and this is the subject of the next chapter of this thesis.
The preceding discussion has raised the difficulties of generating collective responsibility and ensuring a range of perspectives, including environmental, are incorporated into democratic participation in the face of barriers such as power imbalances and vested interests. However, democratic participation that is genuinely deliberative has the potential to lead to more sustainable outcomes because such processes encourage critical reflection and facilitate expansion of understanding of the world and the interests and needs of human or non-human ‘others.’ Deliberative forms of democratic practice are more conducive to sustainability than those that are less deliberative because they are more likely to encourage enlargement of perspective and development of greater (more comprehensive and more far reaching) understanding among participants, be they ‘citizen,’ ‘stakeholder,’ ‘specialist,’ ‘official’ or otherwise. Indeed, Smith’s (2003) views concur with these conclusions:

There is no necessary connection between environmental values and deliberative democracy… However, the cultivation of democratic deliberation offers a conducive context within which the plurality of environmental values and perspectives on the non-human world can be voiced and considered in the political process. It provides conditions under which the conflict between environmental (and other) values can be appreciated, and solutions to complex environmental problems sought (2003, 76, emphasis added).

A central issue for sustainability, however, is the development of deliberative processes that can allow participants to engage effectively with the range of knowledge and perspectives present. Deliberative processes must encourage participants to engage with a diversity of interests, backgrounds, worldviews, beliefs and values if they are to forge more informed, innovative and shared approaches to future development. While this deeper dialogue can help create more sustainable outcomes without being placed overtly in the context of a ‘sustainable development’ or ‘sustainability’ framework, sustainability is more likely to be progressed when deliberative processes explicitly encourage engagement with the complexity and interrelatedness of ecological and social considerations, and are guided by awareness of concepts such as social justice and ecological integrity.
CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the emergence and potential for sustainability of a more participatory, collaborative and moreover deliberative governance. Such conditions can foster informed and relevant decision-making, broader support for policies and actions, and the engagement of citizens in shaping their communities. The chapter has argued that this context is particularly conducive to progressing sustainability because it can create space for the more comprehensive understanding needed to develop holistic and mutually beneficial outcomes. Furthermore, as a contested and context-specific concept, sustainability requires opportunities to develop shared approaches to solving policy issues.

While participatory and collaborative processes are largely conducive to the development of inclusive outcomes, there are considerable challenges inherent in the power imbalances and differing values and perspectives brought to these exchanges. This chapter has therefore raised questions about what particular forms and conditions of participation might be needed to accommodate a sustainability agenda, and how genuine exchange and expansion of knowledge and perspectives might occur. I have argued that more attention needs to be given to fostering reflective dialogue and learning in deliberative and collaborative processes, that is, to their capacity for transformation.
Chapter 3
Transactional space: expanding capacity for transformative exchange

Whereas public deliberation needs to be anchored in facts, sound judgement—whether on the part of individuals or groups—is not based mainly on a command of pertinent facts, as policy experts often assume. Deliberation consists chiefly of exchanges about what individuals and groups value, their priorities and personal stories and their relevance to public concerns (Melville et al. 2005, 42).

Envisioning sustainable futures will mean, at the very least, clarifying these underlying value premises. It will also entail discovering, even more than we do at present, why such value premises are formed and through what processes of revelation they may be accommodated into larger and more coherent social structures (O’Riordan 1998, 109).

Deliberative and collaborative governance holds potential for progressing sustainability, yet, as discussed in Chapter 2, there remains the fundamental challenge of developing opportunities for a depth of exchange in which more comprehensive understanding can be generated around complex issues. In this chapter I explore how such processes of potentially transformative exchange might be developed. I argue that greater opportunities for critical and reflective dialogue have the capacity to make deliberative and collaborative processes more transformative, and thus more conducive to the depth of learning needed for progressing sustainability. An exploration of the challenges involved in developing effective deliberative processes leads to an examination of key literature informing and supporting the concept of transactional space. Drawing on this I then consider how transactional space can enhance participatory processes. The concept of ‘transactional space’ brings into focus critical, reflective dialogue as a vehicle for engagement with differing interests, perspectives and values.

DEVELOPING REFLECTIVE DIALOGUE

Arnstein’s (1969) well-known ladder of participation introduced more than three decades ago is notable for drawing attention to the purpose and nature of participatory democratic processes. It highlighted a major concern regarding citizens having real power to affect decision-making processes, rather than poorly organized and even tokenistic processes that fail to allow citizens the opportunity to influence, individually and collectively, the decisions that affect them.
Such concerns have persisted, and the following are two key considerations that pervade the literature of participatory and deliberative democratic practice.

a) How might these processes allow citizens and stakeholders to have real power to affect decision-making?

b) How might they foster the ability of participants to be genuinely involved in deliberation and contribute perspectives?

These two aspects are of course inextricable: if a citizen has power of voice in a participatory process then the citizen is more likely to have the power to affect the larger decision-making process; at the same time, if the citizen feels the process is genuine and that their participation will be taken seriously, they will be encouraged to contribute. Furthermore, both aspects fundamentally relate to the quality and effectiveness of the participatory process—the first refers to how well it is integrated into the policy-making process, and the second, how well it is organized to enable effective participation and deliberation.

In this thesis I am concerned more with the nature, dynamics and quality of deliberative processes than with the ways in which deliberative, participatory processes might be integrated into larger policy-making processes. This quality relates to the participant’s experience of the process (satisfaction and feeling of empowerment from being heard and included, and from the opportunity to gain knowledge), and that of the organizer (the level of informed participation achieved and thus quality of outcomes). I am therefore primarily concerned with exploring the effectiveness of deliberative dialogue in including multiple perspectives and in integrating and developing these perspectives for more informed and shared outcomes.

There is much dispute about what forms of dialogue are most effective in deliberative processes, what the principles of such processes should be, and how these processes can deal with self-interest and potential power imbalances, and ensure inclusion of all voices, particularly those that tend to be marginalised or less dominant. The following discussion thus considers some key perspectives on the nature and process of effective deliberation, and provides particular insights into the difficulties often encountered.
Considerations for deliberative process

Literature relating to deliberative democracy frequently raises the issues of inclusion or opportunity to affect the process of deliberation, power imbalances, self-interest, and development of mutual agreement in the presence of diversity of views. Many theorists are concerned with the capacity of the deliberative process to allow all present to participate and contribute their knowledge and perspectives (for example Benhabib 1996, Gutmann and Thompson 1996, Elster 1998, Macedo 1999, Dryzek 1990 and 2000, Young 1997 and 2000, Fung and Wright 2003, Hajer and Wagenaar 2003, and Matravers and Pike 2003). The arguments of authors such as these have served to expand deliberative theory with attention to how deliberation is affected by the differences and unequal communicative abilities people bring to discourse. Some of the key concerns relate to factors affecting the ability of participants to communicate their views and respond to other views, such as race, ethnicity and culture, education, employment and socio-economic status, and gender, age and personality (for example, how assertive they might be). These factors can affect a person’s use of language and the way they are perceived and understood; they can influence whether what a participant says is perceived as more or less valuable, eloquent or reasonable. Participants may have varying command of language due to their backgrounds, as well as differing thinking and communicating styles.

Young (1997 and 2000) in particular discusses the need to facilitate inclusion of often underrepresented or marginalised groups in deliberation, such as particular racial and ethnic groups, women, youth and the aged, through various modes of communication. She argues that the emphasis on reasoned argument and force of the ‘better,’ more unified argument that has tended to dominate deliberative theory may be too simplistic a rule to ensure the inclusiveness of all participants.

Gunder (2003) also responds to the fundamental challenges of developing inclusion and agreement in the presence of diversity. Like Flyvbjerg (2004), Gunder is concerned with the issue of power in planning practice. He argues that communicative planning theory based on Habermas’ ideas fails to sufficiently account for power imbalances, and represents an approach that in practice leads to lower levels of equality and diversity of voice. While the approach sees the planner as the “shaper of attention” (Forester 1999
cited in Gunder 2003, 239) and “facilitator of public normative consensus as to what ought to be” (Innes 1995 and Healey 1997 cited in Gunder 2003, 239), such consensus, Gunder claims, depends on the degree to which power imbalances can be overcome. Citing Hillier and Flyvbjerg, Gunder argues that “[s]ubtle and overt power asymmetries” among participants often “negate the potential for democratic equality in public debate and participatory decision-making” (2003, 240).

In “The Myth of the Best Argument: Power, Deliberation and Reason” (2001), Pellizzoni provides an important discussion of the nature of power and difference in deliberation and their effect on the process. Like Young, Gunder and many others, Pellizzoni questions the typically Habermasian view that agreement may be found in the most convincing of arguments and most collectively preferable of solutions, no matter who presents them. An argumentative process should involve all available arguments and knowledge, but Pellizzoni suggests that this may not always be the case. He also raises the problems that sometimes languages may remain incommensurate and the ‘best’ argument may not be found.

In his discussion of the issue of power in communication, Pellizzoni describes power in terms of two interconnected modes: “external” power is about how participants react to other participants, “the ability to acknowledge or disregard a speaker or a discourse;” “internal” power refers to “the ability of an argument to eliminate other arguments by demonstrating its superiority” or robustness (59, emphasis added). Conceptualising power in terms of internal and external modes does not suggest the two are separate aspects but simply helps break down the problem. Whereas internal power can be attributed to the “most persuasive idea – the one that analyses a problem most thoroughly and indicates the optimal solution in terms of technical excellence and moral rightness” (62), external power means that what a participant says may be disregarded if it is seen as irrelevant, incorrect, inadmissible or as “employing non-standard expressive tones and registers, or mixing them inappropriately” (61). Referring to Lyotard’s arguments (1983), Pellizzoni also suggests that the way participants react to others may simply be related to how meaningful they find what another says (61, emphasis added).

In the face of such dynamics, a key question must therefore be how do participants develop meaning among themselves in the process of deliberation and engage in mutual
What type of dialogue can encourage this and provide opportunities to better understand where fellow participants are ‘coming from’ and to appreciate the knowledge they have to contribute?

Self-interest and the principle of reciprocity

These concerns for deliberative process have been discussed in a range of literature where important insights have emerged regarding the ways in which greater meaning might be generated among participants in deliberation, and in turn more comprehensive understanding and perspective. It is important firstly to consider the challenge of self-interest and its relationship to the principle of reciprocity that many describe as fundamental to deliberation. A useful way of looking at the issues of difference of interest and self-interest is in terms of the “diverse intensities of preference” (varying strengths of feeling for particular choices) that participants bring to a subject (Fearon 1998, 45). Fearon argues that deliberative processes have the potential to allow for the expression and apprehension of these intensities. Mansbridge (2003) highlights the centrality of the identification of respective interests to the process of deliberation. She argues that “[a]s participants in deliberation, we cannot understand ourselves or others, or work out just resolutions to many conflicts, if we cannot formulate relatively accurately and express relatively well some conception of our own narrow self-interest” (176). She stresses the need to expand the concept of deliberation “to include a greater normative role for self-interest” (176). Indeed, it is when people’s interests and assumptions are made explicit that they then have the opportunity to negotiate these and work towards more common ground.

Gutmann and Thompson (1996) offer another perspective on the roles of self-interest, disagreement and reciprocity in deliberation. They argue that differing moral perspectives should not be taken as simply a reflection of conflicting self-interests and that “reducing moral disagreement entirely to self-interest is misleading” (20). They also suggest that some policy debates—such as those about abortion, pornography and capital punishment—involves differing moral perspectives more than conflicting self-interests. Gutmann and Thompson argue that even if self-interest influences the positions citizens take in a dispute “it does not completely determine them” (19), and does not mean that citizens are unable to “stand outside the arena of self-interested
combat and judge the merits of the conflicting claims” (20) or take a moral position that is irrespective of what they have to gain or lose.

Gutmann and Thompson argue that in the face of deliberative disagreement a sense of reciprocity—the “sense of mutuality that citizens and their representatives should bring to the public forum” (52)—“calls on citizens to continue to seek fair terms of cooperation among equals” (53); it encourages citizens to “aspire to a kind of political reasoning that is mutually justifiable” and to offer “reasons that can be accepted by others who are similarly motivated to find reasons that can be accepted by others” (53).

This fundamental principle of deliberative practice provides a linchpin for my argument that while the differing perspectives people bring to deliberation present challenges to transformative exchange, these can be negotiated and utilised to produce more creative and robust deliberative outcomes if participants are encouraged by the process to forge understanding of each other’s perspectives. A notion of reciprocity is crucial in deliberative practice because it provides motivation for reflection on one’s own as well as other perspectives. It helps participants appreciate that if they want to be heard and understood then they must do the same for others, and therefore must seek to apprehend a plurality of knowledges and perspectives.

The above discussion has raised the point that although self-interest in deliberation involves a desire for one’s interests to prevail, it is also an indication of underlying differences in values between participants. I argue, therefore, that rather than dismissing disagreement among participants as simple ‘self-interest’, practitioners and analysts of deliberative practice must give due attention to the role that difference of perspective plays in the deliberative process. That is, consideration must be given not only to how differences of perspective, worldview or underlying value frameworks cause participants to adhere to particular arguments and create tensions, but also to how they present opportunities for deliberation. The above discussion has also raised the point that difference of interests and values does not mean participants are unable to appreciate those of others, and indeed, as Mansbridge has suggested, clarification of one’s own interests and values relies on this very process of appreciation.
I am therefore concerned here with how perspectives might be expressed and understood in dialogue and deliberation such that thinking may be expanded and developed in the process, and may in turn contribute to more integrative and shared approaches to public policy issues. In the case of sustainability, people’s perspectives need to meet and be integrated and transformed if they are to create solutions that are as informed and collectively-supported as possible. Such a process can help create win-win solutions or at least more mutually beneficial outcomes across social, economic and environmental objectives.

Many authors have offered important insights regarding how deliberative practice might be more reflective, integrative and transformative. In the following discussion I first explore Young’s arguments for their consideration of the way in which deliberation can and should be inclusive of different perspectives. Young’s arguments complement those of Eckersley discussed in the preceding chapter in their emphasis on inclusion of different needs and concerns in deliberation.

**Inclusive deliberation**

In several of her writings (including 1997 and 2000), Young argues that the deliberative model that is usually articulated focuses too narrowly on critical argument as a vehicle for deliberation and that this conception of deliberation should be broadened to include recognition of the important roles of other forms of communication such as greeting, rhetoric and storytelling. These she claims can help make deliberation more inclusive of various social groups by providing alternative ways of expression. She also argues that differences of social position and perspective should function as resources for deliberation and not be sidelined or ignored in the interest of developing a ‘unified’ view.

Young (1997) contends that a view of political discussion as reasoned argument presupposes that participants have equal opportunity to “put forward proposals and criticize them,” and that they are free and equal to assent to a conclusion that is made simply through “force of the better argument” (1997, 62). She argues that this form of communication tends to privilege individuals and social groups familiar and competent with it and to disadvantage those who are not, and who may be more comfortable and
effective in deliberation using other forms of communication. She therefore stresses the need for inclusion of the following:

- **greeting**: preliminaries can help parties establish trust or respect, and gestures of politeness, deference and positive affirmation or even flattery help “lubricate ongoing discussion” (70);
- **rhetoric**: rhetorical flourishes, bodily expressions of emotion and figurative language (such as the use of symbolism, hyperbole and metaphor) help a speaker gain attention and connect with their audience. Consistent with Young, Dryzek (2000) argues that rhetoric is important for “deliberating across difference…because it entails communication that attempts to reach those subscribing to a different frame of reference, or discourse” (167); he suggests it can involve “emotional appeals to an audience” (167). Mansbridge (2003) likewise argues that emotional appeals may sometimes be needed to draw attention to certain perspectives, but that “[p]articipants in deliberation are often uncomfortable with the emotions used to express intensity of conviction or need” (176); she thus argues that good practice would mean “developing and making explicit norms that allow ‘non-rational’ forms of communication” (189);
- **narrative**: Young argues that the relation of stories or personal experiences helps reveal particular experiences and sources of values, culture and meaning, and in so doing helps foster understanding across difference; narrative also helps reveal the situated knowledge (knowledge from the point of view of a particular social position) such that listeners may learn more about how their own perspectives relate to those of others and may together generate “the collective social wisdom not available from any one position” (73).37

Young claims that these communicative forms are particularly important for some people (such as racial minorities and women) to convey meaning and respond to others. She argues, however, that they are often discounted and seen as signs of weakness in formalised discussion forums privileging critical argument, which is typically expected to be as ‘rational,’ calm and devoid of emotion as possible.

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37 As an example, Young suggests that a person with a disability might need to narrate some of their experiences to illustrate the kinds of facilities or infrastructure they require. Indeed, a deliberative survey process discussed later in this chapter involved dramatisations of participants’ experiences, one of which related to wheelchair access at the beach.
Although modes of communication such as rhetoric and testimony or storytelling might improve and be readily incorporated into deliberative democracy, Dryzek (2000) points out that these can also have disadvantages, such as rhetoric being used to manipulate emotions and thereby coerce an audience, particular kinds of stories being more acceptable, and greeting being used to intimidate. Dryzek stresses that such forms should be used in a noncoercive way and primarily to connect the “particular to the general” (167).

Returning to Young’s (1997) ideas, she argues that rather than assuming that deliberation is “culturally neutral,” that reasoned argument is “universal” (63), and that “unity is either a starting point or goal” (62), deliberation should bring to the fore differences of knowledge, experience and perspective because they are vital in informing any conclusions that may be drawn. This “difference is not total otherness” (67); there are potential similarities to be found. She suggests that conceiving deliberation as narrowly focussed on unity means the concerns and perspectives of minorities and the marginalised are often left behind, and that those of the privileged tend to “dominate the definition of that common good” (66). It also means missing the opportunity for the learning and transformation of opinion that can occur through “mutual expression of experience” (68) and “listening across difference” (69). Young suggests that a more ‘real’ and robust sense of unity can develop when participants express difference and thereby transcend and transform their partial knowledge or perspectives.

Young’s concerns, in essence, relate to how deliberative process can facilitate inclusion of a diversity of interests and perspectives. This diversity may be due to cultural differences, difference in social position, or gender and age differences. Young (2000) explains that people come from differing social locations that offer “differentiated knowledge of social events and their consequences” (136). She refers to this as “social perspective” and argues that rather than being only sources of division or

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38 It should be noted here that the notion of ‘diversity’ tends to be a slippery and complex construct. As raised in Chapter 2, _multiple layers of diversity_ affect social interactions and in particular collaborative initiatives. Such complexity is discussed in the literature of ‘intergroup relations.’ Ragins and Gonzalez (2003), for example, remind us that diversity is a construct that “has been viewed as a state, as a process, and as a political act” (133). Consistent with Young’s concerns they raise the issue that “defining diversity as all of the ways in which people differ may dilute diversity by treating all differences as equal, thus ignoring group differences that result in discrimination and unequal treatment in organizations” (129).
conflict, “group differentiation offers resources to a communicative democratic public that aims to do justice, because differently positioned people have different experience, history, and social knowledge derived from that positioning” (136). These perspectives are different but not necessarily incompatible because each “is particular and partial with respect to the whole social field, and from each perspective some aspects of the reality of social processes are more visible than others” (136). Furthermore, social perspective consists in “assumptions with which reasoning begins, rather than the conclusions drawn,” and people with a similar perspective on a subject may still have differing interests and opinions (137). Social perspective simply helps to “set a framework of interpretation” (139). This reasoning supports the point I made in the previous section when discussing Mansbridge’s (2003) and Gutmann and Thompson’s (1996) arguments.

Young thus argues that the communication of different knowledge and experience “helps correct biases derived from the dominance of partial perspective over the definition of problems or their possible solutions” (2000, 83, emphasis added). Moreover, it enables participants collectively to “construct a more comprehensive account” (83, emphasis added). People’s perspectives may sometimes seem incommensurate but when put together usually “offer additional questions and fuller social knowledge” rather than cancel one another out (141). Young further describes the potential learning and change that can occur when we “interact with other people’s ideas and experiences” (1997, 65) by suggesting that:

a. we reformulate our ideas as we express and explicate them; and
b. we reformulate them as we listen to and appreciate other ideas about solutions.

Understanding another perspective does not mean we have full understanding or “mutual identification” (68). It simply means we are open to a plurality of perspectives and additional knowledge, and in this way may together “gain a wider picture” and generate “greater social objectivity” (69). This can help us “understand more of what the society means or what the possible consequences of a policy will be” (68), and help us recognize and respond to the unique needs of particular social groups rather than simply what is in the ‘general’ or ‘common’ interest.

Eckersley (2004) similarly highlights how such reflection can create greater objectivity, while also pointing out the difficulty involved: “[t]o the extent that we can reach such
intersubjective understandings that transcend particular standpoints (noting that this can be a complicated and hazardous process), we can say we have attained a degree of objective knowledge about the world” (123). She explains that “such a postpositivist epistemology does not deny the existence of nature as an extra-discursive reality; it simply acknowledges that we do not have any shared access to this reality other than through discourse” (123). Like Young’s discussion of social perspectives, Eckersley argues that “understandings of ‘reality’ will always be historically and culturally specific, provisional, and potentially always vulnerable to challenge and change” (123).

With regard to the concept of transactional space, I refer to this extension of understanding as a process of expansion and transformation of perspective. People’s knowledge and perspectives on issues are by nature partial and imperfect; while participants can never fully understand or hold the knowledge and perspectives of those differently situated, participants can nevertheless:

- learn a great deal through the process of listening to and considering other thoughts and perspectives;
- expand and partly transform their own knowledge and perspectives; and
- contribute to a more developed collective wisdom.

This is a process that is central to sustainability because of the greater wisdom required to make decisions that can provide better outcomes across a range of interrelated systems.

**Exploring the nature of critical reflection in deliberation through theories about transformative learning, frame reflection, narrative and dialogue**

This section now considers more closely the nature of critical reflection in deliberation as it relates to the concept of transactional space. While the concepts and ideas discussed in this section arise from a range of literature and relate to differing contexts, they all shed light on developing transformative exchange in participatory and deliberative practice. The following section therefore considers some of the contributions of, and overlaps between, theories related to transformative learning, frame reflection, narrative and dialogue, and what they together reveal about effective deliberation.
Transformative learning

As the preceding discussion has suggested, reflection on differing perspectives, reformulation of perspectives, and development of wider perspective or collective wisdom, have the potential to create a transformative process of learning. This type of learning tends to be challenging but is central to sustainability and possible through well designed deliberative processes.

The theory of ‘transformative learning’ has recently become an important focus in the literature of adult education, which Cranton (1994) highlights applies to a diversity of settings such as community organizations, university courses and training sessions in business and industry. In her guide to transformative learning, Cranton describes the theory of transformative learning as developed by Mezirow. Learning in simple terms refers to the processing of information, construction of meaning, change in memory and transformation of understanding that occurs within an individual (Cranton 1994), but here I am also concerned with the collective learning that can take place in a deliberative situation. I argue that this generation of collective wisdom involves the shared development of more expansive perspective and thus a degree of group orientation towards mutual learning and working collaboratively.

Although adults bring a rich set of experiences and resources to a learning environment and can benefit from the sharing of these, prior learning can both enhance and interfere with new learning (Cranton 1994). Learning can also be affected by a person’s “self-concept” (self-esteem) and estimation of the value of their knowledge, as well as their particular learning style (40). More importantly for this thesis, learning may sometimes be uncomfortable; Mezirow points out that transformative learning can be a painful process (Mezirow 1991, in Cranton 1994).

Transformative learning in the deliberative context is in this way challenging. Nevertheless, Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning can assist understanding of the context, particularly for its exploration of processes of critical reflection (both critical self-reflection and critical reflection on other people’s ideas and views). Mezirow describes reflection as “the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience” (Mezirow
reflection occurs when we critically examine the content of a problem, the strategies by which we approach it, and the assumptions relating to it, the latter being important for the actual transformation of meaning perspectives.

A person may hold multiple perspectives and these “perspectives are made up of specific values, assumptions, and beliefs, that Mezirow called meaning schemes” (Cranton 1994, 42). “[M]eaning perspectives” are then “the structure[s] of cultural and psychological assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one’s past experience” (Mezirow 1985, 144 in Cranton 1994, 24-5). These filter our experiences, often uncritically, into ways of knowing and believing, which can include distortions, prejudices and misunderstandings.

Transformative learning occurs when the learner is conscious of this and engages with reflection and perspective transformation (Cranton 1994): it is “a process of examining, questioning, validating, and revising these perceptions” (26) that especially involves “self-directed learning” (59). While this may come naturally to some people, Cranton notes how difficult it is “to step outside our worldview and explicate the foundation for it” (217). She therefore suggests that this critical reflection and introspection be encouraged and supported from outside. Although not all learning is transformative, and other forms such as simply “adding knowledge to our meaning schemes or learning new meaning schemes” are “crucially important” (Mezirow 1991, 223 cited in Cranton 1994, 19), because of the way education shapes individuals and societies, Cranton argues that transformative learning should be a central goal.

The theory of transformative learning is clearly relevant to expanding the capacity of deliberative and collaborative processes for transformative exchange, but how exactly can it help further sustainability? As I have argued throughout the preceding chapters, sustainability necessitates participation and dialogue. Developing greater understanding about sustainability and more holistic approaches to policy issues requires deliberative opportunities in which participants can engage not only at practical and strategic levels but also at the values level. Transformative learning can support progress towards sustainability by helping to deepen the level of engagement with the concept and with the perspectives surrounding it. It can help create a space in which participants are
together engaged in a process of examining beliefs and assumptions, and in doing so expand their perspectives and understanding.

Several authors have considered the role of such a depth of learning in developing understanding about and commitment to sustainability, and this is particularly evident in the emerging area of Learning or Education for Sustainability. In his doctoral thesis, Sterling (2003) argues that sustainability requires higher order or deeper learning—which he also refers to as transformative learning—involving “a deep, conscious reordering of assumptions equivalent to epistemic change” and “leading to change of paradigm” (283). He cites the view of the Center for Transformative Learning (University of Toronto) that this means experiencing “a deep structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions” as well as in “our understanding of ourselves and our self-location: our relationships with other humans and with the natural world” (Morrell and O’Connor 2002, xvii, cited in Sterling 2003, 280). He believes, and from experience asserts, that this kind of space is conducive to empathetic and innovative responses. He concurs with the suggestion of the view cited above “that an expanded worldview inevitably leads to an embracing of ecology, social justice, and personal development, and that deep learning inevitably leads to such an orientation” (280). This is an assumption I share in my argument for creating transactional space for sustainability. Sterling refers to several other key authors that support his assumption that deeper learning generates new meaning and understanding, and ultimately leads to expansion of perspective and more integrative thinking. Particularly useful is Ison and Stowell’s explanation of the process:

…each learner goes through a period of chaos, confusion and being overwhelmed by complexity before new conceptual information brings about a spontaneous restructuring of mental models at a higher level of complexity thereby allowing a learner to understand concepts that were formerly opaque (Ison and Stowell 2000, 3, cited in Sterling 2003, 288).

Like these authors, and Mezirow and Cranton, Sterling recognizes that transformative learning can be uncomfortable and challenging as it represents a space in which people undergo major shifts in thinking during interaction. Sterling cites Hawkins’ description of this state, a view that concurs with my own regarding transactional space:

The other more useful way of viewing this level is that it provides temporary access to a higher logical level of awareness, where we have the space to become free of our normal perspectives and paradigm and constraints to see through them rather than with them, and thus create the space to change them (Hawkins 1991, 172, cited in Sterling 2003, 130).
Another view that resonates strongly with the concept of transactional space I present in this thesis is Reason’s description of a level of learning that is “an experience of self much more fully in transaction with others and with the environment, a participatory self or participatory mind” (Reason 1995, 3, cited in Sterling 2003, 130, emphasis added).

As raised earlier in this thesis, I approach sustainability as a contested, iterative process. I therefore argue here that learning around sustainability should be understood in participatory and dialogical terms. Sterling describes learning as “an essentially creative, reflexive and participative process” (285); within this, “[k]nowing is seen as approximate, relational and often provisional, and framed in terms of participatory knowing” (285-286). He argues that this approach signifies a shift “towards ‘learning as change’ which engages the whole person and the whole learning community” (286). This means that “[l]earning is continual exploration through practice,” and that “sustainability becomes an emergent property of the sets of relationships that evolve” (286). Such a process involves an “ability to work with ambiguity and uncertainty” (286).

Sterling acknowledges that transformative learning experiences can occur informally and without intervention but believes they should be encouraged and facilitated by appropriate design or control of a learning situation. They require “an intent on the part of the designers/teachers born of their own learning, to construct a learning system through which they can encourage others to explore epistemic change, as a collaborative inquiry” (289). This is a view I share in my argument for expansion of transactional space in deliberative situations. This expansion relies on conscious efforts to create learning environments in which reflective and transformative exchange can occur, whether this be in educational, organizational or civic deliberative settings.

Other authors besides Sterling have emphasized the benefits of processes of critical reflection on assumptions and values for supporting dialogue and action towards sustainability. As discussed in Chapter 2, processes that help clarify values are crucial.

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39 Wooltorton (2003) takes a similar view of transition towards sustainability and cultural change, and argues for reconnective transformative learning centred around ‘community.’

40 Sterling’s approach is founded upon a participatory worldview that is central to cooperative inquiry and participatory action research processes.
to the success of collaborative or partnership initiatives. These processes play an important role in any participatory or deliberative setting and are particularly important to developing greater understanding around sustainability. Tilbury and Ross (2006) explore the role of values clarification in engagement with sustainability and learning. They provide a useful description of values and how they affect interaction: “[v]alues are certain beliefs, attitudes, or convictions that are reflected in decisions and actions and are passed along through cultural processes. People use values to judge the worth of ideas or actions” (20). Tilbury and Ross explain that values clarification “involves providing participants with strategically open ended questions to assist them in thinking about what they value and why they value those qualities or things” (20). Tilbury et al. (2005) claim that such strategies can enable learners “to clarify and critically examine their own values, particularly those which are unconscious or inarticulate” (52). They explain that this kind of process “helps learners uncover how our culture, ideology, gender, socio-economic background and religion shapes our deepest held personal beliefs and values and assists learners in determining how our own values coincide or conflict with others” (52). They argue that “[g]enuine engagement with sustainability requires us to understand how these factors shape our values and thus our view of the world” (52).

These authors have in common with Sterling an understanding of learning as an inherently inclusive process of personal and shared discovery that helps build appreciation of the complexity and interrelatedness of systems. Such approaches tend to be informed by ‘systems thinking’ which Tilbury et al. (2005) describe as a type of thinking methodology that “emphasizes holistic, integrative approaches, which take into account the relationships between system components and works toward long-term solutions critical to addressing issues of sustainability” (52). Keen, Brown and Dyball (2005) explain that “to understand things systemically literally means to put them into a context” (12).

Fagan’s (1998) views highlight the importance for progressing sustainability of grounding participatory processes in local knowledge and contexts where people are in touch with certain issues and can relate to them. He argues that “[t]he educational process necessary to deliver sustainable behaviour must seek to re-engage local people in learning and internalising sustainability” (207). This garnering of knowledge should
be a collective and popular process involving critical discussion of past actions and future plans, and should be connected to real life and local action. In sum, Fagan, among many others, advocates learning about sustainability through genuine participation where the interchange of knowledge and mutual reflection helps participants understand sustainability for themselves, discover meaning collectively, and in turn appreciate their responsibilities.

This type of process also gives people the opportunity to access a range of information and experience, and thus expand their knowledge and perspectives. In her discussion of community involvement in sustainable development, Warburton (1998b) makes a similar point.

Placing different knowledges and, possibly, values, alongside our own, allows us to re-evaluate our own knowledge and beliefs… Once the space has been established for this potential to be explored and understood, new solutions can begin to be found (29).

Also in reference to sustainable development, O’Riordan (1998) provides an insightful observation about the nature of empowerment and the motivation for people to engage with different perspectives. Citing Schwerin (1993), O’Riordan argues that “[e]mpowerment is not so much demonstrating the acquisition of power, as it is the creation of conditions for social and individual self respect and for a willingness to listen with care and flexibility to the interests and aspirations of others” (108).

A common theme emerging from the arguments discussed above is that sustainability requires continuous learning and that this can occur though dialogical and deliberative processes that encourage ongoing critical reflection on knowledge, assumptions, beliefs and values. These processes can help develop the comprehensiveness of understanding needed to bring sustainability concepts to fruition.

**Frame reflection**

As with the theories related to critical reflection and transformative learning, the concept of ‘frames’ provides an important way of focussing on the way in which people’s perspectives affect deliberation and may be developed in the process. The meaning schemes and meaning perspectives that Mezirow describes are not dissimilar from the ‘frames’ that authors of policy analysis literature discuss, such as Schön and
Rein (1994), Laws and Rein (2003), and Yanow (2003). This literature highlights the frame conflict that can occur in deliberation and the central role of reflection on frames and reframing.

Frames are essentially constituted of the beliefs and values we develop through experience and carry to help us interpret experience. As structures or frameworks for meaning, frames can also be seen as the perspectives people hold. Goffman describes frames as responses to the problems we encounter in everyday life and seek to make sense of (Goffman 1974 in Laws and Rein 2003). As Young and Mezirow suggest regarding perspectives, these frames or worldviews help us interpret what we experience but come up against others during interaction. Laws and Rein claim that policy discourse is typically “problem centred” because of “either dominance or pluralism” of frames (174). Yanow (2003) explains that frame conflict occurs not only because of differing interpretive positions but also because participants actually “value different elements [of a policy issue] differently” and seek to validate and gain public recognition of their values (238).

When frames or perspectives are challenged in deliberation by the emergence of new information, participants may be prompted to reflect on other people’s perspectives as well as engage in critical self-reflection. This can help to explicate the assumptions that often present underlying barriers to greater understanding among people, and can help them apprehend difference and integrate knowledge and perspectives around an issue. Indeed, Barns (1992) argues that rather than being impediments to understanding, frames are inevitably the way we come to understand things and thus must be explicated. He argues that explication of value frames has a key role to play in debate about sustainable development.

The way in which worldviews and values affect interaction is complex, however. An individual may carry multiple frameworks for meaning to deliberation. Furthermore, rather than clearly defined frameworks for meaning, frames can be highly nuanced and sometimes ambiguous. They can also shift as people move between situations and are faced with the frames or perspectives of other people. Schön and Rein (1994) argue that while institutional actors (such as interest groups) tend to ‘sponsor’ particular frames

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41 Fisher (1997) provides a useful review of the differing uses of the term ‘frame’ in various disciplines.
and perpetuate them, these are not necessarily coherent and instead may be “families of related frames” and “complex and hybrid in nature” (Schön and Rein 1994, 33).

Although this may complicate things it also means that organizations like the WA Collaboration, which encompass seemingly divergent social and environmental interests, are able to find common points of advocacy and develop new and relatively cohesive approaches to certain issues. Reflective processes can therefore be fruitful in exploring where organizational or individual perspectives coincide or conflict. The Steering Committee members of the WA Collaboration, for example, represent diverse groups with specific perspectives or ‘institutional action frames,’ yet have in common an operation within the wider, cultural frame of the voluntary sector and have overlaps in terms of particular value frames. For example, the Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) and Council of Churches of WA share social justice concerns; the Conservation Council’s concern for the environment is shared by the Council of Churches in their belief in stewardship of nature and concern to assist those in the third world in their right to a clean environment. A wider value frame that can therefore be identified as one in common for the group, and possibly the strongest, is related to justice (collective responsibility for protection of rights and advocacy for underrepresented ‘others,’ human or otherwise). Reflective processes can help groups such as the WA Collaboration Steering Committee identify the differences and commonalities of perspective that must inform their work together, and this is discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Schön and Rein (1994) describe frames as “underlying structures of belief, perception, and appreciation” (23), and argue for “frame-reflective policy inquiry” (41). They argue that policy positions rest on frames and that policy controversies occur when frames are conflicting but left tacit. In such cases, appeals to facts and reasoned argument are not enough because frames “determine what counts as a fact and what arguments are taken to be relevant and compelling” (23), that is, they generally determine how actors approach a policy situation. Policy discourse must therefore be reflective of these frames by explicating them. Schön and Rein argue that while this higher-level, more abstract reflection is often seen as out of place in action or sidelined due to time constraints, it is nevertheless fundamental to difficult and sometimes

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42 Schön and Rein define institutional action frames as “the beliefs, values, and perspectives held by particular institutions and interest groups from which particular policy positions are derived” (1994, xiii).
intractable policy issues such as poverty, crime, environmental protection and the ‘Third World.’

Schön and Rein recognize, however, that while such discourse can help generate the understanding needed for agreement, it is nevertheless challenging in the face of conflict: “each party would have to be able to put in terms of his or her own frame the meaning of the situation as seen by the other in terms of the other’s frame” (45). In order to “illuminate some of the conditions under which a practice of frame-reflective inquiry might actually proceed” (50), they refer to a number of theories including Kuhn’s ‘reciprocal translation’ (attempting to translate another’s view into one’s own language as well as drawing on the everyday vocabularies that are shared, in preparation for conversation) and those pertaining to consensual dispute resolution (where achieving better outcomes than conflict may be incentive for cooperation). Schön and Rein highlight the development of “mutual trust” as one such condition of frame-reflective discourse and describe it as involving a “leap of faith beyond the available evidence” but as fostered by the development of a degree of “mutual respect” and familiarity (179).

Reflection on perspectives or frames can encourage development and reformulation of them, and potentially the formation of more shared and cohesive perspectives. Referring to a group or team situation, Kasl et al. (1997) draw on Mezirow (1992) and Schön (1983) to define framing as “the group’s initial perception of an issue, situation, person, or object based on past understanding and present input” and reframing as “the process of transforming that perception into a new understanding or frame” (1997, 230). This is important for the situation of the WA Collaboration because, while the steering organizations involved continue with their own advocacy, together they seek to develop continuously a more cohesive approach to sustainability that can be promoted to government.

Dale’s discussion in his chapter “Interface Issues” in Groups at Work (1981) is also particularly relevant to the WA Collaboration and to frame conflict and reframing in deliberative situations in general. His arguments consolidate those raised earlier in my discussion of the diversity of perspectives at play during interaction. Dale claims that because “every individual carries interests and outlooks from each group of which s/he
is a member into every other one,” there will always be “intergroup issues within any particular group” (220). Furthermore, he states that while individuals tend to proliferate “mental frameworks or ‘bits’ of knowledge” when faced with a complex situation, groups do likewise, “except that the differences may be distributed between individuals” (221). He thus considers the question of “how ‘to get it together’” in any given situation, whether within or between groups (221). In response he suggests that there may not always be a need to ‘get it together’ and that individuals or groups may have no issue with holding “mutually contradictory views or frameworks” because these often apply to different settings. Where this does become a problem, however, is when particular cases require integration of these frameworks, that is, “where there is real interdependence between the different positions in relation to possible actions” (221). Thus “the greater the interdependence, the more is differentiation likely to produce interface issues” (221). These points are salient to the case of the WA Collaboration and to deliberation of sustainability issues in general because of the interconnectedness of issues relevant to sustainability and the various interests and knowledge they attract.

Laws and Rein (2003) provide some important arguments that shed light on the nature of processes of framing and reframing. They describe frames as “systems of belief that intertwine with identity and social action” (174, emphasis added). Instead of focusing on the “contest among conflicting frames,” Laws and Rein give their attention to “the interplay between belief and doubt within a frame viewed as a struggle that generates efforts to make sense of a changing situation and to coordinate action” (174). Laws and Rein describe this struggle as occurring when “accepted stories are challenged” and create “moments of doubt” (175). When these indeterminate situations arise, people are forced to reinterpret them not only because the “irritation of doubt” motivates inquiry and reconceptualization, but also because of the newfound opportunities to influence and benefit from the outcomes of the debate (175). Importantly, these moments of doubt open the way for “new insights, ideas and behaviour” and thus a change in systems of belief (175).

Arguments like those for critical reflection on perspectives and frame reflection are important because they attend to difference and conflict. Diversity among participants can present challenges for effective deliberation but when engaged with can be productive in terms of the opportunities for development of greater understanding and
more encompassing views. Good practice will therefore involve engaging with such tensions, that is, a ‘reflexive’ or ‘critically reflective’ approach in which participants recognize the value and limitations of their own and other people’s knowledge and perspectives. Dale (1981) points out the complex and contradictory dynamics that can occur in interaction: conflict is necessary to strengthen and further define individual or group identity and views, and at the same time the discovery of collective interest is “more easily possible when individuals can transcend their ‘worlds-taken-for-granted’ and the norms which go with them” (1981, 220); Dale highlights Moscovici’s (1976) view that divergent interests can provide a source of innovation. Similarly Hendriks (2004), in her thesis about interest organizations in deliberation, refers to difference in terms of ‘productive tensions.’ Mansbridge (2003) likewise argues for making “uncovering and expressing conflict a valued goal” in deliberative practice (176).

Arguments such as those discussed so far support my emphasis on the productiveness of engaging with difference in knowledge and perspectives during deliberation, and shed light on the development of a transactional space in which openness to other knowledge and perspectives, recognition of gaps in understanding, and moments of doubt, attract new ways of knowing and expansion of perspective.

**Narrative and the appreciation of particular experience in deliberation**

The broad literature related to ‘narrative’ offers another important way of considering the development of effective dialogue and deliberation, and here I build on my earlier discussion of Young’s argument for alternative modes of communication such as narrative. An awareness of the role of narrative is particularly important to developing a more robust approach to deliberation because *stories tend to carry the frames, perspectives or worldviews of participants in discourse*, and thus are vital to creating transformative learning in deliberation. Furthermore, the familiarity of this mode of communication provides a simple yet effective way of bringing people closer together in a dialogical process.

Narrative involves evaluation and expansion of knowledge and understanding. The act of telling stories or at least narrating fragments of lived experience helps both speaker and listener reflect on particular knowledge and experience relevant to the issue at hand. The process also helps reveal the perspectives and values that affect how an issue is
approached. Narratives carry perspectives or frames in that they “convey attitudes, feelings and emotions” about that which is recounted, “filter and shape these elements by giving them meaning and structure,” and make a point about the world (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 1997, 44). While frames can be seen as, in a sense, types of stories or narratives, here I focus on how particular knowledge and experience may be shared in deliberation and how frames and perspectives are explicated through the act of storytelling (or at least talking about experiences through narrative fragments).

‘Narrative’ is generally understood as the encoding, reconstruction, or recapitulation of previous experience (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 1997) and is typically characterised by a ‘beginning, middle and end’ structure (Labov 1999). Narratives, however, are not always associated with “events that happened in the past,” such as in the case of generic narratives (about habitual happenings in the present) and projective narratives (about plans for the future and prophecies) (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 1997, 42).

Importantly, as opposed to narratives of vicarious experience, narratives of personal experience tend to involve evaluation throughout (Labov 1999). This is significant for deliberation because of the reflection involved as well as the opportunity for others to reflect on direct rather than indirect knowledge and experience. Indeed, as highlighted earlier, Young argues that the expression of stories can reveal particular knowledge and experience and moreover certain values.

Like frames and perspectives, narratives are not fixed, clearly defined or singular. Furthermore, narrative can be understood as not only a way to represent experience but also as a way we understand and experience things. According to Somers and Gibson (1994), some narrativists now argue that “social life is itself stori ed and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life” (Somers and Gibson 1994, 38, cited in Hosu 2003, 10). In other words rather than simply an “explanatory device,” narrative is “actually constitutive of the way we experience things” (Johnson quoted in Schrag 1997, 23, cited in Hosu 2003, 10). Freeman (1993) reminds us that although narratives and frames influence interaction and action, the formation of the “self” is not simply

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43 Like myself, many people use the words ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ interchangeably and see both words as able to convey a sense of agency and constructivism. Cohan and Shires (1988) state that “[a] narrative recounts a story, a series of events in a temporal sequence” (1).
situated “within the texture of discourse itself” but is a recollective and interpretative activity, that is, the “making and remaking [of a] sense of who and what we are” (6-12).

This is important to deliberation because to be unaware of the influence of people’s backgrounds and identities in the process would be to neglect the transformative potential of deliberation. People bring aspirations and perspectives to deliberation, which determine the course of dialogue but are often dismissed as partial preferences or self-interests. Stories carry these aspirations or efforts to validate identity and desire, and thus must be expressed and engaged with. While in my earlier discussion of Young I suggested that social perspectives are similar to identities and can be illuminated in deliberation through narrative, at the same time it may be understood that identities are constituted of the narratives or perspectives that we carry and struggle between. Indeed, Hosu suggests that ‘identity politics’ (the assertion of difference or a particular group identity in political discussion) is in essence a struggle over narratives and because of narratives. She argues that “[s]uch battles often represent efforts to legitimize one particular narrative over its possible rivals by establishing its apparent ‘naturalness’, and thereby to confirm one’s self-identity and picture of reality” (2003, 13, emphasis added). Thus there are several relationships between these aspects of social interaction that need to be considered in the focus on what might constitute effective deliberation.

Narrative, in terms of both process and substance, is important for deliberation because it involves the shaping and reshaping of the identities, aspirations, beliefs, perspectives and values that govern the course of deliberation. This is the case irrespective of whether deliberative democracy is approached instrumentally or as a value in itself. That said, participation in public life through deliberation can be seen as having particular significance for the development of a person’s sense of self and sense of place or belonging when democratic process is regarded as having instrumental as well as intrinsic value (in terms of people’s right to be involved in decisions that affect them and desire as autonomous individuals for fulfilment in life).

Reflection on narrated experience is of particular importance to deliberative processes because it enables participants to engage with each other’s backgrounds and aspirations. It involves engaging with and evaluating not only personal narratives but also other
worlds of experience, knowledge and perspective, and can allow for mutual
development of social responsibility and a sense of connection with and contribution to
‘community.’ Indeed, Mason (2004) argues that the idea of personal narratives has
often been misread as an individualistic discursive form and that instead the process of
reflection on narratives promotes relational thinking and connectivity with others. The
development of a person’s identity or sense of self can therefore be seen as intimately
tied with the development of the collective identity or community spirit that should
ideally be generated in deliberation.

Gunder (2003) engages with the issue of identity in his discussion of deliberation in
planning processes. He suggests that rather than setting personal aspirations aside,
deliberation is more likely to build shared vision and be transformative when it engages
with the underlying aspirations and values people bring to the table. He argues,
therefore, for the inclusion of ‘passionate’ and ‘agonistic’ discourse (that is, contested
rather than antagonistic) in order to engage with personal aspirations and visions of
what can be achieved collectively. Indeed, I believe that engaging in discourse
energised with passions may mean a degree of conflict but may also mean participants
have the opportunity to recognize similarity and connection in views and get to the heart
of issues.

Forester (1999) emphasizes the dynamics of identity in participatory and deliberative
processes in his discussion of “a transformative theory of social learning that explores
not only how our arguments change in dialogues and negotiations but how we change as
well” (130). He argues that participatory conversational or storytelling rituals are
central to such transformation because they have the potential to “transform identities,
agendas and perceptions of values in the world” (136) and that they must therefore be
made a priority. These rituals are “encounters that enable participants to develop more
familiar relationships or to learn about one another before solving the problems they
face” (131). They may include informal drinks before deliberations, meal breaks during
intensive workshops, small break-out groups to support plenary problem-solving
sessions, and early story-telling phases of mediation processes (131-132).

Such rituals, Forester argues, support problem solving and are central to development of
working relationships because “we learn about our problems through, and as we learn
about, other participants too” (132). They can take up valuable time but “[p]ushing for solutions too soon—before affected parties have been able to listen to one another—can end up taking far more time than preliminary participatory rituals might” (132).

Furthermore, these opportunities for dialogue can allow for the expression of particular details that may sometimes be of little relevance but may also reveal “claims about value, claims about what one party is worried about, wants to gain, is afraid of, wishes to protect, or cares about enough to put on the table for discussion” (133). Forester argues that “[f]ar more than descriptions of events, stories are forms in which their tellers can offer what they take to be worth passing on” (136); they provide insights that can create more comprehensive understandings of events and “a practical context for future action and judgement” (136).

Stories have particular significance for progressing sustainability, in terms of the closer understanding of sustainability that can be gained from hearing about specific examples of practice, and in terms of the transformative potential of the act of engaging with the varying perspectives underlying people’s narrative constructions of experience. Like Forester, Eckstein (2003), in *Story and Sustainability*, explores the transformative potential of processes that facilitate engagement with stories or fragments of narrated experience and argues for its importance in participatory planning processes. She claims that stories can inform urban planning by bringing meaning and a range of perspectives and alternatives to the table, and when “[c]arefully told and carefully heard…have the potential to act as a bridge between engrained habits and new futures” (13). Consistent with Sterling’s view of the potential of transformative learning for sustainability, she argues that “telling stories, by its very nature, builds tolerant, diverse communities of participant citizens” (13).

The essence of the discussion thus far is that critical reflection on knowledge and perspectives during deliberation, and in particular telling and listening to narrated experience, can help meaning-making occur. It can help participants engage with other people’s meaning structures and with the meaning they have made from experiences. In turn it can help participants see those at the table as less of ‘others’ (unknown and different) and more as people with their own aspirations and as fellows in the deliberation that can shape their communities. This means that participants may still hold differing perspectives but can recognize each other as having some similar ways of
knowing and a certain level of agreement on particular issues. In sum, by allowing for the expression of varying backgrounds, perspectives and values, reflective processes can significantly contribute to addressing tensions created by difference, as well as expand knowledge and perspectives.

**Deliberative dialogue**

As the above discussion illustrates, a common theme of the literatures relating to deliberative process (including policy discourse, deliberative democracy, adult learning and intergroup relations) has been a focus on the role of *reflective dialogue* in creating genuine engagement with a range of concerns in participatory and collaborative situations. McCoy and Scully’s (2002) argument for ‘deliberative dialogue’—which they discuss in relation to the capacity of ‘study circles’ to combine dialogue and deliberation—contributes further to our understanding of the *dialogical nature of deliberation* and of the integration of reflective dialogue and reasoned argument in deliberation.

McCoy and Scully (2002) argue for the union of “two strains of public talk—dialogue and deliberation” (117), because the two provide different benefits. While the approach to deliberation I have developed thus far is clearly about an integration of both, it is particularly useful to consider the subject in terms of the distinctions McCoy and Scully identify. *Dialogue* is about “an orientation toward constructive communication, the dispelling of stereotypes, honesty in relaying ideas, and the intention to listen to and understand the other” (117). *Deliberation* is a related process but is about “the use of critical thinking and reasoned argument as a way for citizens to make decisions on public policy” (117). McCoy and Scully argue that both are necessary to “create mutual understanding” and “connect personal with public concerns” (118).

McCoy and Scully identify some principles of deliberative dialogue of particular importance to the concept of transactional space; the principles include:

- *making listening as important as speaking* (as opposed to thinking of one’s own views and preparing one’s next comment while others are talking): McCoy and Scully argue that “a strong emphasis on listening increases the likelihood that more people will participate fully in the discussion” for two reasons—firstly, it allows those who feel more comfortable listening to participate in that way, and
secondly it increases the likelihood of people understanding, empathizing with each other and finding common ground for solutions (121);

- connecting personal experience with public issues: they make the important point that participation is unlikely to be effective unless participants have “adequate opportunity to reflect on the relevance of the issue to their own personal experience”; this helps people “address public concerns in their own language and on their own terms” (121), and make sense of complex and sometimes confusing issues; personal stories also help to articulate “how and why they feel the way they do” (122); beginning with stories can help ground the discussion, help people appreciate different points of view, and make the issues easier to approach; and

- building trust and a foundation for working relationships: they argue that trust is foundational to the process of examining publicly the basic assumptions and values underlying one’s views, let alone understanding those of others, and thus must be developed; they suggest this can occur through the reflection on personal experience and focus on listening already discussed, but sometimes may need exercises “intentionally designed to build trust” (123);

McCoy and Scully’s argument is significant because it highlights the way in which dialogue helps build understanding and working relationships and in doing so supports deliberation and the development of agreement. The ‘study circles’ they discuss exemplify processes that provide opportunities for both dialogue and deliberation around particular issues, and that bring together community organising and deliberative dialogue. For these reasons they are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

McCoy and Scully’s emphasis on dialogue resonates with the arguments of Hunt et al. (2003) who, in their report about participatory processes, highlight Bohmian dialogue as a particularly effective approach. They argue that Bohmian dialogue represents a process of moving towards deepened understanding and potentially more collective positions, and that it is essentially transformative in that participants challenge and question their own commitments. While it shares a Habermasian view that personal or strategic commitments should be suspended, Bohmian dialogue “includes within it the recognition that exploration and integration of these commitments is likely to be a necessary part of the dialogic process” (2003, 9). Like the theories discussed so far in
this chapter, Bohmian dialogue is about being conscious of the effects of difference in deliberation and of the transformative potential of dialogue across difference.

**Conclusions: engaging with difference and tensions through reflective processes**

While necessarily limited, the above discussion has drawn from a range of literature in order to highlight some important theories about developing more effective deliberation. These ideas have significantly informed my argument for developing the ‘transactional space’ of deliberative and dialogical processes, that is, for fostering communicative spaces in which participants can engage with their differing interests, perspectives and values. I have argued that reflection on particular knowledge and experience is central to this and has the potential to make deliberative processes more transformative. Explication of backgrounds, values and perspectives through reflective dialogue can create a richer and more robust discourse as well as greater understanding of concepts surrounding sustainability, and is fundamental to participatory and collaborative endeavours.

This section has argued for the importance of attending to difference and diversity in deliberation as opposed to avoidance of tensions among differing interests, perspectives and values. While the interplay of frames in deliberation can create conflict, deliberation is more likely to be effective if it engages with these differences of perspective because the negotiation of tensions can make deliberation more productive in terms of generating relatively shared outcomes, and because apprehension of differing perspectives can itself trigger learning and the development of more encompassing knowledge and worldview. Critical reflection on our own and other people’s experiences, knowledge, beliefs and values is a cornerstone of effective deliberation because such reflection helps attend to the assumptions and partial perspectives that present barriers to transformative deliberation.

Because many public policy issues are complex and deeply contested, particularly when approached in the context of progressing sustainability, deliberation at this level is essential. When people engage at such a level of dialogue they can better explore the particular interests and aspirations they bring to the process. Engagement with other participants as people with particular identities and aspirations should therefore not be
dismissed as out of place in deliberation. Indeed, such engagement is essential to developing transformative deliberative experiences in which participants better understand one another’s aspirations and use the knowledge gained to develop more informed, holistic and mutually beneficial outcomes.

Reflective dialogue asks participants to be critical of their own and others’ perspectives and therefore helps participants open up to other views. When participants are encouraged to be reflective they are likely to be more inclined to realise they have something to learn from others and less inclined to simply assert their own view and dominate, which tends to impoverish discourse. In this way reflective dialogue can make processes more inclusive and empowering.

The discussion thus far of various arguments related to improving deliberative processes has sought to illuminate the fraught nature of deliberation and hence the necessity for attention to difference, rather than suggesting that challenges such as self-interest, power imbalance and conflict can be easily overcome. While my argument for a conception of transactional space is a response to such challenges, and potentially can help to alleviate them, process issues such as power imbalances, conflict and moral disagreement will without doubt always be considerations for deliberative practice. I thus concur with views such as those of Gutmann and Thompson (1996) that ultimately we should accept the persistence of disagreement and conflict but at the same time seek to keep it in check. I also agree with many authors that self-interest and power imbalances will always be challenges for genuinely inclusive deliberation and for deliberation that contributes to learning and transformation of perspectives.

Deliberative processes are significant for their potential to generate understanding, but it must be remembered that differences cannot always be reconciled: “[g]ood deliberation will have opened areas of agreement and will have clarified the remaining areas of conflict” (Mansbridge 1996, 47). Nevertheless, these remaining differences provide creative tensions and thus resources for further deliberation.
TRANSACTIONAL SPACE

Transactional space refers to forms of dialogue and deliberation that create opportunities for the discovery and expansion of understanding needed to develop more mutually beneficial and robust outcomes across a range of social, economic and environmental objectives. It is a concept I use to focus on reflective dialogical processes in which participants can explore their diverse wealth of experience, knowledge and perspectives, and in doing so reveal the underlying values that influence deliberative outcomes. In using such a concept I aim to draw attention to the development of rich and potentially transformative exchange in participatory and collaborative processes.

I argue that the development of such exchange requires foremost the explication of participants’ background narratives and worldviews through critical reflection. This type of discourse can help take participants to the level of the beliefs and values that affect the course of their deliberations and that at the same time offer resources for enlargement of perspective. Transactional space therefore encapsulates two key elements of transformative exchange: when dialogue is reflective it can help participants think about and appreciate differing experience, knowledge and concerns; when dialogue involves critical reflection it can help participants fathom both the value and limitations of the various knowledge and perspectives present. Critical reflection can in this way contribute towards a process of expansion and deepening of understanding.

The various arguments of authors explored in the preceding section in their own ways point to the significance of the perspectives and values that participants bring to discussions, and how these affect the way people respond to one another and what they see as important. Unearthing these underlying motivations requires greater space for expressive and reflective dialogue. In most participatory and collaborative situations there are likely to be participants who take longer than others to express themselves, or whose voices tend to be overshadowed by others. Providing greater opportunities during deliberation for a range of expressive modes can help create inclusiveness of the wealth of knowledge and perspectives present, and sharing of stories—or at least fragments of narrated experience—is a key way in which this can occur. Critical reflection is fundamental to this process because it helps participants expand their thinking, apprehend the differences as well as commonalities that they bring to policy
discussions, and forge more informed and shared ground for decision-making. It helps them correct assumptions, negotiate rather than avoid conflict, and generate the understanding needed for greater trust and more constructive discussions.

The concept of transactional space is used to draw together the important elements of effective deliberation discussed in this chapter. In the following discussion I further develop this argument in terms of how a more transactional level of exchange can work in practice, especially in the face of challenges such as power imbalances, difference, self-interest, conflict and moral disagreement. While these issues and their interrelationships were explored in detail in the first part of this chapter in relation to creating reflective and transformative dialogue, here I draw out the connections in relation to the concept of transactional space.

Deliberation involves more than simply reasoned argument; what participants see as relevant or convincing in deliberation is affected as much by the differing aspirations, values and perspectives that people bring to discussion as it is by well-reasoned and eloquent arguments. Rather than being fixed, mutually exclusive frameworks, these perspectives are multiple, nuanced and often overlapping, and also shifting and incomplete. They therefore provide learning opportunities: they bring partial and particular knowledge and experience that can provide access to a greater suite of knowledge and contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and encompassing collective wisdom. The differing perspectives of participants and the subsequent tensions created should thus be seen as resources for deliberation, as authors such as Young, Forester, Gunder, and McCoy and Scully remind us. Schön and Rein see a constant interplay between belief and doubt during dialogue and an urge for resolution of doubt. This struggle between and within frames or perspectives can lead to changes in initial perceptions, new insights and overall enlargement of thinking.

However, this process may not occur if power imbalances and conflict overtake discussions. The richness and potential for learning presented by a diversity of participants may not be utilised if processes fail to be inclusive and conducive to developing mutual respect and trust. Deliberation must therefore be organized and facilitated to address this. Deliberative processes can benefit from being placed in a context or approach of reflective and transformative exchange. Participants can be
introduced to the benefits of this and may together develop their own fair terms and conditions for it. The final chapter of this thesis suggests principles and strategies that I believe are important for encouraging transformative dialogue, particularly the goodwill, commitment, openness and sense of mutuality required. In sum, organizers and participants must support a culture of collaborative and reflective learning.

In many situations participants are able to stand outside of their self-interest, but this may sometimes need to be consciously encouraged and developed by facilitators. Once participants start to engage in critical reflection they become more likely to develop an ability to see the limitations and value in their own as well as other people’s knowledge, experiences and perspectives. They also become better able to understand the specifics of why people place importance on certain things and of how these intersect. Such processes help participants understand the reciprocal need to apprehend the nuances of other people’s arguments and perspectives, and the overall aim of meeting a range of needs. In this way participants are less likely to simply assert or be obstinate about narrow interests and views, and more likely to expand their understanding of policy issues. Transactional exchange therefore involves developing an awareness on the part of all participants (whether they be ‘specialist’, ‘official,’ ‘community organization,’ ‘citizen’ or otherwise) that there are limitations to their own knowledge and perspectives and that they therefore have much to gain by considering those of others.

As raised earlier, openness to the use of various modes of communication is important for combating situations in which some participants are not heard or included. Storytelling is one such mode that can help a range of people express their particular views, knowledge and experience, and deliberation should not be seen as an emotion-free zone. People reason with one another and explicate their views in various ways. Furthermore, narration of experience is an act of evaluation. It may involve passion or expression of strong feeling but it nevertheless helps people reflect on their experience and reformulate knowledge. This occurs through the process of telling one’s own stories and hearing responses, as well as through the process of listening to the stories or fragments of narrated experience of others.

Narration of experience, frame reflection and explication of perspectives are important for enabling transformative dialogue in deliberation. Deliberation involves aspirations
as well as arguments. It provides the opportunity for participants to undergo a shaping and reshaping of preferences, visions and perspectives, that is, the sense of what they would like to see come out of deliberation. At its best deliberation involves expansion and transformation in ways of thinking and understanding because this enables people to continuously discover better solutions to problems.

The concept of transactional space draws attention to such processes that enrich deliberative practice and foster its transformative potential. Transactional space can especially enrich deliberation about sustainability. The holistic aims of sustainability necessitate the development of greater understanding and wisdom about social, economic and environmental systems, and the inclusion of a diverse wealth of knowledge is central to this. At the same time the contestedness of the approach necessitates dialogue and deliberation about its meaning and application. However, negotiating a range of experiences and perspectives is a challenging process. Furthermore, the differing and often conflicting values people bring to discussions present barriers to developing the most informed, sustainable and collectively supported outcomes. Greater space for expressive and reflective dialogue in deliberation, that is, ‘transactional space,’ is an important way to address such challenges. It is a means of helping to open up and potentially resolve the tensions inherent in conversations about complex policy issues, and therefore of progressing dialogue about sustainability. It is also important for discovering the possibilities and opportunities that may have been overlooked, for understanding the interrelationships of issues, and for developing robust approaches.

In 2004 I conducted in-depth interviews with key people involved in the WA Collaboration and in government sustainability policy development, which provided me with important feedback on the concept of transactional space as well as useful background information. The interview respondents generally found the concept of transactional space to be valuable and their responses suggested they appreciated the importance of a focus on deeper dialogue. The comments of Government Respondent B (a person instrumental in the development of the State Sustainability Strategy) in particular encapsulated the relationship between transactional space and sustainability. He considered that attention to difference of experience and perspective could enrich
sustainability debates, and that integration and expansion of perspectives was necessary for addressing sustainability issues:

I agree with you that it [transactional space] is critical to sustainability because as we’ve said over and over, dialogue between difference is the way in which sustainability, deep sustainability issues, are dealt with. If you don’t have that dialogue occurring you’ll get expert opinions only, and isolated opinions, and that’s been our problem.

The processes of reflection described above are not necessarily easy or uncomplicated. It can be challenging to step outside of one’s own way of thinking (to suspend one’s own interpretive frameworks and values) and engage with and seek to understand the perspectives and positions of others. Process issues such as the effects of power imbalances, the need for inclusion of difference, and the difficulties caused by strong conflict and moral disagreement, remain formidable challenges for effective deliberative practice. The processes of reflection and transactional exchange discussed above can help combat these issues and help ensure that differences present resources rather than barriers for dialogue and deliberation.
Chapter 4
Transformative exchange in participatory and deliberative processes

INTRODUCTION

Previous chapters have explored how reflective dialogue is crucial to developing transformative deliberation, but in what ways does such exchange occur in current democratic practice and how might capacity for it be expanded? This chapter considers a selection of dialogical and deliberative processes that provide opportunities for a depth of exchange and have the potential to expand this in practice. There are countless participatory and deliberative processes that have been developed by practitioners around the world, which as a consequence tend to carry various names. It is not within the scope of this thesis to explore the purposes, merits and limitations of the complete spectrum of these processes and all their variants. Instead, I explore a number of processes relevant to my concern for developing transformative exchange in participatory, collaborative and deliberative settings. That said, the following discussion encompasses a range of processes in order to illustrate the potential to incorporate reflective exchange across various practices. Furthermore, it is primarily concerned with the development of:

1. opportunities for integration of ‘stakeholder’ and ‘citizen’ views;
2. opportunities for deep, transactional level exchange; and
3. regular and ongoing space for dialogue and deliberation.

A wide array of participatory processes has been used by various sponsors to involve the public. These have emerged in recognition of basic rights and the need for procedural justice (a normative rationale), as well as for practical reasons such as seeking knowledge and views (substantive), and support and trust (instrumental), from members of the public (Rowe and Frewer 2000; Fiorino 1990 in Dürrenberger et al. 1999; Fiorino describes these three rationales). Community engagement processes

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44 Useful sources of information about various processes and techniques are The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (www.thataway.org), The Deliberative Democracy Consortium (www.deliberative-democracy.net), The Innovations in Democracy project of The Co-Intelligence Institute (www.democracyinnovations.org), and the International Association for Public Participation (www.iap2.org).
carry differing roles in policy and decision-making cycles.\textsuperscript{45} Some help provide information or conversely help identify views (both being one-way flows of information), while others combine both purposes and help create dialogue among officials, stakeholders and citizens (an exchange or two-way flow).\textsuperscript{46}

While a range of processes has been important for expanding democratic practice and encouraging active citizenship, a major issue has been the need for democratic practice to foster expansion and integration of perspectives and the development of more informed and shared positions. The focus here is on processes used to promote informed involvement where participants are encouraged to develop their views through discussion and reflection. These more dialogical processes go beyond consulting and imparting information to being more participatory, collaborative and empowering. They may employ information and communications technology, but tend to be based around face-to-face interaction and small group discussion. Because the WA Collaboration operates at both stakeholder/organization and citizen/community levels (with its partnership of organizations and wider involvement of interested groups and individuals), the processes I discuss in this chapter relate to both forms of involvement as well as their intersection.

Of the processes discussed in this chapter, some provide more opportunities for dialogue and deliberation than others. Some may be initiated by government agencies, while others may be collaborative or community-driven. They are processes that have been used to engage people in a wide range of issues and areas of policy development such as:

- urban planning;
- management of water and energy resources;
- science, technology and risk management (in particular genetic testing, genetic modification of food, and siting of radioactive waste facilities); and
- various issues related to community health, safety and development.

\textsuperscript{45} Processes tend to be chosen and combined according to need and context. As many authors suggest, they are like the complementary tools of a tool kit. For a particularly comprehensive overview of a wide suite of participatory tools see Aslin and Brown (2004) “Towards Whole of Community Engagement: A Practical Toolkit.”

\textsuperscript{46} The IAP2 spectrum of public involvement (inform-consult-involve-collaborate-empower) is particularly useful here and is accessible through http://www.iap2.org/.
As these examples suggest, issues that attract participatory and deliberative processes are often topical or surrounded by considerable public debate.

**CITIZEN-ORIENTED PROCESSES**

The *deliberative survey*, also known as a ‘deliberative opinion poll,’ is a process with particular potential to help develop citizen knowledge and perspectives around issues. It usually involves a random representative sample of the public (several hundred) and is used to ascertain *informed* public opinion, often about a contentious planning issue (Carson and Gelber 2001; Government of Western Australia 2002a). Deliberative survey processes can take many forms, but in general, participants are surveyed and provided with background information material in advance. They are then asked to engage in small and large group discussions for a substantial period of time (usually one to three days) at which they hear presentations from various experts and stakeholders. Following this they vote or are again surveyed for comparison with the previous survey. Deliberative surveys are a good alternative to conventional opinion polls because they build information and deliberation into the process. Moreover, they provide the opportunity for engagement with different backgrounds, arguments and views. At the same time, they are costly, require numerous trained facilitators, and particularly complex issues may be better suited to processes involving fewer participants.

Personal experience with this type of process in Western Australia (WA)—as a *randomly selected participant* in a deliberative survey about redevelopment of the busy metropolitan beachfront of Scarborough in 2004, and as a *facilitator* in a similar process held for the development of a coastal planning strategy for the Perth metropolitan area in 2005—revealed potential for such processes to allow for reflection on differing knowledge and perspectives.47 At the day-long forums of the two processes, organizers stressed on a number of occasions the importance of listening, openness and learning about other viewpoints. In particular, the 2005 coastal strategy workshop, used a Perth-based ‘Playback Theatre’ group to help set the scene and capture the various

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47 Both of these processes were hosted by the WA Department for Planning and Infrastructure (DPI). In 2003 I was involved as a *self-nominated participant* in a similar process held by DPI called Dialogue with the City. The process involved a much larger participant group (over 1000 people) who were together engaged in an interactive day-long forum about the future of the Perth metropolitan area. It was based on the ‘21st Century Town Meeting’ model, as discussed by Carson and Hartz-Karp 2005. All three of the processes in WA used networked computers and a ‘theme team’ to help crystallise key views and questions emerging from tables in real time and project them back to the whole group.
experiences and memories of the coast among participants. Participants volunteered particular experiences and the theatre group then brought them to life, so to speak, in interesting ways. All stories were performed with equal gusto but the portrayals of the actors and actresses were perhaps a little affected by the sense of nostalgia and concern for preservation of the relatively undeveloped quality of Perth beaches that seemed to emerge. The point of the exercise was to allow expression and reflection on people’s feelings about the coast, rather than opinions on how it should be managed, but this view nevertheless seemed to emerge.

In any case, the performances helped to highlight the different aspects of the coast that were important to people in a non-confrontational way, in particular, a woman’s concern for wheelchair and pram access because of her experience at the beach with family members with these needs. Many participants seemed to find the process interesting, though some may have felt impatient with the time it took to portray a range of perspectives or may not have found the use of drama appealing. Small group discussion and plenary feedback could have possibly been more efficient and conducive to face-to-face communication and reflection, but may not have generated the same sense of fun and collective reminiscence that seemed to help working relationships and engagement on the day.

Overall, while I found the 2004 and 2005 processes engendered a fair level of engagement with the issues and sense of community spirit, I also found the workshops provided insufficient time for discussion, dialogue and reflection. Both workshops were heavily structured to ensure the day kept to the timeline of activities. Although this is important to make the day as productive as possible (and indeed people tend to be action-oriented when it comes to policy issues), equally important is the thinking and reflection time needed to develop understanding of, and robust responses to, complex policy issues. Expression of particular experiences, beliefs and concerns takes time, and so too does listening, questioning and developing understanding. The workshops would therefore have benefited from more opportunities for dialogue and reflection. Organizers of such processes need to structure in time for deeper exchange by reducing the number of tasks or by extending the period of engagement/number of sessions.
Appendix 2 outlines a number of other citizen-oriented processes with potential for a depth of exchange:

- **Citizens’ panels** (used to track shifts in views about strategic planning issues over an extended period of time);
- **Citizens’ assemblies** (involving several meetings over a long period of time leading to final recommendations);
- **Wisdom councils** (which instead of having large numbers of citizens participating at once involves a new ‘wisdom council’ of 8-24 people randomly selected every few months to continue the deliberations);
- **Citizens’ juries** (involving a small random representative sample of the public as a ‘lay’ panel that listens to ‘expert’ witnesses and deliberates in an informed way for several days over a clearly defined but often challenging issue); and
- **Consensus conferences** (which are similar processes but often longer and involving citizens in the actual definition of the issue, key questions for deliberation and selection of witnesses).

**STAKEHOLDER-ORIENTED PROCESSES**

The *collaborative workshops* described by VanWynsberghe et al. (2003) are pertinent to this thesis and my case study of the WA Collaboration because they provide an interesting example of efforts to encourage dialogue and critical reflection between different interests. As part of the larger effort of the Georgia Basin Futures Project of British Columbia, half-day workshops were conducted with stakeholders in five different sectors (housing, forestry, transportation, food systems and waste) to create dialogue about sustainability in the Georgia Basin and elaborate alternative scenarios for the future of each sector in the region. The workshops were structured carefully to encourage value-focused and critical thinking about alternatives (including examination of assumptions and biases). Often using pair work, they were designed to “explore the

48 'Stakeholders’ usually represent various interest areas or sectors of activity and are often recognized as providing the ‘expertise’ relevant to the issue. They may not necessarily be representatives of a particular organization or association. The term in the widest sense therefore refers to the key knowledges or interests surrounding an issue.

49 The Georgia Basin Futures Project is a five-year, interdisciplinary research project aimed at engaging regional partners in an interactive approach to research and increasing “the level of public and expert understanding of how complex ecological, social and economic systems interact and to discover ways of achieving a sustainable future” (2003, 204). The workshops were designed to help develop a computer-based model called GB-Quest that would help represent these complex interactions in the Georgia Basin region and engage the public in dialogue about more sustainable future scenarios.
use of narrative as a tool for critical thinking in community engagement processes” (207). 50

Each workshop involved ‘experts’ from various areas within a sector that ranged from directors of NGOs and people with activist orientations, to scientists and decision-makers, though several people had rich combinations of experience and roles. This created some difficult dynamics in which participants often seemed more concerned with “validating their positions” (217) and managing “others’ perception of them” (215) than “moving towards shared interests” (217). Some voices had more power and authority than others, with less influential people feeling the need to “get out” their views in a hurry (216). Participants with a wider range of experience contributed much more than others. Some of the senior figures tended to be instructive and paternalistic, and to make appeals to common sense and limits of possibility, which unfortunately served to circumscribe the limits of thinking.

The short narratives read aloud at the workshops were prepared by the organizers. These hypothetical stories were intended to set the tone for the workshop and stimulate imaginative and expansive thinking regarding scenarios for the future. Some were able to convey different issues and perspectives about a subject and thus invoke a degree of empathy with the experience of others. For example, the forestry story conveyed aspects of clear-cutting practices, job losses and community pride in the forest industry. The transportation narrative, provided as an Appendix to the article, described a person’s reaction on returning to a place that had become more developed, and used the present tense to evoke the increase of people, busy state of the place and more prominent “car culture” (219). However, although the use of stories can help set a context, illustrate one or more perspectives, and create a platform for discussion, VanWynsberghe et al. found it to have mixed reactions from participants and believed it was not a familiar or possibly appropriate ‘ice-breaker’ for an expert workshop. Participants variously found the stories enjoyable, communicative, threatening, simplistic, ignorant and stereotypical, and some even “felt inclined to correct or comment on the story while it was being read” (215).

50 See Appendix 2 for an outline of the steps of the workshops.
A personal experience with the use of a story to set the context of a workshop indicated that the effectiveness of using prepared stories can depend greatly on how well they are constructed to enable certain perspectives to be reflected and to encourage critical thinking. First-hand stories from the participants themselves are perhaps more likely to be meaningful and effective.

Another important observation of VanWynsberghe et al. about the collaborative workshops was that participants were particularly forthcoming when asked in step 2 to simply list the objectives or values they were working towards. “Participants wanted to ensure that everyone else [knew] where they [were] coming from and what they cared about” and “balked when they did not get the chance to talk to one another and to set out their positions with regard to the topic” (215). VanWynsberghe et al. interpreted this as participants wanting “to make friends” and offer “a bit of who they are” as an initial part of exchange (215). This is an interesting observation that supports the view that people do like to share what they care or are passionate about.

There are many processes oriented towards involving stakeholders in dialogue and deliberation and Appendix 2 outlines focus groups and processes that tend to be of longer duration such as roundtables, advisory committees, natural resource management groups and regional forums.

**BRINGING TOGETHER ‘LAY’ AND ‘EXPERT’ KNOWLEDGE IN ASSESSMENT PROCESSES**

Integrated Assessment (IA) has recently become “an important approach for synthesising multidisciplinary knowledge about complex environmental phenomena with regard to policy decision-making” (Dürrenberger et al. 1999, 341). IA has traditionally been performed as a primarily scientific exercise, but Dürrenberger et al. argue that “a participatory element is needed that integrates lay persons (citizens, stakeholders) into the assessment process” (1999, 341). In this section I discuss the IA focus groups (as described by Dürrenberger et al. 1999, Gough et al. 2003, and Kasemir, Jaeger and Jäger 2003) that were conducted in seven urban regions around Europe as part of two large research programs (the European Union project ULYSSES, 1996-1999, and the Swiss project CLEAR, 1996-2000), and altogether involved
approximately 600 public participants.\textsuperscript{51} This major research initiative aimed to help address the complex issue of climate change and other sustainability issues through procedures facilitating participation of stakeholders and citizens in integrated sustainability assessments.

In the IA focus groups, “disagreement and controversies among experts were made explicit in order to render obvious complexity and uncertainty issues associated with expert knowledge” (Gough et al. 2003, 55), and the authors found that participants were readily able to understand the complexities and broader contexts of issues. The focus groups are also noteworthy for going beyond simply eliciting views to being more deliberative:

\begin{quote}
IA focus groups…are designed to observe citizen preferences in a dynamic setting. This means that preferences may be expressed, criticized, and/or revised in the course of the conversation (Kasemir, Jaeger and Jäger 2003, 21).
\end{quote}

The focus groups were designed to “generate policy recommendations that synthesise and integrate a wide variety of scientific information and social, political and ethical considerations” (Dürrenberger et al. 1999, 345).

The IA focus groups, as in the case of conventional focus groups, involved guided small group discussions around a focal topic aided by the stimulus of information materials about various issues and options. However, the IA focus groups were “oriented towards generic and long-term (sustainability) issues” that were complex and global in scope and required “a broad range of specialised scientific and technical expertise” (Dürrenberger et al. 1999, 342). These issues were not ones that could be discussed sufficiently in a single meeting; the traditional focus group model was therefore adapted to become a longer and more structured discussion process involving phases with differing purposes:

- the \textit{first phase} used collage work and general discussion to allow participants to express spontaneously their feelings about climate change and energy use;
- the \textit{second} involved several sessions in which participants interacted with expert opinion on the issues through presentations and computer models;
- in the \textit{final phase} participants synthesized their conclusions in the form of a written report reflecting the group’s ‘integrated assessment,’ including uncertainties and open questions.

\textsuperscript{51} Sessions for decision-makers and stakeholders were held separately to the citizen focus groups.
The groups consisted of approximately 6-8 citizens who were selected to be as heterogeneous as possible in terms of social stratification and environmental attitudes. This diversity meant the discussions “were shaped by very different backgrounds and experiences among the participants” (Kasemir, Jaeger and Jäger 2003, 26). The discussions required careful moderation, but importantly “also tended to contain richer interactions between different viewpoints than had been the case with more homogenous pilot groups conducted within the project” (26). Another important point provided by Kasemir et al. is that it is inevitable that certain participants in focus groups will have more influence than others but that this can largely be addressed through experienced and careful moderation. Furthermore, they highlight that such processes are about clarifying rather than reducing uncertainty and disagreement.

There were some particularly interesting outcomes of the IA focus groups. Participants tended to adopt an ethical rather than economic approach and “were also in favour of mitigation measures even in the face of scientific uncertainly – that is, they usually based their views of the climate issue on the precautionary principle” (2003, 32). However, there was less of a “deep-ecology perspective” and more of a “economic-management perspective” when it came to discussing the actual mitigation measures (32). Participants saw substantial reductions in energy use as more desirable than business as usual but generally felt that “reduction could and should be achieved without greatly raising energy prices” (32).

In terms of the process overall, Gough et al. (2003) found that the involvement of lay participants in IA brought a much broader range of knowledge and perspectives that made the process richer for it:

Our findings suggest that lay participants involved in IA do not limit themselves to “expert information” but also incorporate personal and collective experiences and values, historical trends, trust, distrust, and expectations about the political, social, information, and economic systems (47).

To add to this, Dürrrenberger et al. conclude that IA focus groups should have a balance between informing participants and listening to the “local knowledge, life experience and political and cultural valuations” they bring to the process (1999, 348).
PROCESSES COMBINING CITIZEN AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

In their report *Developing Participatory Consultation – a review of learning from four experimental dialogue processes*, Hunt et al. (2003) provide important insights into dialogical and deliberative processes conducted in the UK involving citizens, experts and stakeholders. The strengths and weaknesses they identify reveal a great deal about developing reflective dialogue and a depth of exchange.

Hunt et al. describe a *discussion group* process that bears similarities to a focus group but is designed for 10 public participants and one official stakeholder participant (who in the case described by Hunt et al. was a representative of a nuclear regulatory body). The facilitated discussion occurs around a table and is supported by information boards on the key aspects of the issue in question. Hunt et al. argue that the two-session design (with an intervening week) allows for “development of greater ease with the situation, more mature positions and deeper dialogue” (15), and suggest the format could be extended to three sessions. In the case described, they found that significant mutual learning took place between the public participants and stakeholder involved, who suggested the process could be used prior to or instead of public meetings. However, the case indicated the tendency for discussion to gravitate towards perspectives similar to the stakeholder’s because of her/his apparent authority and expertise.

Hunt et al. also experimented with the *future search conference*, which is a deliberative mechanism involving diverse stakeholders. It is a highly structured and intensive process involving on average 30-50 participants in small group and plenary discussions that usually take place over two consecutive days with an overnight stay to encourage greater engagement with the process (Carson and Gelber 2001; Oels 2004; Hunt et al. 2003; Tamarack 2004). It is a particularly creative, collaborative and action-oriented process in which stakeholders of a community or organization are encouraged to recognize their respective knowledge, experience, concerns, and moreover interdependence, and to produce concrete sets of action plans and goals based on collaborative action. Further discussion of this method is provided in *Appendix 2*.  

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Hunt et al.’s use of this method involved 15 public participants and 5 official stakeholders, though they had intended the involvement of 10 stakeholders. Facilitators moved between groups situated in the same room to create a sense of collective endeavour. The process began with introductory exercises focussing on capacity to listen and engagement with imaginative faculties, which were designed “to facilitate the entering of a different social space,” empathy, and a sense of “common humanity” and “being embedded in a shared historical process” (17). The participants then considered in, small groups, their hopes for the near future of radioactive waste management, and their hopes with regard to management scenarios in the distant future, both of which were followed by plenary feedback and discussion. These activities used mind map diagrams that included noting any disagreements. The second session involved strategically mixed stakeholder and citizen groups, with the more diverse group having more contentious discussion as anticipated. The entire process was kept “information light” (17) to encourage shared responsibility for learning from one another.

Hunt et al. observed that “a high overall level of engagement and a sense of group identity” (17) had developed by the second day, and facilitators believed the overnight stay, shared meals and evening socialisation had contributed to this. Another observation, however, was that the absence of disagreement in the final plenary session (which focussed on the present and how a desirable future could be achieved) was possibly a “premature consensus” (18). They believed this indicated a group aversion to ending on any “dissonant notes” (18) and tendency towards closure, rather than any tiredness or desire to leave.

They concluded that the future search model was on the whole more successful in developing a deliberative environment than the discussion group model previously outlined, but that this environment was nevertheless “preliminary” (28) in its accommodation of different knowledge levels and encouragement of mutual respect for views and learning. Furthermore, whereas the presence of the one stakeholder in the discussion group as an information source “inhibited some participants from articulating their own knowledge” (28), the imaginative exercises of the future search “encouraged participants to draw on their own experience and to make sense of the radioactive waste situation in their own terms” (28). These shared visioning exercises helped to develop “a sense of common good and shared responsibility” (31). They were
also significant for the articulation of areas of conflict, something that Hunt et al. believe is necessary for the development of trust and understanding. The scenarios workshop that Hunt et al. also trialled (where consideration of a hypothetical local scenario and then scenarios involving other people’s localities were designed to encourage consideration of the ‘common good’) had some similar benefits to the future search process but was a shorter process and more information rich and task-focussed.

Hunt et al. also studied the use of another process which they called a dialogue workshop. This workshop took place over two successive Saturdays and involved 12 official stakeholders and 28 public participants in plenary and smaller mixed group discussions. It was intended “to explore an issue that was more likely to polarise opinion” (20), which was “the implications associated with either maintaining reprocessed uranium and plutonium as resources or declaring them to be wastes” (15).

The format of the second day was changed to accommodate the participants’ “concerns on the first day about the information needed to discuss the issues surrounding plutonium” (21). Another adjustment was that all participants were given guidelines on the second day regarding “inclusive and collegiate dialogue” (21) to indicate the kind of dialogue in which they were being asked to participate. It was observed that more advanced dialogue, involving “deeper mutual explorations of relationships, assumptions and meanings” (21), was beginning to emerge on the second day. While the simplicity of structure of the workshop—in which “the dialogue itself was presented as the ‘aim of the process’ and framing of the problem was left open for participants—may have contributed to this, Hunt et al. suggest it also may have contributed to a “sense of uncertainty” and disorientation (23).

The dialogue workshop aimed to achieve “higher level dialogue” through the “explicit application” (31) of Bohmian Dialogue ideals such as listening and suspension (in which people engage with their own and other people’s assumptions and perspectives, and suspend the desire for their own perspective to prevail), and “aspiring to move as a group towards the generation of new shared meaning” (29). Hunt et al. found it difficult to determine whether the workshop had been any more successful at this than the other processes (due to the last minute changes in the design and a very time-limited
process), but learnt from it that much more time and *ongoing* commitment to dialogue is needed to develop ‘higher level dialogue.’

While written feedback about the workshop confirmed that mutual learning had taken place and that some participants had felt inclined to reflect on their own views, there was doubt as to “how far *underlying reasons* for difference of perspective had been explored” and “whether production of new shared meaning took place” (22). The quality of feedback was, however, much greater than the other processes, suggesting the process had encouraged better engagement with the “ethos of the event” and development of a “sense of shared ongoing exploration” (22).

General conclusions about the processes discussed above included the points that both public and stakeholder participants valued the opportunity for communication, and that small, facilitated groups combining stakeholders and citizens worked well “as a means for participants to gain insight into each other’s perspectives” (30). Hunt et al. also found that whereas in the *discussion group* dialogue was constrained by the “institutional ‘risk management’ perspective” (27) of the stakeholder involved, in the *future search* and *dialogue workshop* processes involving numerous stakeholders and public participants, “conditions were more conducive to framing by the participants” and thus a “wide range of different ways of understanding were articulated” (28). Hunt et al. confirmed that in processes with an “open agenda and longer duration, as was the case of the dialogue workshop, there is greater scope to let the interpersonal dynamics find their own balance within the group” (25). On the other hand, of all the processes, the highly structured future search design proved to be “the most successful in providing a safe space to explore perspectives and to generate ideas”, and in its mapping of issues “went somewhat deeper into the bases of some deep-seated contentions” (31).

**PROCESSES OF OPEN PARTICIPATION**

Whereas the processes explored above tend to have randomly or strategically selected participants, the processes discussed in the following tend to be more open in their participation. They are often driven by community organizations or products of partnership approaches, and can help develop collaborative work, broad involvement and ongoing engagement.
Study circles, raised earlier in this chapter, have significant potential for developing transformative deliberation, and as ongoing processes, are highly significant for the space they create for in-depth dialogue and deliberation. McCoy and Scully (2002) and Scully and McCoy (2005) provide in-depth analysis of the benefits of this model for meaningful engagement. Commonly used in the United States, study circles are “small, diverse groups” that “meet simultaneously all across a community to address an issue of common concern” (2002, 119). These groups involve citizens of various racial, ethnic, socio-economic and educational backgrounds, as well as public officials. The inclusion of public officials is important for building mutual trust and connecting the process to decision-making. In contrast to meetings involving “members of a group with similar interests and ideas” (119), study circles provide opportunities for dialogue and deliberation between people of different backgrounds and affiliations. It should be noted here that while the WA Collaboration is formed around the sustainability agenda and attracts people with some kind of interest in the approach, it nevertheless engages a considerable diversity of people because of the breadth of the sustainability concept.

Study circles are structured spaces in the sense that ground rules and trained peer facilitators are used to encourage inclusiveness and respectful and empathetic listening; balanced and accessible discussion materials are used to provide substance, prompt people to ask follow-up questions of others and help develop understanding (the US Study Circles Resource Center provides these materials online which many communities adapt for their circumstances). The small size of the groups and typical sequence of at least four two-hour sessions helps to reduce the pressure for people who are less confident or take longer to voice their views. “Participants agree to attend every session and to share responsibility for the quality of discussion” (2005, 205). The “first few sessions of a study circle emphasize the dialogue aspects of deliberative dialogue” (2002, 124), beginning with personal stories to help the group consider the problem from different points of view, while the latter sessions move to “the pros and cons of different proposals for action” (124). The aim is to reach “common ground” or “areas of general agreement” from which actions may follow (125).

The small groups then have the opportunity to come together as a community and pool their ideas in a large-group meeting called an ‘action forum’. Community indicators or benchmarks may be established to monitor progress and in turn inspire broader
participation. The model tends to encourage partnerships to form around specific areas of work in the community. McCoy and Scully point out that participation is enhanced when “the galvanizing issue is of concern to all kinds of people” (129), and note that race relations has been a topic that has attracted strong participation in many study circles in the US.

Study circles are significant because they provide a way for people to see themselves as change agents, enable people to act and create ongoing engagement processes rather than isolated events (McCoy and Scully 2002). They put into practice the principles of ‘deliberative dialogue’ discussed earlier in this chapter: making listening as important as speaking, connecting personal experience with public issues, and building trust and a foundation for working relationships. The ultimate purpose of study circles is to “provide everyone with routine opportunities for meaningful participation” (2005, 202).

The national issues forums discussed by Melville et al. (2005) have similar features and potential as the study circles. In particular they use ‘issues books’ developed collaboratively by organizations, which structure discussions and remind participants of the range of perspectives that need to be considered by outlining various approaches to key issues. Like study circles, national issues forums bring together diverse groups and individuals and have the potential to expand understanding of issues and broaden engagement. Melville et al. have found that the issues forums, through processes such as exchange of personal experiences, have in many cases helped “participants move from a narrow sense of self-interest—an initial focus on ‘how this affects me’—to a broader sense of how a particular course of action is likely to affect others in their own community, in different circumstances, or even in other generations” (46). They argue that in this way participants’ views expand and are altered rather than undergo dramatic changes.

Karpowitz and Mansbridge (2005) are similarly concerned with the challenges self-interest can present in deliberation and how shifts and expansion of views may occur. In their analysis of deliberative methods used to facilitate town planning in Princeton, New Jersey, they consider how such processes might better accommodate “open-minded, ongoing discovery of one another’s possibly changing values and interests” (238), which they conceptualize as ‘dynamic updating.’ Their case study of the
Princeton Future process provides important insight into the challenges of ensuring tensions and conflict are dealt with in deliberation and developing reflective and transformative exchange.

In short, triggered by a proposal to build a new library in the downtown area and frustration with adversarial politics, Princeton Future (a community group concerned with fostering a deliberative approach to town planning in Princeton) “held a series of thirty-four small group discussions in local homes and churches” (240) beginning in November 2000. Facilitated by trained peer coordinators, the neighbourhood meetings were designed to develop a ‘social vision’ for Princeton through group discussion. The process culminated in a development plan based on citizens’ comments that was prepared by Princeton Future, with the assistance of a consulting firm, and which after further public meetings was presented to the borough in accordance with a prior agreement. The plan was endorsed by the borough council in July 2001.

However, following this process substantial opposition to the plan emerged during a series of open borough council meetings that served as public hearings of particular testimonies. Council members were astonished at the level of passion the development had evoked. Why then did such a seemingly effective community engagement process result in “a backlash against the deliberative process itself” (238)? Karpowitz and Mansbridge explain that Princeton Future had “envisioned its deliberative forums as a way to pursue common public goals and resist a planning process that might otherwise be dominated by narrow, private interests” (241), but “in its attempt to forge a consensual public interest, Princeton Future failed to engage important conflicts among the various segments of the community” (241).

In response they argue for “an interactive process of forging and discovery, with continuing attention to the evolution of conflicting as well as common interest within the deliberative process itself” (238), a process of explicit mutual exploration that they found to be neglected in the Princeton case. They warn of the dangers of a forced or pseudo consensus in which “objections are overlooked in the group’s eagerness to settle the situation” (245). At the same time they suggest that mutually beneficial outcomes are possible “when the parties to a negotiation find innovative ways through which both can get what they want at less cost to the others than they had originally expected”
Karpowitz and Mansbridge therefore pose the lingering question of “the degree to which actual negotiations on conflicting interests can be structured into deliberations without undermining pursuit of the common good” (247). They suggest giving due attention to conflict by building into the deliberative process “elements of negotiation” (238), combining “relatively unitary with relatively adversary forms of public talk,” “mixing deliberative methods with other modes of public discourse,” and in particular, by including “more instances of testimony” (248).

Appendix 2 provides a discussion of some other engagement processes that can shed light on developing reflective and transformative exchange, such as

- **world cafés**—dialogical processes involving large numbers of participants in simultaneous deliberation at small group, café-style tables;
- **charrettes**—intensive planning processes open to the public that aim to produce specific outcomes within a short time frame;
- **community visioning and other creative processes**; and
- **appreciative inquiry**—a change methodology that fosters innovation in various types of organizations through gathering of positive stories and inquiry into what is possible.

**LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT PRACTICE AND THE CHALLENGE OF FOSTERING REFLECTIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE EXCHANGE**

The effectiveness of deliberative processes depends on several factors including the dynamics of the groups, the experience and skills of organizers and facilitators, the clarity of purpose and transparency of the process, the level of resources provided, and the degree of official support and openness to deliberative outcomes. These are considerations that are frequently raised in the literature, and while they are all important, this thesis is concerned primarily with how deliberative processes might be designed to be more effective in terms of the mutual learning potentially experienced by participants during the process of deliberation. Opportunities for integration of perspectives, among both stakeholders and citizens, are central to this learning.

Apprehension of a plurality of concerns and perspectives can help participants understand an issue more deeply and thoroughly. The presence of stakeholders, who
may often be more confident in articulating their views, can in some situations restrict the voice of public participants, but nonetheless involvement of a range of participants can provide a wealth of knowledge about various areas of concern. By the same token, engagement with the views of citizens in deliberation can help stakeholders, as well as specialists and officials, fathom the particular experience and concerns of citizens. Stakeholders also stand to gain feedback and advocacy opportunities (see discussion of this in Hendriks 2004). Furthermore, in the processes they observed, Hunt et al. found that “[p]ublic participants consistently demonstrate great capacity to step back from an immediate technical question in order to frame it within broader social, ethical, environmental and historical contexts” (27).

This is why processes that integrate the participation of stakeholders and citizens have the potential to develop rich and transformative dialogue, and why open initiatives like the WA Collaboration provide significant opportunity for this. More attention needs to be given to the ways in which deliberative processes can integrate citizen and stakeholder modes of participation. Attention must also be given to how organized civil society can help provide effective and ongoing deliberative spaces; multi-stakeholder, community-based endeavours like the WA Collaboration have considerable potential for in-depth dialogue among organized interests and unaffiliated members of the community.

Although blurring the roles of citizens and stakeholders can sometimes create uncertainty (as Hunt et al. 2003 note), in the rather informal WA Collaboration situation this has in general not been the case. Instead of being strategically placed, participants at forums usually sit where they wish and tend to mix well. However, the challenge remains in such situations of ensuring both organizational and various individual interests are equally involved.

As the preceding discussion of processes illustrates, there are a number of processes that provide potential for a depth of exchange. However, while dialogical and deliberative practice may help participants traverse challenging issues and forge potential solutions, it often fails to reach the level of exploration of underlying differences in perspectives and values—the reflective dialogue important for creating genuinely shared and innovative solutions.
Many authors share this view. O’Riordan et al. (undated), in a study of deliberative processes, advocate Deliberative and Inclusionary Processes (DIPs) that aim “to deepen the level of discussion so that underlying meaning and values are more fully explored” (abstract) and “more richly informed decisions” are developed. O’Riordan et al. contend that these practices “should be analysed more carefully for their contribution, purpose and processes, and that the methods through which values were elicited and accommodated needed more attention” (abstract). Resonating with Karpowitz and Mansbridge’s (2005) concerns discussed earlier, Smith and Wales (2000) raise concerns about how well the citizens’ jury process allows participants to work through all the different aspects and perspectives important to an issue and achieve a depth of understanding and shared outcomes:

Questions have been raised by some jurors as to whether, on occasion, moderators push for consensus amongst the jurors at the expense of allowing participants to understand and work through their differences. There must be space for disagreement built into the process: even though juries accommodate majority/minority decisions, an expectation of consensus can create a barrier to critical dialogue with particular perspectives dominating the agenda and defining the consensus (59-60).

From their experimentation with dialogical and deliberative processes, Hunt et al. (2003) provide important insights that are highly pertinent to my concern for developing a depth of exchange in such processes. In their experiments, Hunt et al. sought to bring about “a situation in which the underlying roots of assumptions were explored and new shared meaning generated” (29) through dialogue in which “conflicting perspectives and commitments are raised into awareness” (36). However, they observed “[p]lateau phenomena’ in the development of dialogue” (20) and found that discussions tended to remain at the level of “issue mapping”—simply defining a range of issues and positions—rather than reaching the level of exploration of “reasons for differences in perspective” (20). Reflecting on their experience, they make the important conclusion that the level of discipline, commitment and energy required “to remain open to radically different perspectives, types of knowledge and linguistic conventions should not be underestimated” (28, emphasis added). They found that:

establishing a high quality deliberative situation involves stages that cannot be short-circuited. The preliminary stages of developing authentic communicative trust cannot be rushed…[a] deliberative situation that embraces diverse perspectives requires an ongoing time commitment (29).

A tension is evident in their conclusion that “greater dialogic depth can be achieved by longer and multi-session events,” but that “it must be recognised that shorter and one-
off events open participation to a greater number of people” (2003, 25). They suggest this tension can be resolved somewhat: “what is appropriate depends on the context and aims of the consultation…a comprehensive consultation process might be expected to include events to exemplify each of the aspects” (25). Indeed, I argue that opportunities for reflective dialogue should, where appropriate, be built into processes or otherwise provided in specific sessions. Opportunities explicitly for mutual exploration of different concerns, claims, values and perspectives are required to support more action-oriented tasks and foster strong working relationships. These opportunities are conceptualized in this thesis as generating transactional space.

This chapter has illustrated the considerable potential for transactional space in current participatory and deliberative practice. At the same time it has shown that while these processes are developing rapidly, there is a need for much greater consideration of how such processes might better negotiate differences and create genuinely effective and transformative engagement. The aspects of critical, reflective dialogue and concept of transactional space explored in this chapter provide one response to this gap in research. More attention must be given to understanding how deep tensions in values and beliefs can be dealt with in participation, and how perspectives can meet and be expanded.

CONCLUSION
Chapter 3 and this chapter have sought to identify the aspects and processes of dialogue and deliberation that are conducive to developing transformative exchange. They have canvassed the considerable work made in both theory and practice towards developing effective processes of engagement, and at the same time have highlighted remaining challenges. Transactional space is about providing opportunities for reflective and potentially transformative dialogue in which a diversity of perspectives can be included, expanded and integrated for better deliberative outcomes. Such opportunities can supplement more task-based deliberation and generally enrich participatory practice. The remaining chapters of this thesis explore further the development of transactional space, primarily through a case study of the WA Collaboration.
Chapter 5
The WA Collaboration and its potential for creating transactional space for sustainability

INTRODUCTION
This thesis has so far explored the potential for sustainability of deliberative and collaborative governance, and in particular the role of reflective and transformative exchange in discussions of complex policy issues. In Chapter 1 I considered the fluid and contested nature of the notion of sustainability. Chapter 2 then explored how such a challenging agenda might be progressed through a shift towards a more participatory, networked, collaborative and, moreover, deliberative governance. I argued that while this context has significant potential for developing more sustainable policy outcomes, a depth of exchange will be required in policy discussion if it is to generate expansion of understanding and perspective. Chapters 3 and 4 then shifted to an exploration of key theory and practice significant to developing transformative exchange in order to demonstrate how it might be developed in participatory and collaborative processes. I used the concept of transactional space to focus on this exchange and argued that this space can be created through the incorporation of opportunities for critical reflection on experience, perspectives and underlying values.

This chapter and the next focus on the relevance of this concept of transactional space to the WA Collaboration, and present a case study of my research and engagement with the organization between October 2002 and August 2006. This research was based upon the premise that the integration of reflective dialogue with task-based discussion and action is crucial to the development of organizations and in particular collaborative initiatives. It was inspired by the arguments of authors such as Schön (1983) that continuous reflection is essential to developing effective practice. The research was informed in particular by participatory action research methodology, which is outlined in some detail in the next chapter. In discussing the activities and potential of the WA Collaboration over the period 2002-2006, this chapter provides essential background to Chapter 6, which discusses the intensive process developed and conducted with the WA Collaboration Steering Committee between January 2003 and February 2004 to help foster a culture of reflective exchange.
This chapter explores the WA Collaboration as an example of a significant partnership body that emerged around the sustainability agenda, and one that I recognized as having considerable potential to provide transactional space through its work in the Western Australian community sector and wider community. The formation of the WA Collaboration was based upon the belief that progressing sustainability requires collective approaches to issues and as such forms of dialogue that bring together the interests and perspectives of a diverse range of groups (Hodgson and Buselich 2006). As Chapter 2 established, collaborative initiatives, particularly those dealing with the challenges presented by sustainability, require ongoing opportunities for exchange and in particular critical reflection on the varying backgrounds, perspectives and values participants bring to policy discussions. However, as will be shown in this chapter, a tension was evident in the Collaboration’s work between providing sufficient opportunities for dialogue and responding to pressing issues. I recognized the Collaboration as having an immanent capacity for transformative exchange that needed conscious attention for its development.

This chapter outlines the range of activities with which the Collaboration was involved over the period 2002-2006 in order to illustrate the various opportunities it provided for engagement in sustainability. In particular, I discuss the forums and other events the Collaboration provided that I perceived as having greater potential for in-depth discussion and exchange. The discussion in this chapter has been informed by formal and informal collection of data, as outlined at the outset of the thesis. Together with the interviews, this data includes internal and public documents of the WA Collaboration, formal documentation and my own records from WA Collaboration Steering Committee meetings and various open events, personal communications, and knowledge and understanding gained from the collaborative writing of several papers with the Coordinator of the WA Collaboration. This chapter has in general been informed by my experience over the past four years of being actively engaged with the WA Collaboration’s activities and development, as well as by my regular contact with the Coordinator.

The chapter begins with a description of the way in which the Collaboration formed. Following this I discuss the organization’s distinctive nature, aims and roles, structure
and operation as a network and forum, participants, activities, and relationship with government, in order to illustrate its significant potential for transformative engagement with sustainability. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the opportunities the Collaboration provided for transactional level dialogue and deliberation and on the importance of active development of its transformative potential.

THE FORMATION OF THE WA COLLABORATION

The formation of the WA Collaboration in mid-2002 was stimulated largely by changes in Western Australian State Government policy direction. Environmental and sustainability objectives were among the key election commitments of the WA Labor Government elected to office in February 2001, which in particular had committed to developing a state sustainability strategy. In the lead up to the election a number of Western Australian environmental groups had been working cooperatively as an Environmental Alliance to bring environmental and sustainability issues to the forefront of the election campaign (Environmental Alliance 2001). At the same time the WA Council of Social Service was involved in developing a framework for social sustainability as a precursor to developing housing indicators for socially sustainable communities (Barron and Gauntlett 2002). This work involved discussions with the Conservation Council about sustainability in WA.

The organizations recognized the value in having a partnership that could extend existing cooperation within the community sector and provide a space to bring together social and environmental perspectives. Such a partnership could have the potential to develop a more coherent voice from the community sector and in doing so more effectively shape and promote the sustainability agenda in WA. Funding for the WA Collaboration was secured from Lotterywest for approximately two and a half years from August 2002. This funding allowed the WA Collaboration to develop community engagement with sustainability and a forum independent from government for exchange of knowledge and perspectives around sustainability.

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52 Lotterywest is the official state lottery for Western Australia. Profits from the sale of lottery products are returned to the community according to the Lotteries Commission Act 1990. Because Lotterywest is not designed to provide ongoing funding, the key source of administrative funding for the WA Collaboration was later received from the State Government of WA. At the time of writing the Collaboration was in the process of identifying ways to secure long term funding from various sources.
While the State Government’s commitment to developing a state sustainability strategy provided impetus for the formation of a WA Collaboration, it was the Australian Collaboration that provided inspiration and a model of the kind of partnership that could be created. Formed in 2001, the Australian Collaboration involves the following peak national community organizations representing social, cultural and environmental constituencies and interests: the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF); the Australian Consumers Association (ACA); the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS); the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID); the Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia (FECCA); the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) and its Social Justice Network; and the Trust for Young Australians. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) participated until June 2004 when it was de-funded and disbanded.

The Australian Collaboration aims to help achieve a sustainable relationship between social, cultural, environmental and economic policies and activities within Australia and overseas, and has adopted four key roles to further this aim: it provides a forum for exchanges between national community organizations with differing interests and perspectives; its advocacy role means it engages with governments and other organizations to influence their longer term policies; as a think tank it develops significant publications with the assistance of academic researchers from around Australia; and the educational role is closely related to the research role and involves engagement with many schools and universities (Australian Collaboration 2005).

At a conference in Adelaide in April 2004 during which the South Australian Collaboration was launched, the Convenor of the Australian Collaboration, Emeritus Professor David Yencken, noted that the Australian Collaboration’s roles had evolved

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53 The Australian Collaboration has released two important reports focussing on major issues affecting Australian Society and the relationships between them: “A Just and Sustainable Australia” describes key social, cultural and environmental issues and makes recommendations for action (Yencken and Porter 2001); “Where Are We Going” focuses on the development of more comprehensive reporting of social, cultural, environmental and economic conditions and trends, at various levels of government and across sectors of Australian society (Yencken 2001).

54 The South Australian Collaboration and the Queensland Collaboration made inroads into their establishment but at the time of writing were relatively inactive as organizations. The WA Collaboration Coordinator was a speaker at the SA Collaboration’s launch and conference and shared the WA Collaboration experience with them. I attended this launch and conference. The Coordinator has also held discussions with the Queensland Collaboration and provided a video presentation to them about the WA Collaboration experience. I attended one of the Queensland Collaboration’s early workshops in Queensland in 2003 and presented some thoughts on the WA Collaboration from my research.
over time and that this adaptability had proved beneficial to the group. This insight into
the nature of collaborations is significant because by having multiple parties involved,
such initiatives tend to take time to discover and develop their collective potential; they
take time to identify where they can make the most difference and which directions are
best to take. Like the Australian Collaboration, the WA Collaboration has undergone an
evolution of its priorities and roles, which while distinct, have tended to develop
according to opportunity and capacity. Indeed, in their report of collaborative initiatives
in the UK, Rochester and Woods (2005) note that participants of collaborations tend to
assume from the start that their collaborative structures will constantly evolve.

Inspired by the national level model of the Australian Collaboration, the WA
Collaboration formed as a similar grouping of organizations but at the state level. The
following organizations, many of which are ‘peak’ or ‘umbrella’ bodies in the
community sector, were the founding partners and Steering Committee of the WA
Collaboration (the descriptions have been compiled from the organizations’ websites,
brochures and other resources).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), before it was
dissolved, was Australia’s principal democratically elected Indigenous organization. Its
vision was for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to be able
to exercise freely their legal, economic, social, cultural and political rights. It advocated
self-determination for such communities and monitored the performance of government
agencies in providing services to their Indigenous citizens.

The Council of Churches of WA (CCWA) is an association of Christian Churches or
related Christian bodies that exists to promote a closer unity among Christians in WA.
It is in particular committed to respecting one another’s Church doctrines, disciplines
and traditions and recognising the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of Christian
communities in Australia.

The Conservation Council of WA is Western Australia’s foremost non-government,
non-profit, voluntary conservation organization and acts as an umbrella organization for
nearly 70 affiliated conservation groups throughout WA. It advocates conservation and
a sustainable society in WA, in particular sustainable management of resources, ‘living cities’ and conservation of biodiversity.

The *Ethnic Communities Council of WA (ECCWA)* is the State’s peak body for ethnic organizations and takes an active interest in all aspects of multiculturalism and ethnic affairs. It is an advocate for all ethnic communities in WA to ensure equitable access to the resources that governments manage on behalf of the community. It seeks a fair and just society where all people have the opportunity to realise their full potential and be free from discrimination.

*Unions WA* is the peak or overarching trade union body for the various workers’ unions affiliated to it. It represents the interests and expectations of the broader workforce and unions, and in doing so advocates for workers’ rights and strives to foster better and more rewarding jobs. Unions WA was formerly the Trades and Labor Council of WA and now operates under the new name to reflect its broader representation (its association with ‘white collar’ and ‘blue collar’ unions). It was for a long time affiliated with the Australian Labor Party (ALP) but became independent in the 1960s.

The *WA Council of Social Service (WACOSS)* is the peak council of community service organizations and individuals in Western Australia and is part of a national network that assists low income and disadvantaged people throughout Australia. It seeks a socially just and sustainable Western Australian society where people care for each other and have access to the resources and opportunities necessary for their wellbeing.

The *WA Sustainable Industry Group (WA SIG)* is a multi-stakeholder network of business, public sector, environment, engineering and education professionals committed to application of Cleaner Production and Eco-Efficiency for a clean and competitive Western Australia, and is a member of the Regional Network of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. Its vision is for WA businesses to lead by example in addressing local and global sustainable development challenges, by delivering innovative, competitively-priced goods and services that bring quality of life, while progressively reducing environmental impact and resource intensity.
This partnership represents the first time that such a range of organizations has formally cooperated in WA. It is also the first time that an independent and ongoing partnership and open forum have been created around the sustainability agenda. Although the organizations described above encompass a limited range of interests, the partnership nevertheless represents a diversity of concerns, a unique grouping and a departure from traditional forms of interest group involvement in policy-making, such as single-issue group advocacy and alliances set up to lobby around a particular issue. Furthermore, in their concern for ‘a just and sustainable Western Australia,’ the peak organizations of the Collaboration’s Steering Committee (which have numerous groups associated with them), together with the smaller organizations affiliated with the Collaboration, encompass a large number of community sector organizations and groups, and an array of interests. Further to this involvement are the diverse individuals that participate in the various events the Collaboration provides. The Collaboration therefore operates at essentially two levels—in its Steering Committee (SC) and its wider network. The wider network exists in the participants of the various Collaboration events and in those who use the WA Collaboration as a contact point and resource. With the engagement of the wider community of participants, the SC and Coordinator of the Collaboration identify and organize the Collaboration’s activities. While the Collaboration is extensive in its participation, it recognizes that it cannot claim to represent the entire spectrum of community sector or community interests and views.

In sum, as a network and forum, the Collaboration brings together a diversity of organizations and individuals to engage with sustainability and deliberate about policy issues related to it in WA. Its Steering Committee and wider network help to bridge discourse gaps and foster collaborative work across sectors. In these ways the WA Collaboration has considerable potential to create transactional space for sustainability—a potentially transformative space involving exchange of the backgrounds, perspectives and values people bring to discussions about sustainability.

I became involved as a researcher with the WA Collaboration in October 2002, soon after its formation. The Coordinator of the Collaboration had been keen to involve a researcher who would be able to engage with the organization and study its development, and I became the only researcher closely following its progress. All of the founding organizations described above, except Unions WA, which was largely
inactive in the Collaboration at the time, were involved in the intensive process I conducted as part of my research that I describe in the next chapter.\textsuperscript{55} ATSIC and WA SIG have since left the Steering Committee of the Collaboration. As noted earlier, ATSIC was disbanded by the Federal Government in 2004, and the WA Collaboration is yet to identify an appropriate replacement. WA SIG withdrew in early 2004 because it is not authorised to make policy statements on behalf of its signatories and was therefore unable to join the other organizations in making collective position statements, something the Collaboration was increasingly interested in doing. This has been unfortunate in terms of the diversity within the Collaboration, but the relationships nevertheless remain and have the potential to create opportunities in the future for policy dialogue and joint forums on issues such as sustainable production and consumption and corporate citizenship.

While the Australian Collaboration provided a model, the WA Collaboration is quite different in its roles and operation. The WA Collaboration provides a forum and space for exchange not only at its Steering Committee level but also at a wider level where interested groups and individuals participate in regular workshops and other events. In contrast, the Australian Collaboration’s forum role exists primarily in its steering committee, with other exchange occurring through its research or think tank role. The WA Collaboration considers its exchange role fundamental to its existence and actively organizes events where participants can exchange perspectives, its aim being to bring together civil society perspectives on sustainability (Hodgson and Buselich 2006). As a group close to regional and local issues, the WA Collaboration is expected to respond to these and to provide accordingly opportunities for broad engagement. The WA Collaboration Coordinator established a working relationship with the Convenor of the Australian Collaboration that was particularly useful in the early days of the WA Collaboration, but the two collaborations have generally not had much interaction and have operated at different levels and for differing purposes. There is potential for strategic dialogue and support between the two in the future, especially in terms of fostering bipartisan and broad community support for sustainability at national, state and local levels.

\textsuperscript{55} Unions WA was largely inactive in the WA Collaboration until early 2004 because of difficulties identifying a staff member who could participate in the Steering Committee.
THE WA COLLABORATION’S ROLES AND WORK TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

The organization’s distinctive nature and potential
The WA Collaboration is significant in being a departure from single-issue group advocacy and in being more than an alliance or coalition of interest groups around a particular issue. Coalitions and alliances tend to form as cooperative rather than collaborative initiatives, that is, as expedient, temporary and tentative associations for a short-term agenda or task, and with the singular aim of pursuing overlapping interests around a particular issue. They tend not to demand too much time of the participating organizations or to greatly influence their work, organizational perspectives and values. In contrast, the WA Collaboration was formed as a partnership of organizations committed to ongoing collaborative work around sustainability. While alliance, partnership and collaborative initiatives exist in a wide spectrum of integration, the WA Collaboration was set up with the aim of creating an integrative situation in which regular work and dialogue would facilitate closer understanding and policy positions.

As such, the WA Collaboration is a distinctive type of organization and an example of the multi-issue and multi-interest partnership initiatives that have recently been emerging around the sustainability agenda. The WA Collaboration is also distinctive in its particular structure and purpose: it involves a range of participants with diverse interests in both its Steering Committee and wider community of participants, and its core aim is to coordinate and integrate such interests and perspectives around sustainability. While there are a number of collaborative initiatives for sustainability of varying purposes and constituents working at a range of levels, the WA Collaboration has the particular characteristics of having partners from divergent perspectives, being set up as an permanent structure and around sustainability, and operating at a state-level and among both the community sector and wider community. Furthermore, the WA Collaboration is significant in its potential to contribute to a shift towards a more networked and participatory governance. With regard to the arguments of Eckersley

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56 For further information see Gadja (2004), as discussed in Chapter 2, and the table provided by the US National Network of Collaboration accessible at http://crs.uvm.edu/nmcollab/framework.html#process.
discussed in Chapter 2, the WA Collaboration represents a space and process with significant potential to expand reflexivity and social learning in governance. It encourages not only pragmatic reasoning but also the navigation of diverse perspectives and values. This declared agenda sets the tone for deliberation with its desire for the creation of comprehensive, collective approaches to social, economic and environmental policy issues.

Because sustainability requires long-term thinking, and the input of a range of participants and their collective ownership, the WA Collaboration is well-placed to help progress the sustainability agenda. As a forum or space for engaging diverse perspectives on sustainability and attempting to integrate them into more encompassing positions, the WA Collaboration provides an alternative, less institutionalised space for policy deliberation than that typically provided by the state, and a space for ideas and perspectives to develop. In comparison with WA State Government initiatives such as the Sustainability Roundtable, which has been limited to approximately 11 stakeholders from various sectors as well as several representatives from government agencies, the WA Collaboration, through its regular forums and other events, has the potential to involve a considerable number and broad range of people because of the open nature of participation.

The State Sustainability Strategy and the WA Collaboration’s early work developing a Community Sustainability Agenda

While several state governments in Australia have been developing frameworks and policies related to sustainability over the past few years, Western Australia was the first state or territory in Australia to develop a comprehensive strategy for sustainability. In July 2001 the newly elected State Government created a Sustainability Policy Unit in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to coordinate the development of a whole-of-government sustainability strategy. An important part of developing the strategy was a consultation process for which the following documents provided a focus: the consultation paper, *Focus on the Future: Opportunities for Sustainability in Western

57 The Roundtable works on several sustainability areas and provides advice on those areas to government. The Coordinator of the WA Collaboration was one of the initial Roundtable members. While she was not officially representing the Collaboration on the Roundtable (Roundtable members are involved for their expertise rather than as representatives of organizations), the Coordinator was in the fortuitous position of being able to keep in touch with policy developments through involvement in the Roundtable, which in turn informed the Collaboration’s work.
Australia, was released for public comment in December 2001 and generated over 200 written submissions between December 2001 and April 2002; the draft strategy, Focus on the Future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy, was released by the Premier in September 2002, and by April 2003, 171 written submissions were received. The final strategy, Hope for the Future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy (hereafter referred to as the SSS), was launched at an international conference on sustainability hosted by the State Government in Fremantle, WA in September 2003.

The Sustainability Policy Unit’s web site provided a general vehicle for consultation. Both rounds of submissions, and how they were addressed, were made available on the web site. Also on the website were 21 background papers and 44 case studies on various subjects to inform the strategy prepared by students and academics through a partnership with Murdoch University. The Director of the Sustainability Policy Unit made presentations about the Strategy at over 200 seminars and workshops during the development period of the Strategy and immediately after its release. Apart from the above, the consultation process included six major public seminars in Perth, further seminars in regional Western Australia and informal discussions with a range of stakeholders.

The consultation process for the Strategy was quite substantial but relatively conventional, being mostly about stakeholder and interest group involvement rather than broad community engagement. I attended the public seminars held in Perth and observed that most attendees were present because of their work (whether private, government or community sector) or because of a strong interest in sustainability such as through their study or involvement in a community group. Few people were present who would be considered an ‘average’ citizen or person off the street. This meant the consultation process was unbalanced to the extent that participation was of people who were already to varying degrees engaged with the sustainability agenda. These

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58 In 2002 I was involved in helping to summarise written submissions to the consultation paper as input to the development of the draft strategy. This provided me with insight into policy-making processes around sustainability. While summarising the written submissions I observed a strong interest in sustainability from a range of people throughout Western Australia. Many people displayed deep engagement with what sustainability might mean for WA, and with the kind of education/awareness-raising processes and cross-sectoral support that would be needed.

59 See “The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy Year One Progress Report 2004” (Government of Western Australia 2004b) for further information about the development of the strategy and for the government’s key sustainability initiatives since the strategy, which include the development of a Sustainability Roundtable, a Sustainability Code of Practice for Government Agencies and Action Plans by government agencies, and a Sustainability Bill.
observations were shared by a key government policy-maker (Government Respondent B) involved in the development of the SSS who was interviewed in mid 2004: “we were really dealing with a very small proportion of people…the same people would show up in dialogue all the time.”

He went on to highlight uncertainty about whether the process would have been more effective if it had encouraged broader dialogue and whether this would have helped to shift or expand views:

…so whether or not [more dialogue] would have actually changed anything I don’t know, because I suspect that people have probably come with reasonably fixed views of what sustainability is anyway, and they might have had their own biases.

The WA Collaboration events have similarly attracted people with an interest in sustainability or with some knowledge of the approach, but have nevertheless involved a wider range of people than the government events. They have provided a less restricted space for discussion in that they have allowed people to develop their own agenda rather than asking people to respond to an established agenda. Also interviewed in 2004, the Coordinator of the WA Collaboration highlighted the range of perspectives involved in the WA Collaboration events, but at the same time noted that the people involved were still a particular set of individuals and organizations interested in sustainability:

I think we’ve got a diversity of views within a subset of society, I mean there’s no way that the views…are representative of a broader societal view…we’re quite clearly organizations and individuals with an interest in social change…people that are going to choose to come along to an event about sustainability are going to be people of a particular mindset I think.

However, she added “I think there’s still a huge range of views within that.”

There has been limited coverage of sustainability and the Government’s strategy in the Western Australian media, meaning minimal opportunities for the development of wide public awareness of such issues. Government Respondent B highlights this problem:60

I suspect this whole debate [sustainability] appeals to a certain audience and it’s why the media struggle with making sense of it and it’s why they’re probably very reluctant to pick it up because the concept is a bit kind of ambiguous to many people.

60 The WA Collaboration has had similar difficulties attracting media interest. Of the 13 media releases the WA Collaboration made about sustainability up to 2006 (whether announcing key actions on their own behalf or responding to current issues such as food labelling and urban growth management) only a handful were published in the news media. The media releases can be accessed at the WA Collaboration’s website.
At the same time, the relatively large numbers of public submissions to the strategy and people attending the various workshops and seminars for the strategy suggest a considerable interest in sustainability on the part of Western Australians, at least among stakeholder and community groups, academia and the private sector. Government Respondent B talks about the level of interest and involvement of the public:

I’m not sure that there was as much debate about the concepts and about the strategies as what there could have been, but I certainly think there was a lot of participation just looking at the volume of people who came to events, the number of written submissions that were generated…it did engender a lot of public interest, relatively speaking to other sorts of government initiatives that were out there…but on the other hand, as I’ve said before, I really think that the main job is still at hand.

Creating space for community and community sector engagement in sustainability

This public interest in sustainability was recognized by the WA Collaboration. The Collaboration perceived a need to encourage greater community involvement in the development of a sustainability strategy for WA. It sought to provide an inclusive and participatory process for community engagement in policy issues related to sustainability. The initial phase of the WA Collaboration’s development was therefore focussed on facilitating discussion about sustainability more broadly in the community and the development of a ‘community’ response to the draft State Sustainability Strategy. This process involved regional workshops throughout Western Australia (‘regional’ here referring to the different geographic areas of WA) and a Sustainability Summit. It culminated in the development of a Community Sustainability Agenda. A major part of the WA Collaboration’s initial funding from Lotterywest was for the provision of such a process.

Between September 2002 and February 2003 the Collaboration conducted ten regional workshops throughout WA involving close to 200 people, primarily community members and representatives of local non-government and community organizations. The Collaboration attempted to attract as many and as wide a range of people as possible. As a result the workshops successfully involved substantial numbers of people with varying interests such as local business owners, representatives of progress associations, environmental and other community groups, social service providers, local government officers and church leaders. The first workshop made clear that directly responding to the lengthy and detailed Draft Strategy would not provide an effective way of engaging people. Subsequent workshops thus became explorations of what
sustainability meant for the people of that region, that is, the workshops identified from a ‘grassroots’ perspective the challenges and opportunities for sustainability. In this way the process helped develop a community response to what the participants themselves identified as important for sustainability, rather than simply a response to government sustainability priorities. All the outcomes of the regional workshops informed and contributed to the Collaboration’s 69-page Community Sustainability Agenda (hereafter referred to as the CSA). While concerns varied markedly between the different regions, the common themes that emerged from the workshops included the following:

- **governance**: the issue of centralised decision-making, the need for better regional processes and planning for sustainability, genuine versus token consultation, accountability and transparency of processes, legislation and regulation to underpin sustainability, mandatory triple bottom line reporting;
- **social**: building on social and cultural heritage, supporting volunteers and community work, depopulation versus sustainable population, diversity of employment opportunities, opportunities for Indigenous people, education opportunities, lack of shared community values, increasing community awareness and understanding of sustainability;
- **environment**: preventing land clearing, protecting biodiversity, sustainable water management;
- **sustainable technologies**: economic diversification, sustainable industries, sustainable urban development and public transport, renewable energy.

A strong concern about repetitive and often token consultation emerged from the workshops. Numerous participants highlighted the considerable amount of consultation they had previously engaged in over several key issues in their areas and the view that such consultation had not affected outcomes as much as they would have hoped or expected. While the WA Collaboration faced the issue of providing yet another consultation process and risked duplicating previous efforts, the workshops were approached with a genuine sense of inquiry and a commitment to reflecting a range of views in the CSA. Without any specific agenda to constrain discussion—apart from asking participants to focus on what sustainability meant for them in their area and the issues they believed were important—the workshops enabled discussion of a range of views about key issues surrounding sustainability, how they related and how they might
be addressed. Moreover, the workshops provided the rare opportunity for a diversity of people throughout WA to come together in dialogue and frame a debate around sustainability, that is, the opportunity to engage in discussions about more holistic, strategic and long-term policy outcomes.

This community engagement process led by the Collaboration was continued through their *Sustainability Summit* in February 2003. Run over two full days, the Summit aimed to foster community discussion on sustainability and to facilitate further input into the Collaboration’s preparation of a community-based sustainability agenda, which was available in draft form as a background paper for the Summit. The Summit provided the opportunity for participants to explore in greater depth the issues and themes identified in the regional workshops, and to engage with a range of perspectives on the issues. Almost 200 participants from community groups or organizations, local and state government, and the private sector took part in the Summit, some of whom participated in the regional workshops. These participants ranged from consultants, people with business interests and State and Local government officers, to people associated with various community groups and non-government organizations, Indigenous leaders, church leaders, activists, students and academics, and people simply interested in sustainability with no particular, declared association.

The Summit employed various techniques to encourage participation in the dialogue and deliberations. The first day was organized under a conventional conference format with keynote speakers and several streams of workshops throughout the day, but the style of the workshops varied considerably depending on the topic and facilitators. The six streams were: (a) the foundational dimensions of sustainability; (b) developing community awareness, values, priorities and action for sustainability; (c) the role of government, including assessment and legislation; (d) governance processes, including forging partnerships and more effective public participation in decision-making; (e) economic tools for promoting sustainability; and (f) strategies and visions for sustainability in areas such as business, urban planning and the provision of services.

The outcomes of the discussions of the first day were analysed by a self-selected working group on the second day of the Summit. This group worked separately from the rest of the summit participants to develop the outcomes into workable
recommendations for the CSA. The second day of the summit followed a very different format to the first. The ‘open space’ method was used to encourage more broad-ranging dialogue and the development of deeper understanding, relationships and potential partnerships for action.61 The principle behind this simple but effective technique is that participants are free to set their own agendas for discussion by posting topics for conversations they wish to host. Open space sessions involve explicit ground rules that are emphasized by the person coordinating, such as inclusiveness, active listening, willingness to learn, and freedom to move on to other conversations, many of which are elements that can create more transactional level exchange.

More than 20 sessions were held in the open space format on the second day of the Summit. Topics included:

- effective campaigning in an information overloaded society;
- involving the community in sustainability;
- sustainability in the household;
- post anthropocentrism and ethics;
- practical ways of acting sustainably;
- Aboriginal languages in schools;
- sustaining regional communities and regional planning;
- monitoring our progress towards sustainability; and
- a framework for human rights in WA.62

The technique of open space was effective in providing opportunities for free and extensive dialogue unconstrained by workshop or presentation structures.

While the Summit had strong attendance and was a success in terms of providing a process that met differing working styles and developing a positive, stimulating atmosphere, there were a number of areas for improvement identified in the evaluation forms received from participants at the Summit. Comments regarding the workshops for the six streams included that:

61 Open Space is becoming a popular meeting format worldwide, especially in the United States and Australia, and can be effectively incorporated into most types of conferences as a less restricted discussion space. The technique is also being used as a powerful tool in the development of organizations. For further information see http://www.openspaceworld.org/ or http://www.opencirclecompany.com/.

62 See the WA Collaboration website for more information about the Summit: http://www.wacollaboration.org.au/.
they generally provided good variety;
they were mostly well-facilitated;
they at times lacked sufficient direction to maximise the limited time available and help develop specific outcomes;
some workshops lacked opportunities for longer and deeper discussions;
they were in general too short, not allowing the time for discussions to develop and reach the point of making recommendations;
they were not inclusive enough as some tended to be dominated by more vocal participants; and that
the topics were difficult to deal with and could have benefited from more professional support.

One respondent commented that there were too many parallel sessions that divided the participants along sectoral lines rather than as collaborative opportunities, while another suggested having smaller groups with focused tasks for sessions that discussed community, ethics and values. Similarly, responses regarding the presentations highlighted the need for more opportunity for discussion in between speakers about the issues raised, and more panel discussion was suggested. However, participants indicated that they enjoyed the very different perspectives conveyed by the speakers.

General comments regarding the Summit as a whole included suggestions such as using case studies as examples of action, extending discussions about social sustainability and the role of community groups, and involving more people from the corporate world. General endorsements included the Summit providing a good introduction to sustainability, and appreciation of the opportunity to be involved, of the opportunity to see the richness of knowledge in the community and exchange thoughts and views, and of the space to network. The responses indicated overwhelmingly the desire for more opportunities to discuss sustainability in depth and to participate in identifying and shaping solutions. This was also evident in the mood of the Summit.

The process described above of the regional workshops and Summit involved in total approximately 350 people (some people from the workshops also attended the Summit). The rich diversity of people involved in these discussions meant the Collaboration was able to be informed by a range of knowledge and views in its preparation of a

Community Sustainability Agenda (which was released in March 2003). Through the
workshops and Summit, the Collaboration had initially intended to develop a written submission from the community sector to the Draft State Sustainability strategy. However, the Community Sustainability Agenda that emerged from the Collaboration’s consultation became more than simply a response to the Strategy. It became more of a position statement and provided a coherent vision of the community sector’s values and priorities with regard to sustainability, as well as reflected some key shared views of people in the community. It also provided an important reference document that could be used by organizations, individuals and policy-makers.\textsuperscript{63} Thus, while the development of the CSA in effect paralleled and supplemented the government’s consultation for its Sustainability Strategy and provided to policy-makers a summary of community sector views and recommendations about sustainability, it more importantly created a foundation for further collaborative work and an ongoing resource that could be adapted for various uses.

The CSA was an attempt to bring together an array of civil society perspectives and form an integrated approach to sustainability across the community sector. It successfully brought together the views and recommendations of a considerable number of community sector and wider community participants around key sustainability issues. While ideally such a document would have had broader consultation and engagement, especially greater inclusion of typically marginalised voices such as Indigenous people, the CSA process was significant considering the limited resources of the WA Collaboration, the vastness of WA and diversity of its communities, and the lack of precedent in WA for attempting to integrate a range of issues into a community-based sustainability agenda.

The CSA was finalised in a relatively conventional way through several meetings of the Collaboration’s Steering Committee. A consultant was engaged to help prepare the document with the Coordinator of the Collaboration. The entire process for developing the CSA took fewer than six months and occurred relatively quickly for such a significant document and for one that involved large numbers and a wide range of people in its development. The finalisation of the CSA did involve making compromises and the Steering Committee would have benefited from more time to work through contentious areas. The group would especially have benefited from more

\textsuperscript{63} The Community Sustainability Agenda was made available online and was distributed to government agencies and participants of WA Collaboration events.
time to discuss at a deeper level the motivations and values of the organizations, and
what they could or could not support and why. Many of the issues that require ongoing
deliberation revolve around the apparent conflicts between social and environmental
priorities: these include the equity impacts of environmental policies such as increasing
the price of water or electricity to reflect their environmental value, and taxing or
regulating against polluting older vehicles. Generally, the level of support the
organizations of the Steering Committee had for certain areas of the CSA varied, but the
organizations all strongly supported key recommendations about the need for ongoing
and genuine participatory processes for sustainability policy-making, institutional
reforms to support sustainability, a framework for human rights in WA, making public
transport more broadly accessible, and awareness raising about reducing consumption.

As for further work on the CSA, the document offers a rich starting point for the
Collaboration’s ongoing policy advocacy. There is much work to be done on exactly
what the recommendations would mean in practice and the WA Collaboration’s role in
them. The CSA was not intended to be exhaustive or immutable, and will no doubt
require ongoing review; it has the potential to contribute to the development of future
reports and position statements that integrate various interests and priorities of the
community sector. There is the ongoing challenge for the Collaboration of finding
adequate time to discuss important focus areas and to prioritise collectively on actions.
Such development of priorities benefits from reflective dialogical processes in which
underlying barriers can be negotiated.

In order to consider the influence the CSA had on the final State Sustainability Strategy
(SSS) and areas for further work, the Coordinator of the Collaboration prepared a
document comparing recommendations in each. Important initiatives recommended in
the CSA included a commission for sustainability, sustainability indicator systems and a
comprehensive legislative review. These were reflected in the final SSS, which
recommended a sustainability roundtable to facilitate cross-sectoral partnership
opportunities, headline sustainability indicators and state of sustainability reporting, and
a sustainability act. The SSS and CSA also shared many other recommendations in a
range of areas including:

- developing a comprehensive communications strategy to foster broad dialogue
  throughout the community about sustainability;
• sustainability assessment of major project proposals and of government policies, plans, projects and programs;
• developing a stronger partnership approach between State and local government for sustainability;
• incentives for environmentally sustainable housing; and
• managing urban growth.

This indicates the success of the CSA in highlighting important policy areas to government for the development of the final SSS. Indeed, Government Respondent B stated the following about the CSA while stressing the need for it to “evolve over time” as government policy does.

Very useful. It was useful because when we were drafting the Sustainability Strategy it enabled us to cross check with initiatives that we had in the Strategy and match them against the priorities of the Community Sustainability Agenda…it enabled us to clearly identify where the points of difference were, so in other words the Community Sustainability Agenda wanted an independent Sustainability Commission, government wasn’t prepared to go with that, but at least there was a clear understanding of what the Community Sustainability Agenda was about and what the priorities were of the Collaboration summit.

Government Respondent A likewise noted the significance of the CSA for the process of developing the SSS, especially the way in which it gave support for institutional change:

…the Community Sustainability Agenda has a lot of good ideas about that institutional process and we were able to use that within government to say “look this is what the Collaboration’s saying, this is important for us to address,” so it gave an extra voice within the walls of government. That can’t be overemphasized because within government if you’ve just got internal voices you can get a far less important outcome.

However, the WA Collaboration argues that some areas discussed in the CSA were not adequately addressed in the SSS. The CSA stressed the need to foster community action for sustainability by recognising and supporting the work of the voluntary sector through more secure funding, capacity building and other measures. However, the only action recommended in the SSS that related to this was fostering partnership processes through a Sustainability Roundtable, something that does not address the need to provide better support for community sector work. The SSS also did not address adequately the CSA’s recommendation for regional roundtables on sustainability that would involve open forums at the regional level for major stakeholders to network and build partnerships as a precursor to developing ‘regional sustainability strategies.’
Expanding the space for community and community sector engagement in sustainability

As discussed earlier, sustainability is a complex and contested concept, making deliberation and the development of shared approaches challenging. Other than the CSA process, the WA Collaboration has provided a range of opportunities for people of various ‘walks of life’ to engage in discussions about sustainability issues and share knowledge and perspectives, opportunities that demonstrate potential for transactional level exchange. However, as I discuss later, the Collaboration faces a constant challenge to provide enough space for deeper exchange in its activities, partly due to pressures to fulfil multiple roles and meet a range of outcomes.

The WA Collaboration’s activities can be seen in terms of four key roles.

1. **Building greater awareness, understanding and capacity for sustainability within the community sector and wider community**: this core purpose is evident in the other roles.

2. **Facilitating exchange and expansion of perspectives around sustainability**: exposure to other perspectives through dialogue and deliberation can lead to more comprehensive understanding and discovery of common ground; it can foster holistic thinking, cultural change and development of more just and sustainable outcomes.

3. **Facilitating community sector and public involvement in policy-making**: the WA Collaboration’s activities provide opportunities for engagement in policy issues and policy developments related to sustainability; because the Collaboration seeks a coordinated and coherent advocacy, this work is dependent on considerable dialogue and deliberation.

4. **Supporting people and organizations committed to sustainability** by providing a network and resource, and opportunities to share information and forge new relationships.

The foundation for all these roles is providing opportunities for *dialogue and deliberation* about sustainability issues both within its Steering Committee and wider community of participants.\(^{64}\)

\(^{64}\) For further discussion of the WA Collaboration’s roles see Buselich and Hodgson (2006) and the WA Collaboration’s strategic plan accessible through their website.
The Collaboration plays a role in governance for sustainability in terms of being a major intermediary body between government and the community sector. It provides a space for views to be exchanged and developed, and for distilled and integrated views to be promoted to government. For participation to make a difference it has to be strategic; the Collaboration has the potential to facilitate involvement of a broad range of participants early and at important times in the policy process. While its functions are not dissimilar from other organizations, the Collaboration provides a space and forum in the very challenging context of sustainability. It operates in a way that seeks to bring together perspectives, rather than operating for the promotion of a single issue or interest.

The following discussion describes the breadth of work the Collaboration has undertaken since the CSA process and illustrates the significant challenge of providing enough opportunities for the depth of dialogue and deliberation that integrating perspectives requires. As a precursor to this discussion, Table 1 provides an overview of some of the key activities in which the WA Collaboration was involved between 2002 and 2006.
Table 1: Timeline of selected WA Collaboration activities 2002-2006

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Mid-2002 Formation of the WA Collaboration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>September Open meeting/workshop</td>
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<td></td>
<td>September Regional workshops between September 2002 and February 2003</td>
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<td></td>
<td>October SC meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>December Open meeting/workshop</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>January SC meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>February Draft Community Sustainability Agenda released as background paper to summit</td>
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<td>February Sustainability Summit</td>
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<td>March Community Sustainability Agenda released</td>
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<td>April SC meeting/workshop to review progress and develop strategic plan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>June Community Sustainability Forum</td>
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<td>July Community workshop around Network City process</td>
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<td>September Community Sustainability Forum</td>
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<td>November Community workshop around Network City process</td>
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<td>November SC meeting – introductory policy discussion format began</td>
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<td>December Community Sustainability Forum</td>
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<td>February Conversation Café – keeping up interest in progressing issues</td>
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<td>May Conversation Café – making sustainability urgent to decision makers</td>
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<td>August Conversation Café – fair food</td>
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<td>September Sustainable September – WA Collaboration event</td>
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<td>November SC meeting</td>
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<td>March The WA Collaboration Coordinator sent an email announcing the uncertain nature of the organization’s immediate future. She said the partners remained committed and that she was investigating, and welcomed suggestions about, potential funding sources.</td>
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The Steering Committee and Coordinator

The Steering Committee of the Collaboration consists of a representative from each partner organization and the Coordinator of the Collaboration who facilitates the meetings. The Committee meetings provide opportunities for this core group to discuss the range of areas related to sustainability in which the Collaboration makes contributions, and the progress of ongoing and planned projects, such as raising awareness about sustainable consumption and facilitating the development of community sustainability indicators. The Committee generally meets according to need, on average every few months, but sometimes less often when members are unavailable. Time constraints upon both the members and the Coordinator have not permitted the group to meet more frequently. Meetings of the Steering Committee involve responding to policy developments in government and proactively considering new strategies. Because of the rapidly developing nature of sustainability on many fronts in WA, the Committee has tended to be engaged with multiple issues at once and has had limited time for in-depth policy discussion of each.

The WA Collaboration was fortunate in having the same coordinator from its launch until late 2006, continuity that helped the group establish itself as a recognized hub and contact point for sustainability. As the only staff member of the Collaboration, the Coordinator’s work encompassed a vast range of activities and provided the backbone and driving force of the Collaboration. Her range of experience, various skills, networks, commitment, and the credibility she established, played a major role in the success of the initiative. Indeed, she was voted vice-president of the Sustainability Practitioners Association for 2005-2006 and was chosen to be one of few community sector advisors on the State Government’s Sustainability Roundtable in 2004.

Unfortunately the scarce resources of the Collaboration have meant limited support for the range of work conducted by the Coordinator. This has in turn limited the ability of the Collaboration to be more active in its various roles, take up opportunities in new areas and develop more fully. It has especially restricted the amount of time the Coordinator has been able to set aside for deliberation, dialogue and reflection in terms

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65 The Coordinator had some voluntary assistance and the assistance of a part-time or casual employee on a few occasions, but was, for the majority of the time, the only staff member of the Collaboration.
of both the SC meetings and the Collaboration’s various events. Much of the Collaboration’s effort has been absorbed in facilitating involvement of the community sector and wider community in the swiftly developing initiatives in WA for sustainability, especially surrounding the development and implementation of the SSS and the development of the ‘Network City’ planning policy for the Perth metropolitan area. Providing greater opportunities for the depth of dialogue and deliberation required to develop strong collaborative relationships and more informed action remains an ongoing challenge for the organization and requires conscious efforts.

As noted earlier, the Committee tends to involve only one representative from each partner organization and this has had both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand this situation has meant greater potential to develop relationships, and collective memory of issues and the WA Collaboration’s work. On the other hand, because of the small number of members, meetings have sometimes had to be postponed if several members are unable to attend. Quite often at least one member is absent or cannot stay for the whole meeting, and therefore sometimes the organizations are not adequately represented at meetings. Several representatives have been replaced by others due to changes in staffing in their organizations, and two organizations are no longer participating in the Collaboration as Steering Committee members. This lack of continuity in the participation on the Steering Committee makes developing trust and collaborative relationships through ongoing dialogue more difficult. While having proxy representatives for each organization might ensure greater participation of the organizations, some organizations are unable to provide for this, and it is in any case preferable to have one representative from each organization participating consistently and developing working relationships with other members.

This situation is not uncommon for collaborative initiatives, which by nature tend to be voluntary and additional to each organization’s core work. In their report on collaborative initiatives in the UK, Rochester and Woods (2005) point out that a lack of stability in steering committees—due to turnover in coordination or representation from participating organizations—exacerbates resource problems and delays the progress of collaborative organizations. They also highlight the importance of developing trust within collaborations, especially in collaborations between equals for a shared purpose, and note that in the organizations they studied this was often supported by relationships
that existed even before formal collaboration took place. Indeed, this pre-existing working relationship was the case for WA Collaboration, as noted earlier in this chapter. In Rochester and Woods’ research with collaborations, face to face meetings proved important for creating shared understanding and thus effective communication and trust. Their research also highlights the amount of time and effort required for the implementation of collaborative projects, with many participants commenting that they had “greatly underestimated the length of time required to work collaboratively” (20).

Rochester and Woods argue that the journey of collaboration is arduous because it involves moving towards an often unknown or unforeseeable destination. They stress the need for ongoing dialogue and deliberation in collaborative initiatives:

> However solid the foundation of common understanding and mutual trust with which they started, it was no more than a foundation and the development of agreed policies, processes and practices by which they could take the project forward had to be painstakingly erected. Collaboration required people to settle down for “a long haul” (20).

These points are highly pertinent to the WA Collaboration because development of its roles, directions and collective advocacy require considerable discussion and ongoing dialogue. This is all the more important when participation in the Steering Committee is unstable and when the organization shifts into new phases of its development, whether these be more or less active.

This dialogue is also significant in terms of maintaining close connections between the WA Collaboration’s work and that of its Steering Committee organizations. While the partner organizations collectively inform the Collaboration’s work, just as important is the flow of ideas from the Collaboration to the Steering Committee organizations and their constituents. That is, the impacts of the collaborative work are intended to go both ways and be mutually-supportive. The partner organizations of the Steering Committee are responsible for helping the Collaboration extend awareness of sustainability throughout their respective constituencies by translating sustainability and the messages of the Collaboration in their areas of work. Indeed, Rochester and Woods assert the importance of “embedding” (22) the collaboration throughout the participating organizations for the effectiveness and long-term future of the collaborative initiative. They argue that developing this commitment requires “effective communication across the organization to ensure that all the constituent parts are aware of the collaboration and what it is intended to achieve” (2005, 22-3).
Many of the Steering Committee members interviewed in 2003 noted the potential for
the WA Collaboration to influence the work of their organizations and bring their policy
advocacy closer in several areas. This has already begun to occur; the Collaboration has
provided fertile ground for several partnerships around particular policy issues to form.
For example, ATSIC and the Conservation Council collaborated to advocate joint
management of national parks (government involvement of Indigenous people in
management of national parks); WACOSS, Unions WA and the Conservation Council
held discussions about electricity reform and an environmentally and socially fair
pricing system; furthermore, WACOSS and the Sustainable Transport Coalition
(associated with the Conservation Council) collaborated about city policy and the social
impacts of oil depletion for a grant application. There are other opportunities in various
policy areas that these organizations can pursue in the future. However, time, resources
and having only one person from each organization on the Steering Committee limit the
opportunities for this exchange of views and partnering on policy issues, and restrict the
ability of the Steering Committee organizations to raise awareness of sustainability and
support the work of the Collaboration in their own organizations.

**Broader participation: creating open networks and forums**

The broader participation in the WA Collaboration’s many activities forms another level
of the organization’s operation. As illustrated by the timeline in Table 1, over the years
the WA Collaboration has provided a relatively busy schedule of events for engaging
the community in sustainability issues. These activities have ranged from email
bulletins and policy forums/workshops, to Conversation Cafes and displays.

The WA Collaboration has involved the peak organizations of the Steering Committee
and smaller affiliated organizations, but besides this has had a fluid community of
participants involved in its events and various activities. These participants tend to
carry some form of association with at least one sector of activity, and participate for
work, study or personal interests. They have included:

- people active in the community sector (voluntary, student or otherwise)—people
  working in community organizations, small community groups and associations
  for various causes, ranging from welfare and mental health to Landcare and
  biodiversity conservation;
• people active in business and social enterprise—people operating small businesses or initiatives in sustainability areas such as green jobs, sustainable building design and retrofitting, sustainable landscape design and eco-villages; facilitators and consultants working in areas related to sustainability or interested in sustainability; representatives from industry associations concerned with cleaner production and efficiency; and
• state and local government officers from a range of policy areas such as sustainability, environment, planning, housing and community development.

Some participants introduce themselves without noting any particular association and some simply say they are present because of a general concern for sustainability or out of curiosity. However, such people almost always have interests in certain issues because of their backgrounds and values.

New participants have appeared at every WA Collaboration event, indicating a growth in the community of people involved in the Collaboration. Indeed the Coordinator of the Collaboration in her interview in 2004 highlighted the Collaboration’s success in attracting new participants:

…I think just the slowly growing momentum of the organization itself is another achievement that’s less tangible…but every kind of forum or meeting we hold, it seems to kind of solidify that much more, and we really are creating a wider network of people who are coming along with us.

The range of participants outlined above demonstrates the presence the WA Collaboration established in both the community sector and wider community. The Collaboration has sought increasingly to attract a diversity of people and reach all sectors and parts of the community. On the one hand the fluidity of participation has meant difficulties in terms of developing a collective ‘memory’ about the Collaboration’s focus areas, and awareness and understanding of sustainability issues generally. However, at the same time the fluidity and diversity of participation has brought a richness of experiences and perspectives to the events, and as such considerable potential for expansion of thinking and transformative exchanges.

An important space for discussion about sustainability issues has been the Community Sustainability Forums held by the Collaboration. The forums have provided updates

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66 Social enterprises are essentially businesses but have primarily social objectives, with funds being reinvested back into a community project rather than distributed to shareholders.
on the work the Collaboration engages in, opportunities to discuss possible directions and initiatives, and opportunities to deliberate a range of policy issues and become involved in decision-making processes. Topics discussed at the forums have included the following:

- sustainable production and consumption;
- sustainable water and energy management;
- urban planning, increasing public transport options and walkability, building and landscape design that is environmentally friendly and conducive to creating communities, provision of affordable housing, and protection of open space, bushland and agricultural areas;
- the impact of the CSA on the SSS and maintaining community involvement in sustainability policy-making;
- the areas of work of the Sustainability Roundtable and the State Government’s progress in implementing the SSS;
- developing sustainability indicators for measuring progress towards sustainability and a sustainability assessment framework for assessing the relative sustainability of government projects, plans and programs;
- increasing awareness of sustainability throughout the community, education for sustainability and building bi-partisan support for sustainability;
- developing the Collaboration’s state election strategy for sustainability, including the initiatives the State Government should be implementing for sustainability;
- ideas for the Collaboration’s Sustainable September and other activities throughout the year; and
- broadening involvement in the Collaboration, such as people from the private sector and from various regions of WA, and making the Collaboration’s work more relevant to the broader community.

Outcomes of all the forums have been emailed to participants or been made accessible through the Collaboration’s website.

Most of the forums have been conducted in a workshop format involving both small group and plenary discussions, depending on the size of the group (which can range from about 20-50 people). They have been facilitated by the Coordinator of the Collaboration and have sometimes begun with presentations from speakers of various
sectors, such as State Government policy-makers and people working in non-government organizations. While the presentations and their question times have been important for informing the discussions that follow, they have often taken up considerable time in forum sessions and limited opportunities for more extended and deeper discussion. One forum in particular (in June 2003) was held in the Open Space format first used at the Sustainability Summit. This forum provided more of an opportunity for dialogue and deliberation around policy issues and sharing of perspectives.

In order to create greater opportunities for informal and extended discussion about sustainability, the Collaboration took the direction of holding regular evening *Conversation Cafés* around various topics and difficult questions, the first of which was in July 2004. The Conversation Cafés initiative emerged during the intensive process I conducted with the Steering Committee in 2003-2004 and is discussed in the next chapter. The WA Collaboration faces the ongoing issues of providing a range of events to cater for differing working styles, and providing opportunities for action-oriented discussion and for engaging in the dialogue and exchange of perspectives needed to inform action.

The *Community Sustainability Forums* have been especially important for facilitating greater community involvement in ongoing policy developments related to sustainability. In particular, one of the forums (in May 2004) focussed on three important areas the State Government’s Sustainability Roundtable had been working on in order to provide input into the Roundtable’s work:

- headline sustainability indicators for WA;
- a sustainable consumption and production strategy; and
- a community awareness and education strategy.

These were the key areas of the Roundtable working groups that the Coordinator of the Collaboration was involved in as a community sector advisor.

In addition to the forums, in 2003 and 2004 the WA Collaboration held several *community workshops around the Network City process*—the State Government’s
development of a planning strategy for the Perth metropolitan area. As with the development of the SSS, these workshops supplemented and extended the State Government’s public engagement process. They provided further opportunities for discussion of a range of issues related to planning and the future of Perth, in particular the challenge of managing significant population growth and urban sprawl. The workshops involved presentations from various speakers about positive and negative aspects of the draft planning strategy, and encouraged participants to make written submissions. They were generally well-attended and highly stimulating, but at times contentious because they involved issues that directly affected participants such as public transport, housing density and neighbourhood design. In association with the Sustainable Transport Coalition, the Collaboration held a film night in November 2004 that involved screening the documentary *The End of Suburbia* and group discussion about oil vulnerability and car dependence. As with the SSS process, the Collaboration provided an intermediary role and carried out work that was beneficial to both government (by extending community engagement in government policies) and the Collaboration.

In order to support its work facilitating the involvement of the community sector and wider community in policy-making and other work towards sustainability, the Collaboration maintained an *email network and regular email bulletin service* over a number of years. This listserv provided a vital pathway for the Collaboration’s communications, a wealth of sustainability-related information and communication of different facets of sustainability to a broad audience. More than 400 subscribers used the listserv to keep up to date on developments related to sustainability, share news and promote events. The bulletins highlighted important news, events and funding opportunities related to sustainability, with links to further information. News items ranged from local to international initiatives and included important publications, resources and announcements about public comment periods for policy developments. The bulletins listed events from various sectors such as community meetings and forums, seminars at universities and government events. They ranged from promotion

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67 This Government planning process involved an innovative consultation exercise, ‘Dialogue with the City,’ which was an attempt to generate a community-inspired plan for the Perth metropolitan area. The process began with a day long forum in September 2003 involving 1,100 participants in a single conference room, and then involved smaller forums in parts of the metropolitan area, as well as working committees formed of participants from community, local government and industry sectors. For more information see www.dpi.wa.gov.au/dialogue/ and Carson and Hartz-Karp (2005).
of organic growers’ markets and fundraising events, to training sessions and conferences. Subscribers commented that the emails provided a valuable resource. They enabled access to comprehensive, cutting edge information in a convenient format and supported deliberation about sustainability in this way.68

The WA Collaboration’s website (www.wacollaboration.org.au) has similarly supported conversations about sustainability by providing information and links about a range of dimensions, issues and initiatives. The website facilitates access to documented outcomes of the WA Collaboration’s events as well as formal documents and short publications of the Collaboration. The greenhouse calculator on the website provides an educational tool by allowing people to gauge the energy use and greenhouse gas emissions of their household or small business. Also available on the website are the several newsletters the Collaboration has prepared since its inception to help raise awareness of sustainability and the various issues and initiatives related to it. Similarly to the email bulletins, the newsletters have helped fulfil the Collaboration’s awareness-raising role but have provided for more extended communication, with articles exploring subjects such as sustainable consumption. The multiple communication channels of the Collaboration help it reach a wider audience and encourage engagement with sustainability.

Another important area of the Collaboration’s work has been Sustainable September, a month long promotion of sustainability activities across Western Australia coordinated jointly with a local consultancy in 2004 and 2005. Central to this promotion is an online calendar of events (www.sustainableseptember.net.au) that invites people to register any event related to sustainability. The initiative has helped to communicate ‘what sustainability means in practice’ by promoting diverse activities which demonstrate the many areas of work contributing to sustainability in WA. Like most of the Collaboration’s activities, the initiative has helped further exchange of information, ideas and experience, build understanding of the different dimensions of sustainability, demonstrate cutting edge and best practice projects, and provide opportunities for dialogue and exchange of perspectives around sustainability.

68 The archive of messages is accessible through http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wacollaboration/. The listserv was inactive at the time of writing due to the change of Coordinator.
The WA Collaboration’s evaluation of the 2004 Sustainable September revealed that over 50 events were registered, including seminars on issues such as energy efficiency and sustainability in Canada, as well as fairs, open days and workshops. Feedback from participants suggested the calendar provided a valuable resource as an overview of sustainability-related events in the month. The statistics from the website indicated considerable exposure with 1,195 visits over August and September. 600 posters and 1000 postcards were distributed around WA, and there was a fairly good media response with interviews on five programs across three radio stations. Feedback from participants about the overall coordination of Sustainable September was in general very positive. Comments from participants suggested the strength of Sustainable September was in having all types of events promoted together in one place, and different events promoting the various dimensions of sustainability. Comments regarding improving Sustainable September included the difficulty experienced by participants in understanding the breadth of sustainability and connections between different aspects despite the diversity of events, and the suggestion of having a coordinated event run by the WA Collaboration showcasing sustainability in Perth.

In response to these comments, in the lead up to the 2005 Sustainable September the Steering Committee of the WA Collaboration considered various options for an event that could address multiple purposes, such as raising awareness of work towards sustainability, building understanding of the different dimensions of sustainability and facilitating action. Ideas included having

- speakers from various sectors and a panel discussion about action needed towards sustainability in WA, or a discussion of ‘living within our means’ with the Steering Committee organizations providing perspectives on justice, peace and ecology,
- open space sessions to focus on taking collective and personal responsibility for ensuring specific actions towards sustainability, and
- a fair to celebrate and raise awareness of sustainability-related work in WA involving information booths hosted by organizations and individuals.

While the intention was to provide a space for celebration and discussion, the event held by the WA Collaboration for the 2005 Sustainable September provided only a space to
celebrate, raise awareness and network, and was essentially a quite lively sustainability fair. Funding was not received in time to organize a Sustainable September for 2006.\textsuperscript{69}

The WA Collaboration has also broadened its engagement with the public through the numerous \textit{presentations} the Coordinator has made in different sectors. These have included conferences, university lectures, and community sector forums, as well as a Sustainability Practitioners Association event in 2005.\textsuperscript{70} This activity has helped to promote the work of the Collaboration and encourage engagement. The university lectures have particularly helped develop the Collaboration’s \textit{research capacity} by leading to the involvement of a few students in research projects for the Collaboration on the subjects of affordable housing policy, education and awareness-raising for sustainability, and Indigenous participation in sustainability. This research capacity has also been developed through the Coordinator’s \textit{collaborative research and publications} with me and Dr Darren Halpin, a colleague with a political science background. These collaborative writing processes gave the Coordinator opportunities to reflect on her work and the development of the Collaboration.

Western Australia is the largest state or territory in Australia, and its sheer size (approximately half the size of Europe) and geographic diversity mean communities throughout the state have varying concerns with regard to sustainability. In recent times WA has experienced a resources boom, considerable migration from the eastern states of Australia and significant growth in the population of the South West region. At the same time, many country towns in WA have experienced marked depopulation in the face of environmental and social pressures. The WA Collaboration aims to involve a range of interests in its advocacy and provide a network and forum for diverse groups and individuals interested in sustainability. Since the regional workshops for the CSA, the Collaboration has had limited opportunities to expand \textit{engagement with communities in various regional areas of WA} as it is mostly active in the Perth metropolitan area, but it has nevertheless created some connections. The Collaboration’s email network and website give people in different regional areas

\textsuperscript{69} The WA Collaboration has also sought to engage a wider audience by providing \textit{displays} about the organization and its work at various shows related to sustainability. For example, the WA Collaboration organized a joint stall with the Conservation Council at the 2004, 2005 and 2006 Perth Sun Fairs. The many displays and interactive demonstrations at the Sun Fairs help introduce people to sustainable living concepts and technologies.

\textsuperscript{70} For further information about the Sustainability Practitioners Association see http://www.spa.asn.au/.
opportunities to network and provide access to a significant information base. This communication channel can also highlight in advance important events that people in some regional areas may need to travel long distances to attend. As a point of contact the Coordinator has put several people in particular regional areas in touch with others who can help them in their work, and has directed them to information that can assist their work.

In 2004 the Collaboration organized a *teleconference among people in different regions* to increase its support of people working towards sustainability in various parts of WA and to encourage exchange of experience and knowledge. Five people, one from the Pilbara region, one from the Rangelands region, and three from various areas of the south west region of WA participated in the teleconference, and brought both non-government sector and local government interests to the discussion. Issues discussed included a sustainability checklist for urban development being prepared by a shire in the south west, the many sustainable display homes opening in various regions, the need for law reforms to embed sustainability in planning, assessing proposed infrastructure for sustainability, and the lack of reference to the State Sustainability Strategy by regional development commissions and in natural resource management plans for regions. The teleconference helped bring people up to date with progress on sustainability and allowed them to inform each other about particular projects in their regions. It also helped establish contacts that have the potential to lead to the discovery of new opportunities.

**Reflections from key participants on the importance of dialogue between civil society organizations and government**

The preceding section described the range of activities in which the WA Collaboration has been involved and the diverse participation their events have attracted. Such activities have contributed to building capacity for sustainability in the community sector and wider community, and have considerable potential to foster the transformation and cultural change necessary for progressing sustainability.

While these activities are aimed at creating opportunities for discussion and bringing together differing views on sustainability for the development of more cohesive positions, an equally important part of its role is to transmit these community
perspectives to government and influence public policy development related to sustainability. As the preceding sections have highlighted, the WA Collaboration plays a key intermediary role between the civil society sector and State Government, and generally maintains a cooperative relationship with government. The Collaboration has had considerable involvement in two different State Government policy processes—the State Sustainability Strategy (SSS) and the Network City planning strategy. Regarding the implementation of the SSS, the Coordinator of the Collaboration was involved for several years in the State Government’s Sustainability Roundtable. Regarding the Network City process, the Collaboration was a member of the implementation committee and community liaison team, which involved working relatively closely with State Government to facilitate greater community engagement in the development of the strategy. These experiences helped the Collaboration establish itself as a legitimate key stakeholder in policy-making processes related to sustainability and initiated the makings of a partnership approach.

There are several reasons why a partnership approach is attractive to the Collaboration and State Government. As already highlighted, consultation processes provided by the Collaboration expand the exposure of government policies and supplement government processes that are inevitably limited. However, there are more fundamental reasons why a partnership approach is necessary, and many were noted in the interviews I conducted in June and July of 2004 with the following participants:

- a key person involved in the preparation of the CSA and also involved in the formation of the Collaboration (identified as “Collaboration Respondent”);
- the Coordinator of the Collaboration; and
- two key government policy-makers involved in the development of the SSS (identified as Government Respondents A and B).

The interviews covered a range of topics (see Appendix 3), one of which referred to partnership processes and the relationship between the WA Collaboration and State Government. On this subject, Government Respondent B identified a fundamental reason why a new agenda like sustainability requires the government garnering support from other parts of society:

…governments are wanting to work in partnership with non-government and industry sectors because there’s a recognition that government alone is not going to achieve the changes that are necessary, so I think that the partnership approaches provide an opportunity for government to have dialogue and joint action in some areas.
He also emphasized the role of civil society in governance and the importance of working with the Collaboration:

...civil society plays an important role as an advocate for certain areas, as an influence in their own right in terms of community capacity-building, awareness-raising, and as a source of advice for the government, so it makes perfect sense to me that we would be looking to work strongly with the Collaboration in that area, because this government in particular has a strong commitment to open and accountable government...

Furthermore, he discussed the way in which the general philosophy behind sustainability calls for a shared journey:

...we need a lot of people on board, we need them to be engaged, we need them to be telling government what they should be doing to help them, and government needs to be having that similar dialogue back the other way with stakeholders as well...It’s not only necessary for sustainability but I think it probably is implicit as a principle of sustainability, and that’s certainly something that we’ve articulated in the Strategy as being fundamental.

...[sustainability is] as much about equity and access as it is about environment improvement or anything like that, and so if it is the case that sustainability’s about trying to achieve social justice and equity, and about genuinely attempting better outcomes for everybody, then I don’t really think you can achieve that without a greater emphasis on participation, empowerment, dialogue, new ways, moving together.

However, Government Respondent B also stressed that “there is still significant dialogue that needs to occur within the various sectors of civil society to resolve what their understanding of sustainability means, and to resolve the various tensions about say social sustainability versus environmental sustainability, and what that might mean.” He noted that partnerships would not necessarily be easy: partnerships raise questions about respective roles and responsibilities and “imply a level of dialogue which is somewhat equal. It’s more than consultation, it’s more than participation. It actually implies a more equal relationship, so those sorts of things throw up new challenges for government as well in terms of the ways that we do business with these other stakeholders.”

Government Respondent A had similar views about the importance of partnership approaches and dialogue in progressing sustainability, and in particular outlined the way in which dialogue across diversity is fundamental to the discovery of more sustainable pathways:

...sustainability is about a dialogue to achieve insight into potential change that is not possible unless you can hear all the voices, because there is no expert view that knows how to integrate and create the understandings that are necessary, it is a dialogue process that only can achieve that.

...the civil society processes that were part of what we did were the enlivening factor and continue to be...you can have very lively civil society firing away and if it’s not heard and acted upon then it doesn’t go anywhere, so the partnership processes give it direction.
Importantly, when asked about the challenges involved in partnerships he suggested the success of partnerships depended on the commitment of parties: “I think that the limitations are set by the groups themselves.”

As with the other interviewees, the Coordinator of the Collaboration commented that partnerships were central to sustainability and could provide opportunities that would not otherwise occur, but she also noted some problematic aspects of partnerships:

…no one sector can do it alone, so there is some sense that we have to work together on it, and there’s some good examples of partnerships in the past…There is that potential to create something that’s greater than the sum of its parts, and that is more far reaching I think through partnerships.

But what does it mean in practice?…we need more clarity around what we mean by partnership undoubtedly. I think the idea of partnership is especially problematic for the community sector. Well I find it so because you’re already so stretched in time and resources that often partnership seems to be about government and industry getting you to do their work for them, and if you say “well hang on, we need some equity in terms of the resources we’re getting,” then partnership appears to be a community sector saying “well you give us the cash,” and then there’s all those issues of perception, of being beholden to either government or the private sector, so it gets messy.\(^\text{71}\)

The literature on partnerships often raises the question of whether partnership is understood more as a means to an end (an instrumental, pragmatic approach) or an end in itself and intrinsically valuable in terms of equity, inclusiveness and capacity building (a normative approach) (Brinkerhoff 2002). Brinkerhoff asserts that NGOs often take a normative approach and the “moral high ground” (20). As the views of the interviewees above indicate, government and community sector perspectives are often cognisant of both the practical implications of partnerships and the intrinsic value of them to sustainability. The interviewees acknowledge the significance of partnerships in terms of their understanding of inclusiveness and participation as principles of sustainability, and how the very meaning of sustainability suggests creating together, in the Coordinator’s words, “something that’s greater than the sum of its parts.”

\(^\text{71}\) A minor problem for the WA Collaboration has been a lack of clarity among some people in sustainability circles about its relationship with government. Because the SSS provided a catalyst for the formation of the Collaboration and pervaded the Collaboration’s early phase of work, there was some initial confusion about the status and nature of the Collaboration. While the Collaboration has since established a name for itself as an independent community sector initiative, the difficulty remains of maintaining that independence and at the same time enjoying a somewhat privileged involvement in government policy-making processes. Furthermore, in the words of the Coordinator, there has been the danger of the Collaboration being perceived by government as a “one stop shop for community consultation.”
Despite good intentions from all parties, the relationship between the State Government and the Collaboration during the development of the SSS was in reality tenuous. Government Respondent A highlighted the lack of contact or opportunity for discussion between government and the Collaboration’s Steering Committee and other participants since the Sustainability Summit, at which the State Government presented. He also clarified the status of the relationship:

…I don’t think it was partnership in the sense that there was a constant process of hearing and moving on to what it would mean…It was much more a question of just canvassing views, which is not exactly partnership but it’s partnership of goals if you like.

He highlighted the “missed opportunity” to develop dialogue between government and civil society groups, but also noted there was still opportunity in the implementation of the sustainability strategy:

If we’d had a bit more commitment to a joint dialogue process then we could have perhaps drawn more of those groups in and done the hard work with them. It’s not that we can’t still do that, there’s still plenty of opportunity. It hasn’t happened yet in my view.

While good intentions are evident, in reality partnership approaches require a great deal of commitment and effort from the parties involved, otherwise they are largely cooperative in nature rather than collaborative. Genuine partnerships also require the type of dialogue and exchange that can allow parties to apprehend the commonalities and differences in their approaches, values and priorities regarding sustainability and to consider the opportunities for joint action. That is, transactional work needs to be built into the process.

In her interviews the Coordinator of the Collaboration noted that links between government and non-government sectors allows organizations like the Collaboration to have more influence in policy-making processes. She stated that the Collaboration’s relationship with government through her involvement in the Sustainability Roundtable had been “much more of a partnership process” than had previously occurred. She also commented that the situation had its drawbacks and that its effectiveness remained to be seen:

It’s going to have to be something that we reflect on and evaluate later because it’s a huge amount of extra work for me. It’s essentially taking on some of that load that government would traditionally do, and we need to evaluate it a couple of years down the track, so “did that involvement actually have a positive influence or did we get the outcome that we would have got anyway?”—like was there some point at which government came in over the top and took it in a particular direction that it would have taken it anyway?…because we’ve put a lot of time and effort into that process in the hope that it would result in a different outcome.
This essentially raises questions about whether partnership approaches create a different kind of outcome from conventional approaches in which competition between interests and the strongest voices prevail, and whether the views of stakeholders, such as in the Roundtable situation, can be incorporated effectively into the process, reconciled and reflected in the outcomes. Again, I argue the need for the facilitation of transactional exchange in such multi-stakeholder processes.

TENSIONS, PROCESS CHALLENGES AND THE WA COLLABORATION’S POTENTIAL FOR TRANSACTIONAL SPACE

This chapter has sought to illustrate the many attributes of the Collaboration’s work and the collective potential of its activities for creating transactional space. A considerable part of the WA Collaboration’s activity over the past few years has related to engaging in immediate policy developments and facilitating parallel processes to increase community involvement. Furthermore, it has established a strong presence in the policy arena as an intermediary and legitimate community sector partnership body around sustainability. The Collaboration has also provided other roles. Through its various work, the Collaboration has become recognized as a network and hub of activity around sustainability with a range of opportunities for people in the community sector and wider community to exchange knowledge and views about progressing sustainability both personally and collectively. Together with the Collaboration’s policy-oriented work, this chapter has therefore discussed the following aspects:

- *networking and information sharing:* exchange of ideas, information and experiences, particularly new initiatives and examples of ‘best practice;’
- *education and awareness raising:* encouraging people to be more informed about sustainability issues, especially issues unfamiliar to them; and
- *dialogue and deliberation (particularly exchange of perspectives):* discussion of policy issues in a critical environment and cultivation of understanding of dimensions of sustainability issues.

This chapter has illustrated the range of activities with which the WA Collaboration has been involved over the past few years in order to highlight its significant potential to provide space for dialogue around sustainability and in particular reflective and transformative exchange. This potential offered by the WA Collaboration is apparent in
their meetings, forums and other opportunities for extended discussion of issues and exposure to differing knowledge and perspectives. These face-to-face opportunities have been supported by the WA Collaboration’s email network and website.

The Collaboration’s space for a depth of exchange has fluctuated, however. Its activities have often depended on particular issues facing the organization and on its funding status. Transactional space has been limited in the WA Collaboration’s work for a number of reasons. With only one full-time staff member, the Collaboration has not had the luxury of time to hold more frequent forums or sessions exclusively for in-depth discussion both in its Steering Committee and wider network. There are many more types of forums and events that the Collaboration could have organized, and other areas in which it could have contributed, but this has been limited by its capacity in terms of staff and resources. Furthermore, like many people today, participants of WA Collaboration events tend to be information overloaded and stretched for time because of various pressures, and as a consequence, action- rather than dialogue-oriented. This is despite critical discourse and extended dialogue being clearly central to the development of greater understanding of policy issues and more holistic and shared approaches.

While it is unrealistic to try to meet all expectations, and there have been many, there have been some key process issues raised and suggestions about the organization’s development. In this final section of the chapter I discuss some of these and highlight the considerable tension between achieving outcomes in the short-term and working towards more long-term outcomes such as fuller understanding of sustainability, genuine integration of perspectives and greater collaborative capacity. I argue that active development of processes in which in-depth discussion and reflective dialogue can occur is vital to realising the potential of the WA Collaboration for transformative exchange around sustainability. This conscious attention to creating a depth of exchange is significant across the range of the WA Collaboration’s activities, particularly for Steering Committee meetings, open forums and relationships with state and local government.

The WA Collaboration’s events have attracted a rich diversity of people. These people have tended to be interested in or aware of sustainability in some way, but their
backgrounds and knowledge bases have varied dramatically in terms of the extent of their knowledge of sustainability and various issues related to it, of policy and government processes, and of the WA Collaboration itself. This remains an ongoing challenge for the facilitation of these events and for the satisfaction participants receive from the events. An associated issue has been the fluid nature of participation. There is a growing community of interested people involved in the Collaboration. While many people regularly participate, new faces are always apparent at the events. This situation is beneficial in terms of building interest in the Collaboration and in sustainability, but challenging in terms of instability of participation and the constant necessity to bring participants up to date with issues already discussed and with the Collaboration’s work in general. As open processes that welcome newcomers, the forums and other events provide opportunities to network with others working in similar areas as well as with people with whom one does not normally engage. In this way they also provide important spaces for learning. At the same time, this means they need to include general discussion of sustainability and gathering of information (Buselich and Hodgson 2006).

While the WA Collaboration’s forums and Steering Committee meetings provide space for discussion about sustainability and help address a considerable gap in this regard, their tendency to be structured and driven by a full agenda means limited opportunities for deeper level dialogue and reflection. The forums, presentations and plenary discussions that follow often take up a great deal of time, allowing less time for smaller group discussions. Furthermore, the small group discussions that occur tend to be task-based and focussed around identifying possible actions rather than exploring barriers. The Conversations Cafés initiative that the WA Collaboration began in 2004 (as I discuss further in the next chapter) has been particularly important for addressing this imbalance between action or task-based discussion, and dialogue or reflective discussion.

Several participants at a WA Collaboration community sustainability forum in March 2005 raised the importance of forming greater bonds within the network of interested individuals participating in the Collaboration’s activities. Suggestions included the Collaboration organising additional sessions specifically to allow participants to network and build connections with people with similar interests or work areas. In such
sessions participants would have more opportunity to share their stories and in doing so gain information about activities occurring in WA in the sustainability area and make important contacts. This interpersonal discussion would help build understanding of differing knowledge, perspectives and priorities and at the same time greater capacity for collaborative work.

Developing greater understanding between participants is an investment in the effectiveness of the WA Collaboration’s future activities not only because many people return to participate in other events but also because it can build a rich store of knowledge about issues to draw upon. It is therefore crucial that the Collaboration provides regular opportunities for participants to engage in sustainability issues at the level of their experiences and perspectives. Without deeper dialogue and exposure to the values that motivate participants towards their particular interests and agendas, participants will be unlikely to understand well enough the various considerations that need to be made in addressing complex policy issues.

In sum, integrating dialogue and action-based deliberation is important for sustainability because it helps develop directions that are better informed and supported, and greater understanding about sustainability. While working towards a task often provides a process in which exchange and learning can occur, more time spent in extended discussion and reflection on various experiences and perspectives can help uncover the nuances of issues relevant to the discussion and commonalities and differences in approach. Participants are then able to use the knowledge and trust built to develop better and more collective ways to approach the issues. This type of exchange is significant for the Collaboration because it can engender genuinely collective understanding and effort, and thus has an important role in the change process towards sustainability. However, developing awareness of the views of others and at the same time of our own opinions and views takes time and requires frequent opportunities for in-depth discussion and reflective dialogue. Challenges remain for the WA Collaboration in creating a balance between the need to stimulate action and the need for dialogue that can support action, while at the same time being cognisant of various expectations and working styles.
There are a number of tensions and challenges experienced by groups like the WA Collaboration in the development of the collaborative effort, and Chapter 2 raised some fundamental issues such as balancing the need to focus on outcomes and the need to focus on the process or means of collaborating, and negotiating joint purpose. Eden and Huxham (2001) remind us of the “sheer time required” for communications (374) and the necessary challenges of developing agreement about the purpose for which the group was created. Furthermore, the goals and fundamental purpose of a collaborative organization shift over time and require continuous review and discussion, and Gadja (2004) in particular highlights the need for sufficient time out for dialogue to evaluate the progress of the initiative and how well it has developed in terms of integration.

Conscious attempts to allow time for dialogue and reflection on process and working relationships is indeed crucial for groups like the WA Collaboration. The community organizations that drive collaborations tend to have a sense of urgency and passion for their particular areas of work. These groups tend to recognize the need for attention to processes and effective communications, but this is often neglected in the face of a full agenda. However, implicit in the fundamental purpose of WA Collaboration—integration of perspectives for the development of more shared approaches—is extensive dialogue.

The WA Collaboration has been described in various ways over its lifetime but all descriptions have referred to its desire to shape collectively the sustainability agenda and increase involvement in it. The Collaboration most commonly refers to itself as a “historic partnership of organizations committed to a just and sustainable Western Australia,” the way it defined itself in its CSA. This suggests a long-term commitment for change requiring real shifts in the way the member organizations work independently and together. Such change would involve exchanging and understanding perspectives to form more integrative and collective approaches to sustainability. Indeed in its CSA, the Collaboration states the following:

The intention of the WA Collaboration is to encourage and stimulate discussions across [social, environmental and economic] dimensions, including how they interact and how their respective goals can best be integrated.

The Steering Committee members have had varying views about what the Collaboration should engage in and which opportunities it should pursue. These varying views and the need to explicate them are discussed further in the following chapter. The point I
make here is regarding the fundamental purpose of the Collaboration, and what makes it significant. To what extent is it simply about coordinating advocacy and providing opportunities for community and community sector engagement in sustainability, networking and information sharing, and to what extent is it about working towards lasting change by facilitating more comprehensive understanding of interests and values and the integration of perspectives needed for more holistic and shared positions?

Various understandings and expectations of where the Collaboration can add most value, and the centrality of dialogue about the perspectives of participants, were expressed by the people I interviewed in 2004. It is first interesting to look at expectations of the Collaboration from a State Government perspective. In his interview, Government Respondent A highlighted what he saw to be the real purpose of the Collaboration and suggested that the members still had much work to do in terms of working through commonalities and differences and building a truly shared approach:

I think the disappointment for me was that they didn’t work hard enough on achieving that common values and vision, they tended to assume it and then seek to reach out to the broader community or reach out to our various processes without having enough of their own thinking done, and therefore when you went back to get the nuances and find out what it really meant, they actually hadn’t done a lot of that hard work. Now that’s an easy criticism to make from the outside.

…in other words they hadn’t really done that internal dialogue before being part of the external dialogue…it would have been a richer experience if that was possible and I think that what it does mean is that the WA Collaboration has got to keep existing, and it’s got to keep providing that focus, and it’s got to keep talking within itself…

The Collaboration Respondent (a key person involved in the Collaboration’s early phase of development) not surprisingly acknowledged the centrality of dialogue to the Collaboration and the ongoing work needed. He stressed the long term nature of the collaborative project and its fundamental objective to stimulate the dialogue necessary for progressing sustainability:

…the Collaboration itself is a joint cooperative project designed to stimulate dialogue between the different member groups and the members of the member groups, to try and identify where there is common ground…and to increase respect and understandings of the main priorities on policy issues for the different member groups.

…one of the specific things that the grant application for the funding for the program was about was coordinating input into and response to the State Sustainability Strategy…but I think the potential for the Collaboration is much broader and long term in the sense of helping to try and explore what sustainability should mean for Western Australia, how it can best be implemented into the future…so stimulating interest and participation in what sustainability is and how to achieve it is another significant role.

He pointed out the importance of participation and dialogue for expansion of perspectives and the Collaboration’s role in this:
whenever anyone gains a better understanding of other issues in the world then that can adjust the way one thinks about things, so my view on sustainability has been definitely enriched and broadened by my participation in the WA Collaboration.

The Coordinator of the Collaboration, similarly stressed the power of the Collaboration to enrich perspectives through dialogue and how her views had developed from being involved. At the same time she raised the difficulty of negotiating this increased complexity:

I think I’ve become much more aware of the social dimensions of sustainability having formerly come at it from an environmental perspective. Whilst I had those underlying values of social justice, they were much less formed than the environmental, and the environmental definitely took precedence, and I feel like I’ve learnt a huge amount about the social dimensions.

…I actually have a lot more to do with people who are working in sustainability from a private sector perspective than I ever have before, so I think my views on sustainability have changed there as well…I’m still uncomfortable, I think, about a lot of business approaches…but absolutely there’s no doubt that my approach to and conception of sustainability has broadened immensely since being involved in the Collaboration, which is what makes it so difficult because it just gets bigger and bigger and more all-encompassing of absolutely everything [laughs].

The Coordinator also spoke about the overwhelmingly positive nature of discussion in the community sustainability forums and indications that participants clearly appreciated the opportunities to engage in a different kind of approach:

…overwhelmingly the culture is of such positivity, it quite amazes me actually…there were a couple of people who came to that last forum that we held, one of whom has been involved in the conservation movement for a long time and is quite a sort of traditional activist who operates on adversarial approaches, and who apparently was raving after that forum saying it was great…it’s bringing a whole new community of people into the discussions and that to me was a real eye-opener, to get that level of positive feedback from someone who would normally tend toward scepticism and more negative approaches.

When asked about the role of the Collaboration, the Coordinator highlighted its significance in terms of providing a space to integrate perspectives:

I think fundamentally it’s a network for differing perspectives within organized civil society, to come together around the issues of sustainability and then try to perhaps communicate a more integrated approach to sustainability…I think where we differ from a traditional NGO is that we also have this real operation as a network and really try and share information and share perspectives and to some extent I guess even build capacity, and to try and make those positions that we espouse in the political arena as informed as possible.

The Coordinator pointed out the differing expectations of members of the Steering Committee in this regard and the need for dialogue to clarify direction:

I would like to see that in the future the organization is much more clear about what it is we actually do but I also have a sneaking suspicion that it’s just the nature of the beast, because we’re talking about sustainability, like could we find anything bigger to focus on? There are just so many levels at which we could be working in the sustainability area and each of the partners in the Collaboration have a different priority about what that should be. Currently I’m trying to meet all of those and I don’t know that that’s workable. So we’ve got people who want to focus on developing community education materials up to people who want to see the WA
Collaboration have much bigger media presence and as an advocacy body, and everything in between.

…out of the muddiness I think some definite kind of roles are emerging but they may be going in a particular direction that may not bring everyone along with it…we’ve got a lot of thinking to do and an awful lot of planning.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that through its various activities the WA Collaboration has provided a significant space for exchange around sustainability in Western Australia. At the same time I have highlighted the much greater potential offered by such an initiative for genuinely transformative exchange. The need to develop this potential by consciously creating opportunities for transactional exchange in which reflective dialogue helps to explicate the background perspectives and values that affect understanding of sustainability issues, is best summed up in the words of the Coordinator:

I think that you equating that transactional space with what the WA Collaboration is trying to do is really valid because I think that was a fundamental premise on which it was established—that somehow we want to try and find out what (and we might use different language) a more coordinated approach to sustainability might look like, what are the different dimensions to it, and can we find some common ground there. I think that’s starting to happen with the Steering Committee. I think we’ve been quite conscious about that. I don’t know that that’s happening as well as it could, at that level of affiliate organization. I look at the last community forum that we held and really I think most of those people would identify with a more environmental approach to sustainability, it was quite lacking in the traditional social approach. We’ve still got a way to go before we can really get the diversity of views consistently involved in the Collaboration discussions as we might hope.

This space for exchange, dialogue and learning is a major part of what the Collaboration offers as an ongoing partnership and forum rather than a short-term alliance, and sets it apart from conventional initiatives. It is foundational to developing collaborative relationships, fuller understanding of sustainability and the integration of perspectives needed to progress sustainability. The following chapter continues this argument by discussing the intensive research process I conducted with the Collaboration’s Steering Committee between 2003 and 2004 to foster a working culture of transactional exchange.
Chapter 6
Fostering transactional space within the WA Collaboration: the intensive process conducted with the Steering Committee

INTRODUCTION
This thesis has developed the case for greater attention to the participatory and collaborative processes needed to progress sustainability, and in particular attention to better accommodation of the transformative dialogue and deliberation needed for the success of such processes.

The preceding chapter explored the potential of the WA Collaboration to provide space for this transformative dialogue and deliberation in its meetings of the partner organizations and open forums involving its wider network. This potential required conscious attention to be developed because making time for dialogue and reflection is often left on the proverbial ‘back burner’ as important but less urgent work. In order to help address this, and as part of ongoing research with the group, I worked with the Collaboration’s Steering Committee to develop a structured intensive process that was informed by participatory action research. Held between August 2003 and February 2004 the process involved in-depth interviews with the Steering Committee members to elicit their organizational ‘stories’, circulation of these as tabular summaries, a workshop to explore the organizational backgrounds and perspectives, and a discussion paper and feedback session.

This chapter describes this intensive process conducted with the Steering Committee to develop capacity for transactional space throughout the Collaboration, and in particular discusses the way in which the process contributed to practical initiatives, such as the Conversation Cafés and the news sharing and policy discussion sessions at the beginnings of Steering Committee meetings. The process described in this chapter can inform the work of similar multi-stakeholder collaborations and many other participatory situations.
BECOMING INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH WITH THE WA COLLABORATION

In October 2002, at a time when the organization was rapidly developing, I became engaged in the WA Collaboration’s work with the view to assisting their collaborative endeavours in some way. I was fortunate to be in the position of being able to observe the WA Collaboration’s meetings and events for some time and develop a good working relationship with the Coordinator before identifying the exact course of research I would pursue with the group. This provided early insight into the nature of the organization and the challenges and tensions it faced. A particular concern that arose was how such a diverse group of people would approach the complex and often nebulous topic of sustainability, negotiate their various views around issues related to sustainability, and make the most of their deliberations and collaborations.

In early 2003 I began discussions with the Collaboration’s Steering Committee about preparing a process for the group that would help them build an awareness of their organizational approaches to sustainability and the underlying values and priorities that affect their collaborations. The research was focussed on the Steering Committee and Coordinator because they were the driving force of the Collaboration and could help institute a culture of reflective exchange in the organization. Attention to the respective views of the member groups was seen as fundamental to creating strong collaborative relationships, and as having both intrinsic and practical value. Firstly, greater understanding of the underlying value frameworks and perspectives of the organizations could help strengthen working relationships by helping participants see where their colleagues held similar or different views on issues, and where they could forge closer approaches and make joint action. Secondly, such work is necessary for developing the genuinely collaborative approach that marks ongoing multi-stakeholder situations; building of understanding and shared perspective is indeed part of the very purpose of collaborative groupings—as more than simply coalitions—and central to meeting collective goals. I also recognized, however, that such work was likely to be overwhelmed by the day-to-day business of the WA Collaboration.

A number of considerations were necessary in seeking to address this. I was aware that my research with the group and any process that was developed would require the approval and cooperation of the group if it was to be relevant and contribute to
addressing a real need. By the same token, it was necessary for the Coordinator and Steering Committee to be involved as much as possible throughout the design of the research if it was to have group ownership and there was to be continued support for such work. I was also conscious of the limited time the group had available for such a process and of their general view that such work was valuable but not a priority at the time. Organizations like the WA Collaboration are typically caught up in the day-to-day pressures of maintaining the partnership on top of the existing work of partners, and setting and achieving goals. Several authors note the tension between a lack of time for reflection and dialogue, and the centrality of such work to collaborative relationships. Cherry (1999), for example, highlights the “doing trap” (42) created when organizations fail to make the time for reflective discourse, while Rochester and Woods (2005) point out “the tension between the process and the project” (20) that collaborative enterprises experience. The research with the WA Collaboration was therefore designed to assist the group in a way that would maximise the use of limited time available, and also garner support for continuing the work in ways they could easily carry out themselves and build in to their activities.

At the beginning of discussions about my research with the Steering Committee they were preoccupied with their regional workshops and the Sustainability Summit that were to feed into the development of their Community Sustainability Agenda (CSA). After the CSA was launched in March 2003, the group was preoccupied with determining their program of work for the rest of the year. Later in 2003 they became increasingly concerned with the overall direction of the organization and where to focus efforts, as well as the looming need to find ongoing funding to secure their future and expand their work. That is, the group developed rapidly from the time of its launch in August 2002 because of the immediate need to become involved in the development of the State Sustainability Strategy, and, with other pressing concerns, had had limited opportunity to explore both their diversity and common ground regarding approaches to sustainability. Through the development of the CSA they had expressed their respective views and priorities on policy issues and made some collective recommendations, but they had not had the opportunity to invest substantial and meaningful time in exploring how their views differed and where these could potentially meet in shared approaches. Such a coherent approach develops over time in the right circumstances, but in the meantime requires conscious commitments of time for engaging with and working
through commonalities and differences in perspective. I aimed to encourage this conscious commitment of time, albeit limited, for a depth of exchange through an intensive process that would provide an opportunity for reflective dialogue and demonstrate its value.

DRAWING ON PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH FOR THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The challenging context described above is typical of the situations that attract participatory action research. Indeed, the kinds of challenges facing the WA Collaboration—such as the tension between dialogue and action, and the limited resources, staff and time to develop appreciation of differing perspectives and deeper understanding of sustainability issues—are problems or needs that often attract participatory action research. This approach, or rather family of methods, is in essence one where the researcher engages in a continuous and meaningful way with the research participants to develop a process that helps address an issue important for those involved.72 It is therefore research that aims to be as applicable and significant as possible for the participants and situation. In sum, participatory action research involves collaborative learning, the development of strong working relationships, and the integration of action and reflection with the view to helping facilitate positive change.

While the research I undertook with the WA Collaboration was in keeping with a participatory action research approach, it is important to note that the research was informed rather than in every way guided by this approach. My involvement with the WA Collaboration over the period October 2002 to August 2006 was a form of engaged research in which I was an active participant rather than a detached observer. I participated in almost every one of the WA Collaboration’s events and meetings, although I endeavoured to be an unobtrusive observer in the Steering Committee meetings. I maintained regular contact with the Coordinator of the Collaboration with whom I spent a considerable amount of time in discussion during the collaborative process of writing papers for various conferences and publications. The following section describes the aspects of participatory action research that relate to my research

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72 While participatory action research can be understood and described in this way, Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) claim that it is a “contested concept applied to a variety of research approaches employed in a diversity of fields and settings” (336).
with the WA Collaboration as well as associated approaches that have informed the research.

**Participatory action research and its significance for the research with the WA Collaboration**

Action research is a relatively well-established area of social scientific research and has diverse roots, including education, development aid and community development (Kemmis and McTaggart 2003, 337; Wadsworth 1998, 21). While Cunningham commented in 1993 that action research had not been a mainstream approach of the social sciences (1993, 3), it has since gained considerable popularity, particularly in relation to management of change in organizations. A website and forum for participatory action research called PARnet was founded in 1993 to provide “a knowledge gateway for practitioners and scholars of action research around the world” (PARnet 2005).  

Action research is part of a larger shift in thinking towards reflexive approaches to research, especially in the area of organizational development. According to Cunningham (1993) and White (2001), traditional research procedures have often been time intensive and lacking in flexibility, and therefore incompatible with the fast pace and dynamism of today’s organizations and the type of problems they face. Cunningham claims that traditional approaches to research with organizations have even been criticised for being counterproductive. While research methods are becoming increasingly sophisticated, “research users are demanding material which is simple, clear, and timely” (1993, 7). According to White (2001), the traditional style of approaching organizations has been seen as prescriptive in its methodology and has involved attempts “to codify in rules the system under observation” (247), rather than an appreciation of the constructivity of knowledge and the ways in which the knowledges and interests of multiple actors affect this complexity.

White argues that “[t]hinking in terms of complexity” is an effective way of approaching the complex state of today’s organizations, which he describes as diverse networks of interacting parts (249). He asserts that in contrast to a “systems thinking” approach, which he suggests has traditionally implied that processes arise directly from

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73 See http://www.par.net.org/ for further information.
the structures of organizations and from the forces and mechanisms through which these interact, a complexity thinking approach “sees structures as a manifestation of an underlying process,” that is, a dynamic “web of interrelationships of actors” within and between organizations (2001, 249). This thinking helps us appreciate that organizations are complex and adaptive and are therefore “emergent” states (White 2001).74

Many researchers are now recognising that the internal and external environments of organizations are not situations that can be controlled for research purposes or to which the researcher has privileged access (Cunningham 1993), but are instead complex and dynamic organizations that require collaborative approaches where processes are designed to evolve with the needs of the situation. According to Cunningham, action research thereby “differs from traditional scientific inquiry because of the researcher’s involvement with people’s expectations and values” (10). The approach has been informed by several perspectives such as a participatory view and a reflexive philosophy of practice. In their introduction to the *Handbook of Action Research*, Reason and Bradbury (2001) argue for a ‘participatory worldview’ informed by but moving beyond both positivist and deconstructive postmodernist mindsets. Like many contemporary authors, they argue that our understandings of the world are framed by our perspectives, and suggest that participatory and reflective processes can enable a more expansive view.

A participatory worldview places human persons and communities as part of their world—both human and more-than-human—embodied in their world, co-creating their world. A participatory perspective asks us to be both situated and reflexive, to be explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is created, to see inquiry as a process of coming to know, serving the democratic, practical ethos of action research (2001, 7).

The action research approach is in this way particularly complementary with sustainability thinking and democratic principles.

As described by Schön in *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), a ‘reflexive’ approach to inquiry is essentially one where the researcher or practitioner is aware of her or his own

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74 Flood (2001) provides a discussion of some of the differences between systems thinking, soft systems thinking and complexity theory, and their relationship with action research. According to Flood, systems thinking takes an objective stance “in believing that there are systems in the world that can be identified and improved,” whereas soft systems thinking (a form of *systemic* thinking) “generates and works with an evolving appreciation of people’s points of view and intentions” (137). In this way systemic thinking helps us “attain a deeper sense of how we fit in with the scheme of things” (141). Complexity theory is similar but “explains that the vastness of interrelationships and emergence in which people are immersed is beyond our ability to establish full comprehension” (141). For further discussion of complexity theory see Waldrop (1992).
knowledge but at the same time continually qualifies this with an awareness of the limits of her/his knowledge and an appreciation of the importance of the other knowledges and perspectives present in the situation. Schön (1983) provides a description of the reflective practitioner’s mindset: “I am presumed to know, but I am not the only one in the situation to have relevant and important knowledge. My uncertainties may be a source of learning for me and for them” (300). This type of practitioner seeks out connections with the client or those involved in the work such that both parties may be more open to each other’s thoughts and feelings, and along the way develop mutual respect and a sense of discovery. This reflexive state is conducive to positive and significant change for those involved, and often means the roles of the researcher and the practitioner are more fluid. The researcher may at times assume the role of consultant to the practitioner and at other times join the practitioner in “participant observation” (323) as, indeed, a reflexive researcher is one who gains “an inside view of the experience of practice” (323). Likewise, the practitioner may move in and out of practice and research in order to reflect on the situation and may work with researchers or other practitioners for this.

The approach I took towards the research with the WA Collaboration encouraged both my own reflection and that of the Coordinator. We had opportunities for reflection during the process of writing papers together and during our discussions with the consultants engaged to co-facilitate workshops about the Collaboration’s future directions. Furthermore, the Coordinator had specific opportunities for critical reflection during the interviews I conducted with her in 2004, which allowed her time to consider at length the extent to which the WA Collaboration was creating space for deeper exchange about sustainability.

An emphasis on reflection and learning is foundational to action research. This kind of approach to inquiry is appropriate for the state of today’s organizations and the problems they are experiencing, and particularly for collaborative work in the challenging area of sustainability. Ellis and Kiely (2000) argue that organizations are seeking alternative ways of addressing problems in their rapidly changing environments and that “[a]ction inquiry strategies are being re-discovered as a way of tackling their real problems and providing tailor made solutions in real time.” According to Burns (1990), action research is essentially “the application of fact finding to practical
problem solving in a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it, involving the collaboration and co-operation of researchers, practitioners and laymen” (Burns 1990, 252 cited in Sarantakos 1993, 7). It is distinctively about action and participation because it involves the researcher taking part in the implementation of the findings (Burns 1990 cited in Sarantakos 1993, 7). The approach focuses on knowledge creation and discovery, that is, learning, through a continuous relationship with a problem (Cunningham 1993, 4), and “involves a constant evaluation of its process and modifications to adjust research and practice” (Burns 1990 cited in Sarantakos 1993, 7). In sum, action research is about supporting action with reflection, creating new forms of understanding and working toward practical outcomes (Reason and Bradbury 2001).

Whether it is referred to as action research or participatory action research (PAR)—the latter stressing the participatory nature of the research or referring to research characterised by strong involvement of members of organizations or communities throughout the research process (Whyte 1991, cited in Sarantakos 1993, 8)—what is significant about this type of approach is that “the process itself equips organisations for dealing with future challenges and transformational change” (Ellis and Kiely 2000, abstract). This kind of research evolves over time “as individuals develop skills of inquiry and as communities of inquiry develop within communities of practice” (Reason and Bradbury 2001, 2) and is “emancipatory”—“it leads not just to new practical knowledge, but to new abilities to create knowledge” (2001, 2).

Action research encompasses a range of research techniques but is generally understood as cyclical in nature. Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) describe participatory action research as involving a spiral of self-reflective cycles:

- planning a change,
- acting and observing the process and consequences of the change,
- reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then
  replanning,
- acting and observing,
- reflecting, and so on . . . (381).

They stress that in reality the process may not be as defined as the spiral description suggests, and that it tends to be responsive and thus fluid (381). Kemmis and McTaggart explain that this type of research is participatory because it “engages people in examining their knowledge (understandings, skills, and values) and interpretative
categories (the ways they interpret themselves and their action in the social and material world)” (385).

In whichever way PAR is understood, it is in essence an approach that emphasizes closer involvement with ‘the researched’ such that the research is more relevant and more significant for those that participate. PAR is in sum research that is more participatory and more tied to action than conventional social research (Wadsworth 1998). In Wadsworth’s words it is “more conscious of 'problematising’” the action or practice, and who is problematising it and why; it is “more intensive and comprehensive” in the study, for example waiting longer before conclusions are made and checking hunches; furthermore, it attempts to develop “deeper understandings and more useful and more powerful theory about the matters we are researching, in order to produce new knowledge which can inform improved action or practice” (5-6, emphasis in original).

Taking an approach informed by participatory action research approach meant the theoretical underpinnings of my research were developed and refined during the process. I began my research with the WA Collaboration with the view that, because of the diversity of organizations and individuals involved, the initiative had considerable potential to provide a rich and transformative type of space for sustainability, but that this might require active development. As I became more involved in the organization I consolidated my view that the Collaboration’s activities required greater opportunities for the deeper level dialogue that could support integration of perspectives on sustainability, and gained an understanding of how this might be addressed. Through the research the argument developed that transactional exchange is central to collaboration (particularly in the context of sustainability), but because it is often neglected by busy organizations like the WA Collaboration, must be consciously developed through processes that provide opportunities for reflection on experience and explication of perspectives and values.

Some other aspects of action research are relevant to the intensive process described in this chapter. Because participatory action research processes emerge over time in the given situation, the approach “cannot be programmatic and cannot be defined in terms of hard and fast methods” (Reason and Bradbury 2001, 2). This has been perceived by
some to suggest a lack of scientific rigour, even though action research, with its alternative procedures of inquiry, actively stands in opposition to methods of scientific inquiry based on the authority of the “outside” or “independent” observer (Winter 1987, 2, cited in Sarantakos 1993, 7). According to Kemmis and McTaggart, some have doubted action research because of its “low tech” nature, despite its “practical contributions to democratic processes of transformation in a setting” (2003, 375). They suggest, however, that the quality of a participatory action research process becomes apparent through the ongoing “reality checking” as to the usefulness of the work that occurs because of the strong involvement of the co-researchers or participants throughout the process (2003, 376). Another important consideration is that action inquiry strategies by their nature entail risk (Ellis and Kiely 2000). In his discussion of principles for researching organizations, Cunningham states that “the tolerance for uncertainty, failure, and accident may be an important part of a research process, especially for problems which are complex, changing, or messy” (1993, 53).

The research with the WA Collaboration indeed involved some risk and uncertainty. I initially proposed a longer formal data collection process with the Steering Committee, but because of the participants’ limited time available reached a compromise and decided on an intensive process. I envisioned that there might be possibilities to conduct further formal data collection at a later stage but as events transpired this no longer became applicable. A more time intensive process with the Steering Committee would have allowed greater opportunity for expression of and reflection on experience and perspectives, while a further intervention could have involved new members of the Steering Committee.

Another important point to be made about the research is the role of narrative and its relation to action research. In Chapter 3 I discussed in some depth the significance of narrative for creating transactional space. For the research with the WA Collaboration, narrative was relevant in terms of substance (the organizational backgrounds and perspectives of the Steering Committee organizations) and in terms of process (which involved participants sharing knowledge and experience, reflecting and inquiring of each other). This narrative aspect relates to the reflexive approach to practice discussed
earlier. Kemmis and McTaggart argue that a “dynamic process of reflection and self-reflection” can help us better understand human action (2003, 354). Being aware of what is “‘objective’ (externally given)” in practice and what is “‘subjective’ (internally understood and interpreted)” is necessary to gain a richer knowledge of the situation, that is, “to understand how any practice is really practised, how it is constituted historically and socially, and how it can be transformed” (354). I argue that this deeper and more comprehensive knowledge can develop through the process of sharing and reflecting on stories or at least fragments of experience. Kemmis and McTaggart state that this appreciation of the relationship between the objective and the subjective, and the subsequent awareness of differing views and learning, is understood as a “reflexive” approach (354). It is the very participatory nature of the action research approach that helps allow reflection to occur.

Reflective processes in essence involve considering other perspectives and as such other people’s experiential knowledge and narratives. Cherry (1999) emphasizes the importance of storytelling in the process of reflection back and forth between participants in an action research situation (between researchers, practitioners and laypersons), and thus testing of research through action. Organizations like the WA Collaboration often lack conscious efforts to incorporate this sharing of stories/experience and reflection, yet reflexivity can greatly benefit organizations because of the way in which it strengthens the knowledge and collaborative base of an organization. The research with the Steering Committee was aimed at fostering a reflective culture in the organization. It was designed to demonstrate how such reflection could occur and help identify simple but effective ways to consciously include opportunities for deeper exchange on an ongoing basis.

Because PAR involves continuous cycles of action, reflection on action, learning and new informed action, the researcher becomes involved in monitoring new and ongoing action arising from the research (Wadsworth 1998). My immersion in the WA Collaboration’s various work and ongoing working relationship with the Coordinator allowed this to occur. Furthermore, my observation of and participation in the WA Collaboration’s Steering Committee meetings and various forums and events allowed

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75 See Clandinin and Connelly (2000) for a discussion of narrative inquiry in qualitative research, in particular their discussion of Bateson’s (1994) ideas about the importance of differences and experiencing uncertainty for learning.
me to build considerable understanding of the context, people involved and the nature of their discussions. Wadsworth (1998) concluded from her experience and analysis that effective participatory action research occurred typically when people “knew their turf” and “knew who they were doing it for” (10). Furthermore, in her experience, “the more there is active participation the greater the chances of maximising both the accuracy and meaningfulness of all contributions, and also the sharing of perceptions and of emerging understandings about the value of what new actions should next be taken” (18).

For these reasons I maintained engagement with the Collaboration’s work and regular contact with the Coordinator throughout the research period. The intensive process described in the following section constituted an important component of the research with the Collaboration but was only one part of the overall research undertaken. Participatory action research is intended to be an ongoing process of learning and change rather than a one-off event (Wadsworth 1998). In my case the research was about developing capacity for the Steering Committee to continue the transformative work themselves. The intervention of the intensive process was intended to lead to further such work by the group and to help spark continuing cycles of action, reflection and change, and my ongoing involvement was designed to encourage this. The research is, in this sense, about a continuous journey of change rather than a complete process.

**THE INTENSIVE PROCESS**

This thesis has argued that creating genuinely holistic and shared outcomes for sustainability requires processes that engage people’s perspectives and values and that in doing so strengthen collaborative capacity. A simple and effective way to encourage this engagement is through the sharing of and reflection on experience. I therefore believed the WA Collaboration Steering Committee could benefit from a process to facilitate explication of their organizational backgrounds or ‘stories,’ which could help expand their understanding of how each organization approached key policy issues in their collaborations for sustainability.

While the Collaboration was quite heavily committed when I became involved in the research, the group recognized the value of an independent researcher having the time to reflect on what the group was doing, identify needs and propose opportunities, and
believed a dialogical and reflective process could generally assist their collaborations. After several months of discussion with the Coordinator and Steering Committee, an intensive process was organized. This process took place between August 2003 and February 2004 as part of my wider engagement with the WA Collaboration between October 2002 and August 2006.

The intensive process involved the following steps:

- eliciting the organizational ‘stories’ of the Steering Committee members through in-depth, semi-structured interviews (August 2003);
- circulating these stories as tabular summaries among the group for reflection;
- discussing the summaries in a professionally-facilitated workshop, and identifying and exploring the commonalities and differences in a matrix (September 2003); and
- reflecting on the process through a discussion paper (October 2003) to which I received formal response in a taped feedback session in February 2004.

The process was aimed at demonstrating the sort of work I identified as necessary for effective collaboration. The structured, intensive process was aimed at consciously encouraging reflective exchange, rather than just leaving it to chance in the busy schedule of the organization. Working closely with the Coordinator on this was intended to encourage her to be more conscious of making ongoing opportunities for such work in the Collaboration’s regular activities. Indeed, the success of the process depended on the extent to which the Steering Committee and Coordinator valued the transactional work and sought to continue such work.

The process occurred at a strategic time in the development of the Collaboration. The Steering Committee had been occupied with the development of the CSA and were yet to finish prioritising their next steps. The opportunity for deeper dialogue presented by this intensive process was to complement their existing, mainly task-based discussions, and to help the group take stock of their views and interests. While the Collaboration had experienced some significant achievements over the year it had been in existence, the Steering Committee members had had relatively limited time together for deeper dialogue. It was therefore an ideal time to give the group a much needed opportunity to build their understanding of each other’s organizational backgrounds and approaches to
sustainability, including their understanding of how collaboration had already affected their perspectives. Thus the process was fundamentally about learning and discovery—development of approaches to sustainability through greater appreciation of other perspectives and of the potential synergies.

**Interviews and circulation of summaries**

The first step of the intensive process took place in August 2003 where I interviewed the Steering Committee members to elicit the perspectives of each organization as well as thoughts on processes that would help develop their collaborative capacity. All the foundation organizations were interviewed with the exception of Unions WA, which was largely inactive in the Steering Committee at the time and was interviewed at a later stage when their level of activity increased. For some organizations I interviewed more than one representative depending on how many people from the organization had been involved in the Committee. At the time of the interviews the WACOSS representative had just been replaced so I interviewed both people (the past representative referred to as A in this chapter and the new representative, B). Three representatives from the Conservation Council (referred to as A, B and C) were interviewed and two from WA SIG (referred to as A and B). In total I conducted 10 face-to-face, one-on-one interviews averaging 90 minutes each.

The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured with a generic set of open-ended questions. These questions varied slightly depending on the flow of the conversation but generally a standard set of questions was used (these questions are attached in Appendix 4). Open-ended probes were sometimes used to clarify or expand responses and helped create a richness of interview data for the summaries and workshop. This type of approach allowed the participants to express complex views. Reinharz (1992) argues that open-ended interview research provides “opportunities for clarification and discussion” and “explores people’s views of reality and allows the researcher to generate theory” (1992, 18). Indeed, the conversational nature of the interviews helped me understand the research context and needs of the participants better, and thus refine my ideas and research process. Reinharz also cites Raymond’s (1979) view that an open-ended questioning approach “maximizes discovery and description” (18). This
sensitive approach to interviewing allows researchers to uncover a richness of experience and knowledge (44). 

Through the interviews I sought to capture the backgrounds or ‘stories’ of the Steering Committee member organizations, including the organizational values and perspectives, so that they could then be shared among the participants prior to and during the workshop. That is, I aimed to surface and encourage reflection on the “institutional action frames” implicit in policy debates (Schön and Rein 1994, xiii). The following themes guided the interviews:

- the background, values and approach to sustainability of the organization;
- the participant’s reflections on the WA Collaboration process and ideas about the act of collaborating in general; and
- their expectations of the WA Collaboration.

Questions were put to the interview participants as representatives of their organizations, although personal thoughts obviously coloured responses. The interviews were fully transcribed and this data together with notes taken in the interviews and document analysis contributed to the preparation of the organizational summaries. These summaries were sent to the participants shortly after the interviews while still fresh in their memory.

The differing backgrounds and approaches to sustainability that were elicited in the interviews are complex. Here I illustrate some of the perspectives and their relationships, while the summaries in Appendix 5 provide a more comprehensive illustration, and the discussion throughout the rest of this chapter highlights some of the tensions and opportunities. When asked to describe the organization’s approach to sustainability, the Conservation Council of WA participant B revealed an overriding concern for the environment but at the same time an appreciation of the interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental objectives:

I don’t actually have a Cons Council policy on sustainability, but essentially one of the things we talk about a lot is just people putting a huge effort into doing scientific work around what the environment can handle in terms of human pressure, and then once you work out what particular areas can handle and/or what particular areas need to be revegetated, rehabilitated, whatever, then you do your work on how the diversity and the resources might be sustainably used, and

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76 The approach taken for the interviews was informed by Seidman’s (1998) discussion of the practice of in-depth interviewing.

77 Schön and Rein define institutional action frames as “the beliefs, values, and perspectives held by particular institutions and interest groups from which particular policy positions are derived” (1994, xiii).
then after all that you ask the question, ‘how does that manifest in terms of economics and social outcomes?’ So I guess we look at things in that order.

…but in a lot of ways we think that all three bottom lines amount to the same thing. The economic bottom line, we’re saying well we want economics that’s sustainable in the longer term which is about not hammering the environment too hard with short term economic goals, and we say that social justice is about social justice in the long term as well, which is also about using the environment sustainably…unless you maintain ecological processes and look after the place then we won’t have intergenerational social justice.

Turning to the WA Sustainable Industry Group, the association obviously comes from an industry perspective and clearly has a strong environmental basis in its work towards eco efficiency and cleaner production, but WA SIG participant A highlighted the way in which this work also progressed social objectives:

I think a lot of the issues around cleaner production are also social because if you do cleaner production then your occupational health and safety standards improve, and that’s a profoundly social impact...And likewise if you reduce odour emissions or other emissions that’s a profound benefit for the people that live around…If you’re sort of looking at a cleaner competitive product that means that there is minimal hazard exposure to consumers.

Regarding the WA Council of Social Service’s approach to sustainability, participant A stated the following: “I would say that WACOSS thinks equity needs to kind of underpin it, and that’s between current generations and future generations.” She also highlighted “equity, diversity, quality of life, interconnectedness and democracy in governance” as principles of social sustainability. WACOSS participant B provided further explanation of social sustainability from the WACOSS perspective:

For WACOSS the core focus is social sustainability and what we can add to the overall sustainability argument, or development or policy influence, whichever one you want to say. That’s what our speciality is, so there’s that core focus…So we need to look at more sustainable ways of alleviating poverty, of helping those individuals and those groups and those communities to get a little bit more of what there is out there to ensure that they’ve got a reasonable standard of living. So it’s really…it’s the ongoing activities…it’s the thing that is more than the band-aid approach, which is I think what the welfare approach has generally been about.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission participant indicated an overriding social perspective in the organization’s concern for fostering sustainable Indigenous communities. At the same time, she highlighted the links to environmental sustainability in terms of caring for the land:

Well certainly the focus for ATSIC would be on sustainability for Indigenous communities, also sustainability of the environment in terms of Aboriginal people being the traditional owners of the country and wanting to look after, care for the country…and society in terms of...for a sustainable community, people need to have more services, the same things that everybody else has, but for a lot of Aboriginal communities the situation is much worse than for the general community. Ah, so all of the things that the Collaboration is looking for in general society are in a lot of terms more urgent for Indigenous communities.
The ATSIC participant highlighted the diversity in circumstances for Indigenous communities and suggested considerable diversity in approaches to the land:

> It varies from place to place…some people would say ‘this country is sacred to Aboriginal communities’…Other places would say, ‘ok, this is our country and these particular places are significant, you can’t touch those, but we need economic development and we need mining.’ And some Aboriginal communities have solar power and are looking at regeneration and things that are less destructive to the environment, and also cheaper to run…So yeah, where technological solutions are appropriate and viable...

The Council of Churches of WA shared the focus on social justice with ATSIC and WACOSS but revealed a global outlook. At the same time, the Churches participant indicated a strong environmental bent in terms of the welfare of people being dependent on access to resources, and respect for and stewardship of nature:

> We are working in sustainability all the time, but our focus is not on the local scene. We are focussed on the global scene. So our work in peace issues, our work in overseas aid and development...These are very much sustainability type agendas, but they’re not one that I find at the forefront...this whole organization, but me in particular have a very strong picture of the world and how we in this country have an enormously privileged lifestyle, which is damaging to not just creation but to the other people in the world. I suppose we do have a bit of an anthropocentric view of it in that primarily we are about the welfare of people, but recognising that the welfare of people is dependent upon the welfare of the environment that supports it.

We’re one of the groups that bring a focus on the human side of sustainability…So we would be arguing for conservation which does not destroy human communities but enhances it, but at the same time recognising that human communities have to change. They can’t demand the consumer’s lifestyle that we have now for example. They can’t justify some people being wealthy and some people being poor.78

The Ethnic Communities Council of WA shared the Churches’ sense of international obligation and concern for human rights, in particular for refugees. After highlighting the environmental and economic factors (such as degraded land and poor crop yields) that contribute to migration, the ECCWA participant stressed that “we obviously need to create opportunities to ensure the full potential of, not just the citizens of this country, but indeed of the world. We may be an island but we are still part of the global economy.”

The ECCWA participant revealed the organization’s overriding concern for social justice for migrants and how a sustainability approach related:

> I don’t believe when it comes to sustainability we can afford to look at each of its components separately. I mean you have to look at it together. Makes it difficult, but you have to, because as I said, they are all interrelated and I would strongly argue inextricably interrelated…from a

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78 In chapter 1 I noted Dresner’s (2002) claim that ‘sustainability’ had been used in a similar sense to the way it is used here as far back as 1974 by the World Council of Churches. Indeed, the Council of Churches participant commented that 20 years before the present day the World Council of Churches had helped get ‘justice, peace and the integrity of creation’ on the international agenda and that their own organization had been involved in the area of work.
social justice perspective, and more importantly from a human rights perspective, which is the position that I have consistently argued for, and will continue to do within and outside the Collaboration. You cannot achieve a human rights perspective if you don’t look at the issue of sustainability as a whole.

As an example of a complex problem requiring a sustainability approach, he highlighted the problem in Australia of “on the one extreme people working far too many hours and the other, people who don’t have jobs” and commented that “an immediate priority for sustainability” as far as the organization is concerned “is to find ways where employment opportunities can better be shared, more equitably shared.” He argued that “the fact that we have crime, drug addiction, issues of mental health, all at record levels, has got a lot to do with the fact that we have ignored the connections between the economic and social aspects of sustainability.”

The ECCWA representative stressed the necessity to appreciate the interconnectedness of different objectives and how the WA Collaboration had encouraged this:  

...the need to ensure that each time you look at a major issue of significance you need to look at all the dimensions of sustainability and not just one of them, is something which is I suppose is well and truly on my mind because of my involvement in the Collaboration. And to also realise that sustainability...to get lasting solutions, if you want to put it that way, from a sustainability perspective, you realise that there has to be more than a bit of give on all sides.

This belief in the interconnectedness of policy objectives and issues is something that many of the interview participants expressed. In particular, the Conservation Council participant C described sustainability as an overarching approach to issues, but nevertheless believed it was necessary for operational reasons to pull apart the threads.

In general, the interview data illustrated varying approaches to sustainability and, at the same time, connections between the organizations. For example, the organizations of the Steering Committee that were by definition primarily concerned with social justice believed environmental considerations were related and of importance but suggested that they should not be seen as the ultimate bottom line. In contrast, the Conservation Council believed environmental considerations underpinned everything and that social justice in the long term depended on using the environment in a sustainable way. The organizations, however, shared an overwhelming sense of urgency for their respective causes, and values such as equity and democratic community involvement in decision-making. In the interviews several participants suggested that underlying the organizational concerns and priorities of the Steering Committee organizations were shared values and a common vision for the future. Furthermore, most of the Steering
Committee organizations recognized the importance of economic considerations for delivering a sustainable society, but were of the view that economic prosperity was merely a vehicle for achieving social and environmental values and not an end in itself or the bottom line. In addition, most of the Steering Committee conceptualized the subject of their collaborations as the holistic vision ‘sustainability,’ whereas the representatives of the WA Sustainable Industry Group preferred to use ‘sustainable development’ because it suggested to them the process for moving towards the ideal state, sustainability.

I had originally proposed a longer research process to the Steering Committee to include additional interviews and an additional workshop at a later stage in the Collaboration’s development, so that all could gain a better understanding of the extent to which the views of the Steering Committee members had been informed by or expanded through collaboration. This would have allowed the group to focus on the effectiveness of their collaborations in developing their perspectives and a more cohesive collective approach to sustainability. However, it was agreed during the planning process with the group that this would be too much of a commitment on top of their already very busy schedules (the Steering Committee members had already taken on extra work by being involved in the Collaboration in the first instance). Instead of the additional interviews and workshop it was therefore agreed that, given the time constraints of the members, an intensive process would best suit the needs of the group at that particular stage in their development.

The extent to which the perspectives of the Steering Committee members had already developed through the process of collaboration was nevertheless one of the key subjects of the interviews. Participants were first asked to describe their organization’s approach to sustainability. Then when asked “has your organization’s approach to sustainability changed over time? if so, in what ways?,” many of the participants commented that their organization’s perspectives on sustainability policy issues had indeed already been informed and expanded by their interactions with the other organizations of the Steering Committee. For example, the Steering Committee member of the Ethnic Communities Council commented that the WA Collaboration had given the organization the opportunity to explore sustainability and its “commitment in terms of sustainability in a much broader context than it previously ever had and ever might have.” Likewise, the
Conservation Council representative C said that the organization’s views about sustainability had expanded, especially through the process of developing the CSA. Similarly, representative A said that involvement in the Collaboration had exposed the Conservation Council to social equity issues that it was not so aware of earlier, and had broadened its understanding of the challenges for sustainability in terms of social and equity implications. For example, common ground between the organization and the more socially-oriented groups had been discovered in the area of water pricing. This meant some agreement that the price should reflect the value of the resource but not in such a way as would disadvantage the most vulnerable in society (for example, means testing of basic services). WACOSS representative A made similar comments:

The way [social and environmental agendas] intersect still isn’t clear. In some ways I think that will only be worked out for us through specific issues...But then having said that, that’s started to happen around water policy and that kind of thing...I think we did shift on the pricing stuff a bit...I guess on the issue of water pricing we accepted that there needed to be price increases but still felt that low income people had to be protected from the impact of that.

Representative B from WACOSS pointed out that tensions and conflict make sustainability a richer concept. She also noted the way in which collaboration, albeit challenging, is fruitful: “overall I think we can actually use those tensions to build our argument, but only if we have equal respect for each other’s viewpoints, and I do have to say that the WA Collaboration is a complete breath of fresh air in that way.” The responses to this question, as of all the interview questions, were captured in the interview summaries and were therefore able to reflect to the group the positive benefits of collaboration and exploration of differing views on issues.

Another important interview topic concerned collaboration processes. This included questions about the participants’ experiences of collaboration so far in their involvement in the Steering Committee and how the group should strengthen their collaborations. Because of the participatory approach of my research, I also elicited what they thought would be useful activities in the workshop for supporting collaboration. Such questions helped identify possible issues for collaboration and the processes or activities that could assist it. Comments about what was important for collaboration included the following (which replicate the language of the participants as much as possible):

- exploring the driving forces and passions of people of the organizations and how they can all move towards the same thing;
- identifying potential partnerships within the Steering Committee;
- commenting on each other’s policy documents (such as ones under review); this could further understanding of interrelated consequences and possible tensions or shared objectives, and could encourage joint work on certain areas of advocacy;
- exploring what people mean by certain words they use in dialogue (including jargon);
- simply “talking more” and inquiring of each other for the learning process; and
- the organizations describing their activities so others can learn more about their priorities and values (more efficient time wise than scanning websites).

Furthermore, most participants interviewed noted the need for more exchange of views and exploration of commonalities and differences in approaches. The ATSIC representative in particular believed the group had not had much opportunity for this because it had been busy with development of the Community Sustainability Agenda: “I guess one of the things that I expected would happen and it hasn’t been, it’s more kind of exchange of views and addressing differences between the various member groups.” She also noted the importance of actually articulating the organizational perspectives to qualify preconceived views:

…it would be useful for people to, I mean some of the questions that you’ve been asking today about where our organization is coming from and what our position is, to actually say that, because I mean you kind of think you know what the Ethnic Communities might think, or the Churches, or the Unions, but it may not necessarily be what you think and we may have preconceptions or assumptions which are not necessarily true.

Another theme of the interviews was discovering common ground through processes of identifying or prioritising key areas on which to work. In addition, several participants noted that getting to the level of a specific policy issue, campaign or pilot project and its smaller detail, and working through it to develop a collective approach, would be a challenging but important collaborative experience because it would involve exploring further the commonalities and differences of the group and possible synergies. This contributed to my decision to provide for an in-depth discussion of a key policy issue in the workshop.

From the interviews I prepared summaries of the organizations and circulated these among the participants as preparation for the workshop. The summaries were also intended to be an ongoing resource for the Steering Committee and future members. Circulating the summaries gave the participants the opportunity to reflect on their own summary and make clarifications with me before the workshop, but moreover gave
them an opportunity to consider the summaries of the other organizations before the workshop. The tabular summaries, structured in terms of the themes of the interviews, were designed to pass on the knowledge gained from the interviews in an efficient way and to be used conveniently in the workshop to discuss the organizational approaches. By circulating the summaries prior to the workshop I wanted to encourage participants to begin to reflect on their own backgrounds and perspectives as well as those of others in the group.

Unfortunately Unions WA was not involved in the intensive process as it was largely inactive in the Steering Committee at the time. However, when Unions WA later became more active in the Collaboration I interviewed their representative with the same set of questions I had used for the other organizations, and soon after prepared a summary for the organization. In this way I was able to complete the set of summaries of the Steering Committee organizations as an ongoing resource for the group. Indeed, the summaries have been useful for briefing the new Unions representative as well as new representatives from WACOSS and the Conservation Council about the organizational approaches, and about the intensive process and my involvement in the Collaboration. The Unions summary was presented to the Steering Committee members at one of their meetings to help better inform them of the Unions perspective. It would have been interesting to have had Unions WA involved in the intensive process because they would have brought another perspective to the discussions, one that closely combined social and economic concerns. The Unions WA summary is attached with the other summaries in Appendix 5.

The Unions representative made an incisive comment about the nature of collaboration that is particularly relevant to the following section: “maybe the terminology’s different to start with but once you get through the words used you seem to be coming to a common point with everybody, with the other views if you like.” The Council of Churches participant made a very similar comment in reference to the question of whether the organization might discover shared approaches to issues with conservation groups: “if we talk to each other enough we will find that we’re all talking about the same thing in the end, but in the beginning it’s hard.”
Workshop and matrix

The next step of the intensive process, a three hour, facilitated workshop held in September 2003, provided an opportunity for the Steering Committee to do just that—to talk more with each other and reflect on their diversity and shared concerns. It was an opportunity to respond as a group to the organizational summaries, and to a matrix of similarities and differences I had developed from the data. It was also a chance to work through a policy ‘hot potato’ (a contentious policy issue), that is, to examine the differences in perspective in a specific context. This was agreed during the workshop to be “sustainable production and consumption.” Rather than to fully resolve differences, the workshop aimed to build understanding and integration of perspectives, and generally more cohesive approaches to sustainability policy issues for future collaborations.

The workshop objectives were stated as follows:

a. to further understanding of backgrounds, values and approaches to sustainability;

b. to identify commonalities and differences; and

c. to consider how tensions and potentials underlying the above can inform collaboration.

The same participants as those interviewed were involved in the workshop with the exception of the WA Council of Social Service, which had only the ‘new’ representative that was interviewed present, and the WA Sustainable Industry Group, which had one of the representatives interviewed and the representative replacing her present. The Coordinator of the WA Collaboration also participated.

Below is an outline of the workshop:

- discussion and clarification of the summaries of each organization prepared from the interviews;

- discussion and clarification of the matrix of commonalities and differences presented at the workshop;

- identification of a policy issue (a policy ‘hot potato’) for discussion of commonalities, differences, tensions and potentials; the group chose
‘consumption and production,’ broke into small groups to brainstorm the four areas and then had a plenary discussion of the areas;

- a round of closing comments by participants about what they believed was significant in what emerged from the workshop.

I engaged the services of an independent, professional facilitator to guide the workshop. There were several benefits to having such a person facilitate the workshop. The facilitator was one that the WA Collaboration had already engaged for a strategic planning workshop, seemed to work well with the group and have a good understanding of their needs, and had considerable experience with other organizations. The facilitator assisted in the design of the workshop and the experience she brought to this was valuable. I also worked closely with the Coordinator in the planning of the workshop so I would provide a process as efficient and useful for the group as possible.

Having a facilitator for the workshop meant I was able to concentrate on what occurred in the workshop and document it. However, I did at times intervene and help in the facilitation of the process, especially when the facilitator gave me opportunities to clarify activities and the matrix I presented to the group, or when I thought the discussion needed to be extended. Having three people to guide the process—the facilitator, the Coordinator and myself—helped to get the most out of the discussions. I fully transcribed the workshop so that I could further analyse the process and the discussions.

**Discussion of the summaries**

The first part of the workshop was designed to give the group an opportunity to discuss the summaries. Prior to the workshop, the participants had had the opportunity to refine their own organization’s summary and read each other’s. In the first part of the workshop the participants were asked to comment briefly on their summary and explain any points they thought needed clarification to the group. They were encouraged to ask for further clarification from each other if they felt the need. The participants generally considered the summaries had been true to their organization and had captured their interviews well. Some comments led to extended discussion. A lengthy discussion was started by the WACOSS representative’s comment about the current economic system and problem of poverty. WACOSS suggested that it was hard to believe society was
making progress towards sustainability when there were so many people still struggling on low incomes. This sparked a process of inquiry from the others:

- Conservation Council member A asked if WACOSS meant the WA Collaboration should focus more on the social dimension or that the poverty issue “needs to be emphasized more strongly.”

- The WACOSS member further explained their view that the issue of poverty was a huge problem, an “age old thing,” and that while there were some potential “solutions as to the redistribution of wealth and changing the tax system,” they just did not seem to get picked up by decision makers. She generally expressed her deep frustration and concern about this.

- Council of Churches then responded by saying “I guess the Council of Churches would agree with that but we would look at it in international terms, and we would be saying that the world cannot be sustainable while there are people dying because they haven’t got enough food, or haven’t got enough medicine, or haven’t got clean water.”

- WACOSS agreed: “It’s exactly the same, we’re just talking either the Australian economic system or we’re talking about the world.”

- ATSIC then commented about poverty among Aboriginal Australians: “You look at the statistics for Aboriginal health and morbidity, they’re appalling, but the sort of thing just for poverty, you’d probably get the same sort of statistics for the majority of Aboriginal people in the lower social economic group…The problem is Aboriginal people is seen as a black issue rather than a poverty issue.”

This dialogue illustrates the type and tone of discussion able to take place in the workshop. Another exchange of views that occurred in this part of the workshop was the discussion of the term “carrying capacity”. This discussion revealed some fundamental tensions in views but helped the group become aware of the importance of language and of using shared concepts. When I encouraged the groups to clarify anything outstanding a quite passionate dialogue occurred between the Conservation Council and Council of Churches. The Churches pointed out the Conservation Council member A’s use of the term “carrying capacity” and how it caused her concern. She made comments about her view of it and asked the Conservation Council representative to clarify what he meant by it:
Maybe I don’t really understand what it is that you mean by that but I think that there is a potential problem for us in debating that matter because the Council of Churches for over 50 years has been involved in refugee settlement, and so immigration policy might be an area in which we have to do some careful talking together.

The Conservation Council representative then started by explaining that the term was used to emphasize the limits of the resources provided by the environment, including ecosystem services:

The whole concept of carrying capacity itself is not a black and white one, it’s kind of complicated and probably different people within the conservation movement would have a different a view of it. I used that phrase just then to try and use it as a catch all for the idea that we interact with the environment and that those interactions can have impacts on the environment and if the impacts become too large in terms of the resilience and the resources of the environment then, ah, that tends to end up being unsustainable. You can have irreversible impacts on the environment and then the ability of the environment to provide the clean water, the food that’s unpolluted, the clean air, as well as the experience of beauty and everything else becomes diminished, and in the larger scale, in the abstract, that is an issue that we need to deal with, and the conservation movement within it has an ongoing argument about how we deal with that in a site-specific way within WA, within Australia.

He stressed, however, the importance of at the same time being cognisant of the social dimensions:

…I was thinking more in a generic sense, within the catchment of the Swan River (which most of Perth is located within), the way our land use is degrading the health of the Swan River, so in a way, in one dimension, we can say Perth settlement is unsustainable because the River’s not healthy. But there are different dimensions…it doesn’t make sense to just think about the environmental stuff without thinking about the social interactions and the social consequences and objectives, because it’s naïve to do so.

The Council of Churches responded by suggesting they take a “world carrying capacity” view rather than simply “carrying capacity:

The way it sounds to me is that it’s about fortress Australia, it’s about us saying no to any needs of the rest of the world, and we’ve got to allow that those of us who are privileged enough to live here to make a Garden of Eden, to return it to the Garden of Eden, you know, we’ll make it as perfect as it can be but not letting anybody else share it, and the idea that there may be a world carrying capacity [agreement noises from several people including from the Conservation Council representative in question] rather than an Australian carrying capacity and that that capacity is about the sharing of resources on a large scale which for us in the Churches is about reducing overall levels of materialism and consumerism [agreement noises from the Conservation Council representative] as a responsible way for the poor and the rest of the world. So I kind of go “eek!” when somebody talks about it as if Australia were, ah, an island [pause, general laughter as the group appreciates the irony] were able to be separate from the needs of and the aspirations of the entire globe.

The Conservation Council member then wished to clarify the organization’s view:

It’s important if I could clarify, because within what I was saying, there was very little in terms of policy recommendation of position, and fortress Australia is not at all what I had in mind, so that was reading a lot into what I was saying.

The Council of Churches then explained what she had experienced:

I understand that, but from my point of view, when I’ve been for the last three years arguing against a global community response which is turning its back against refugees in particular,
then words like carrying capacity have come to mean the kind of missiles that people throw at me.

This is an example of how sharing of experience and reflection can help develop understanding during discussions. The Conservation Council member then agreed that it was important to think in this global sense about carrying capacity. Following this, the Ethnic Communities Council member pointed out that some groups existed within the conservation movement that tended to take a hard line on population and immigration. Another Conservation Council representative, member B, agreed but explained that they did so for ecological reasons—“they just have a really strong line on the Australian Ecological Carrying Capacity.” He stressed that “there are actual differences within the environment movement and there are people that exploit those arguments for ultimate gain.”

The Coordinator of the WA Collaboration then suggested “ecological footprint” as a useful concept:

…another way of thinking about this issue that we might explore further another time is the ecological footprint model, and for those that were at the sustainability conference, the father of ecological footprinting gave a presentation, and for me the equity issue is quite implicit in that whole model because what he talks about is for the average lifestyle in the Western world, working out the number of hectares that we need to support all our production, consumption and waste and comparing that to the ecological footprint of developing countries, so for me it’s a way of looking at environmental limits that’s intensely linked with the assumption and intensely linked with social equity and international equity. I think rather than getting hung up on the specific term can we just suggest that we never use carrying capacity again [a bit of laughter] and that we do explore this issue much more [some agreement noise]

The facilitator then reminded the group that the workshop was about acknowledging and reflecting on differences and not about resolving them then and there in the workshop. In response, Conservation Council representative B then pointed out what the discussion had managed to reveal:

But it’s an important part of the involvement in the Collaboration that we write our environment policy not in such blunt terms that really dis-acknowledge the social side of it; we can’t necessarily write policy that captures the whole gamut of sustainability but at least we can write it in sensitive ways…

I then asked the group if the ecological footprint concept could help this by providing a more acceptable term and member A of the Conservation Council then said: “I think it is a really useful tool, very useful methodology for helping people understand.” He said it was what he had been “trying to get across” earlier in the discussion with Churches on carrying capacity and further discussed the tensions:
Part of the concept that I was trying to get across, that in the end, for any given type of lifestyle and economy in the society we have, it has environmental impacts and, ah, there is a certain level of population that particularly environment will be able to support for that given lifestyle, and there are consequences when we go over that in terms of irreversible changes happening if we get to certain thresholds, or if we don’t. There’s big debates about where the thresholds are, what would happen after, and all that kind of stuff, and it is a complicated area that gets explored by people for different agendas. It’s a minefield in terms of policy and stakeholder interest and for that reason it often doesn’t get the attention it deserves…that might be an area that might be useful to look at because I can tell you within the conservation movement when we’ve had workshops and population issues comes up the emotional intensity and tension within meetings just goes whoosh, spikes through the roof, people within the conservation movement often find it very hard to argue calmly about the issues.

Another member of the Conservation Council (B) then raised a “related example…about where conservation groups are trying to explicitly culture equity issues in the context of international greenhouse emissions.” He explained that rather than pushing “the idea that developing countries have to stay where they are and everyone else has to go down,” conservation groups acknowledged that addressing this issue might mean developing countries being “allowed to increase their emissions” while the “significant impacts” from the “so-called developed countries” would need to decrease, “so everyone’s kind of moving toward an overall lower average.” Member A of the Conservation Council then added “so a ‘fair earth share’ is a concept there,” to which member B responded, “yeah, it’s an aspect of the footprint concept as well, that’s an equal share of the ecological footprint, greenhouse emissions.”

This discussion of concepts such as a world carrying capacity, ecological footprint and fair earth share is significant because it demonstrates the tensions and intersections between equity or social justice concerns (such as believing all people should be able to better their lives or prosper) and environmental concerns (respecting the environment and living within its limits). Such transactional level discussion is important for the kind of understanding and integration of perspectives the Collaboration works towards. Forming more cohesive views is important for the Collaboration’s efforts to change behaviour in the community. While it only scratched the surface of the issues, the above discussion helped to make the issues more approachable for the group in the future.

**Discussion of the matrix**

The next session of the workshop involved the participants being presented with and responding to the matrix of commonalities and differences I had prepared from the
interviews and summaries (Table 2).\textsuperscript{79} The matrix was designed to stimulate discussion of some key aspects common or divergent among the group that emerged from the summaries.

On the advice of the facilitator I decided to introduce the matrix in the workshop and use it as a springboard for discussion. However, in her reflections emailed to me after the workshop, the facilitator noted that the time spent on discussing and adjusting the matrix had led to less time for the policy case study discussion. Giving the participants the opportunity to consider the matrix before the workshop might have meant a slightly speedier discussion in the workshop. Nevertheless, the discussion would have lacked the element of responding to new information and would have therefore changed the balance of the workshop and the type of discussion. The matrix gave the participants new focus material, and if they had seen it prior to the workshop and just skim read it in between work commitments, it might not have had the same impact nor produced as meaningful a discussion. I believe introducing the matrix in the workshop was effective because the participants were able to consider it anew in the context of the workshop, that is, in the “time out” or reflective space it provided.

Table 2 is the matrix after it was adjusted in the workshop and sent to the participants in the discussion paper that followed the workshop. The grey text indicates the amendments from the workshop. The empty/blank cells indicate indeterminate status for reasons including: a) a particular aspect was not determined for the organization in either the interview or workshop; b) a participant could not determine the status of an aspect for their organization during the workshop; c) a participant did not have a view on an aspect; and d) an aspect was seen as not applicable for the organization. Due to time constraints, not every aspect for every organization was able to be addressed in the workshop.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{79} I decided to use the term “matrix” because I wanted to highlight that it was an analysis and that it could be seen as an overview of some of the group’s similarities and differences. 
\textsuperscript{80} The matrix was a guide only and was developed for the purposes of the workshop and the Steering Committee. It does not represent the positions of the organizations on every point.
### Table 2: Matrix of commonalities and differences among the Steering Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements for discussion of commonality &amp; difference</th>
<th>ATSIC</th>
<th>WACOSS</th>
<th>ECCWA</th>
<th>Church of</th>
<th>Council of</th>
<th>Conservation</th>
<th>Council</th>
<th>WACOSS</th>
<th>WA SIG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Yes</td>
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**Grey text indicates amendments from workshop**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Background &amp; culture of organization</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative/cooperative</td>
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<td>Sense of urgency for addressing issues important to the organization</td>
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<td>Committed/’not just a job’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responds to most pressing issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diverse views among member organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being a voice/advocate for others that are often unheard</td>
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<td>More engaged with government recently</td>
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<td>Significantly grown in size</td>
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<td>Lack of resources &amp; funding tensions</td>
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<th><strong>Recent important issues</strong></th>
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<td>Human rights: refugees &amp; asylum seekers</td>
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<td>Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians</td>
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<td>Rights for Indigenous people</td>
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<td>Major issues pertaining to environment</td>
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<td>Peace initiatives</td>
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<th><strong>Approach to sustainability</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human side of sustainability/social sustainability higher priority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environment higher priority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interlocking circles preferable</td>
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<td>Concentric circles preferable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three bottom lines ultimately about the same goals/objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interconnectedness/integration &amp; furthering objectives of all dimensions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety &amp; doubt about ‘triple bottom line’ concept</td>
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<tr>
<td>Openness mindset/approach still developing through involvement in WAC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community engagement processes a priority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tensions/varying approaches to sustainability make the concept richer</td>
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<th><strong>Values (with regard to sustainability)</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equity, human rights, social justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biodiversity and ecological integrity &amp; justice (ATSIC: ‘care for country’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovation, learning, accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democracy (ATSIC: ‘community governance’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concern for future generations</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversity within the community</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Relationship with government</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Further relationship with government</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work mostly independently</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>*</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Collaboration process &amp; Expectations</strong></th>
<th>4, 3, 2</th>
<th>2, 3</th>
<th>1, 4b</th>
<th>2, 1, 4b</th>
<th>4, 2</th>
<th>3, 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role: 1) tool for making statements; 2) forum bringing together sectors/diverse grouping; 3) accessible source of information; 4a) bridge between community &amp; govt; 4b) voice for community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talk more/exchange views – robust dialogue important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consideration of similarities, differences &amp; common ground needed</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would appreciate input from Unions WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acknowledge, learn from &amp; address disagreement/conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partnerships within S.C. around particular issues should form incidentally</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>More ‘grassroots’ involvement (e.g. smaller collaborations in local areas)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Translate sust. to everyday level (i.e. real examples for groups or tools)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify a few key areas to work on (i.e. prioritise on CSA)</td>
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</table>
The matrix was designed to pull together the commonalities and differences that emerged from the interviews and reflect them back to the Committee. I pointed out to the participants that the matrix captured only some of the key statements and themes that came through in the interview summaries, and stressed that the workshop provided the opportunity to fill information gaps or amend the matrix to their satisfaction. After discussions in pairs, the facilitator guided the groups through a discussion of the points of the matrix. Something that emerged strongly during the discussion was that many participants empathised with views of other organizations even though they were not commitments of their own organization. As raised in the discussion paper that followed the workshop, this situation arising from the discussion reminded the members that they were working with people sympathetic to their own concerns, and that they brought shared values to their collaborations.

The matrix generated some interesting discussions, especially in the sections “Approach to sustainability” and “Values (with regard to sustainability).” Here the Council of Churches asked for further clarification of the point “Biodiversity and ecological integrity and justice” and after explanation from the Conservation Council was happy to confirm it as one the Churches shared. One dialogue in particular, about the point “More engaged with government recently,” highlights the way in which the matrix elicited discussion. The Council of Churches member drew attention to the blank cell that had been put for the organization at that point. She noted that the wording was problematic for representing their organization on that point because they had tried to be more positively engaged with government in recent times but had been unsuccessful, hence her concern that the blank cell suggested their organization did not want to engage with government. The Coordinator was helpful in putting the discussion in context by noting to the group “the issue of engagement with government is clearly one that’s more detailed or nuanced than is up there.” A later discussion around the section “Relationship with government for the WA Collaboration in the future” similarly provoked discussion. The Coordinator expressed frustration and concern about the difficulties of working cooperatively with government but at the same time retaining a certain degree of independence.

While the matrix provided a simplified representation of the organizational perspectives, it crystallised important commonalities and differences within the group
and sparked debate and clarification. As can be seen in the matrix, the group clearly
shared an understanding of the interconnectedness of all dimensions of sustainability,
but it was clear from the interviews and discussion in the workshop that varied
conceptions and emphases existed within the group. Thus, the discussion of the matrix
made clear that while the group shared fundamentally a holistic approach to policy
issues, they needed much more work before they could develop a unified, concise
expression of sustainability that they could use for their collective advocacy to
government and for raising awareness in the wider community about both sustainability
and the Collaboration. The facilitator noted the need for further discussion about how
the Collaboration could collectively articulate sustainability:

In terms of fridge door stuff, it means that as a group perhaps you still haven’t got a way to
describe sustainability that suits you all. I know you must feel as though you’ve done a lot of
work on it but it would indicate that there’s perhaps a bit more that can be done.

Discussion of the final section of the matrix, “Collaboration process and expectations,”
revealed that the group had differing expectations of what the Collaboration could
achieve but a marked consensus on commitment to “Talk more/exchange views” and
further “Consideration of similarities, differences and common ground.” This was
significant because while the purpose of the Collaboration necessarily evolves, it is
important to revisit expectations with discussion to ensure the initiative is moving
forward collectively. Clarity of role and purpose is also important for how the
Collaboration presents itself to, and is understood by, people in the community.

Ideally there would have been more time for discussion of the summaries and matrix.
More exchanges between groups about certain issues and points of view would have
occurred if there had been a day-long workshop or a couple of workshops over a period
of time. Indeed, while planned for half the workshop, the summaries and matrix
together took up more time than planned and therefore shortened the time allocated for

81 While it is practical to act on common areas of concern, there is much to gain (regarding both process
and outcome) from developing a shared interpretation or joint articulation of approach to sustainability.
This challenge of developing and communicating a holistic approach to sustainability is discussed in
Buselich and Hodgson (2006). In this paper we argue that a key challenge for the Steering Committee is
to be strategic and focussed on where the common ground on sustainability lies, rather than seeing
sustainability as a ‘parking ground’ for every issue of interest to each organization. At the same time it is
an obvious challenge to develop genuinely shared approaches to sustainability issues across the wide
diversity of perspectives represented by the organizations involved in the Collaboration. By the same
token, the participants of the larger forums held by the Collaboration are diverse and bring along various
agendas, and may not necessarily support a particular expression of sustainability. Hartman et al. (1999)
acknowledge the difficulty of developing a shared vision of sustainability among stakeholders and
suggest the use of a ‘working definition,’ perhaps based around collective responsibility (257-8).
the policy discussion of the second part of the workshop. However, the several
exchanges around certain issues that did take place were significant and provided
opportunities for reflection.

**Policy ‘hot potato’ discussion**

The last part of the workshop was focussed around a policy ‘hot potato.’ This exercise
was designed to continue the group’s exploration of their commonalities and differences
in approaches to sustainability in the context of an extended discussion of a policy issue.
The use of a specific policy example was intended to help the participants experience
any varying views, values and priorities that would emerge, and learn more about each
other’s knowledge and approaches.

Even the initial exercise of identifying a subject or issue to discuss provoked some
interesting discussion. The WACOSS participant suggested that choosing a country
town could help focus the group’s discussion and put it in a realistic context. She
explained that a regional or country town would be a good context for discussion
because of the range of issues involved with respect to mining, the environment and the
Indigenous population. However, the ATSIC participant pointed out that while she
thought it would be a good exercise, it might be problematic if some participants did not
know much about a particular country town.

The group settled on “sustainable production and consumption” after several
participants agreed it would be an appropriate topic for discussion. Several participants
also pointed out that it would be interesting because of tensions such as the link between
production and employment, and how more environmentally friendly and durable
alternatives were often inaccessible to low income groups because they tended to cost
more up front, even though they did not in the long term. Making sure a mix of
organizations was in each group, the facilitator divided the participants into four small
groups with each allocated one of the following areas: commonalities, differences,
potentials and tensions. Before the small group discussions began the Churches
participant pointed out that she had found in her experience that such practical
exercises, which she called “desk-topping exercises,” were very helpful and suggested
they could be used regularly in the Steering Committee meetings.
The small group discussions generated a range of points that were captured by each group on butcher’s paper. I participated in the ‘differences’ group and found the discussion between the Council of Churches and WA SIG stimulating. Box 1 provides the points noted by the groups.

**Box 1: Policy ‘hot potato:’ commonalities, differences, potentials and tensions of sustainable production and consumption**

**Commonalities (WACOSS, WA Collaboration Coordinator and new WA SIG representative)**
- Fundamental agreement on need for sustainability (when defined very broadly i.e. global)
- Acknowledge global problem but need to make it meaningful at WA level
- Specific agreements:
  - change is possible in both reducing consumption and increasing sustainability of production, but fundamental change is a challenge
  - current distribution of consumption is inequitable in micro/macro (would mean some groups consuming less and others more)
- Would require agreement on what are basic needs (where do we stop)
- Priority focus on more scarce resources like water (linked to right to clean water)

**Differences (Churches and WA SIG)**
- Industries/businesses need sales (sustainable production with less impact on environment – but should some products be produced at all?)
- Churches: many things produced are not necessary e.g. retail therapy; individual vs. collective i.e. root of the word ‘private’ means “robbery”; robbery of resources; beyond basic needs is robbing those without basic needs
- Can have small business without huge profit – can have enough for a good life
- Cheap production (e.g. $2 shops - consumption of disposable goods, child labour etc) vs. life cycle of products and durability of products
- What do we mean by basic needs?

**Potentials (ATSIC and Conservation Council)**
- Ecological footprint concept – decreasing the number of over-consumers and increasing the resources used by the disempowered (moving to an average sustainable level of consumption)
- Promoting Indigenous businesses, especially eco-tourism
- Developing policies on reducing consumption – not covered in State Sustainability Strategy
- Educating people about sustainably produced products? (question mark because it opens up issues such as products being more expensive and less accessible than cheap products)

**Tensions (Conservation Council and ECCWA)**
- Reducing consumption desirable from environmental perspective but may not be from an economic industry perspective (it undermines current total focus on economic growth as a goal) - similar situation for production
- Many equity implications - which are different depending on the geographic scale we look at i.e. globally (fair share), nationally or locally
- Production and consumption levels and whether they are adequate and/or sustainable (including equity implications) depend on population levels and associated lifestyles
- Consider which aspects of consumption need to be reduced and which promoted e.g. environmental impacts of non-renewable energy use vs. renewable
- Redistribution of wealth will be necessary for reduction of consumption and sustainability but will be unpopular and there will be equity complications e.g. poor in Australia vs. global aid
- Equity of employment opportunities could be affected by changes in consumption and production - different priorities regarding this among Collaboration organizations
As can be seen in some of the points of Box 1, the participants suggested the topic was quite complex in that a more sustainable approach to production and consumption may mean that consumption by those with access to little resources increases, and decreases with those already using high levels of resources; at the same time it may mean greater production of more environmentally friendly and socially conscious (for example, durable) goods, and less production of cheap ‘disposable’ goods, but with possible disadvantages to people on low incomes. In addition, the WACOSS participant emphasized (in the plenary discussion that followed the small group work) the importance of making the above points relevant for everyday consumers and of constantly trying “to translate it in an everyday sense.” She also argued that to make it meaningful to a wider audience the Collaboration would need to “acknowledge that it’s a global issue but put it in to something that would make sense for west Australian people.”

‘Sustainable consumption and production’ was a formidable issue to navigate, and while the workshop only began to work through this issue, consensus about the importance of tackling it was expressed in the plenary discussion. The process of forming priorities for the “hot” policy issue nevertheless helped further explicate the knowledge, background perspectives and values of each organization and put their diversity into practice on the specific issue.

**Reflections**

As closure to the workshop, the facilitator gave the participants the opportunity to make some final comments. Two important themes relating to the collaborative process pervaded the discussion, the first regarding the group’s goodwill and commitment to working through difficult policy issues, and the second the need to explore such issues further through a particular project. Conservation Council participant A believed that the “fair degree of agreement about the methodology or approach that the Collaboration take” was “reassuring, and hopeful,” and that with “careful and respectful work we can find pathways through, to make more sense, and there’s an enormous need for sense to be made of those complicated issues”; the ATSIC participant made a similar comment and pointed out what she perceived to be a commitment from the group to this collaborative process. Conservation Council participant B stressed “the sense of this
being the start of some of these conversations” and suggested making opportunities to “pick up existing threads.” Several other participants referred to this and believed that working on a particular policy campaign or project would continue to bring out the tensions and potential overlaps among the perspectives of the organizations. The comments from participants suggested that they generally valued the place of reflection, but were keen to organize it around some action.

The feedback received through the evaluation forms the participants completed after the workshop confirmed the usefulness and strength of the process for furthering collaboration and indicated their interest in extending such work both within the meetings of the Committee and in the wider network. The only comment for “least useful things about the workshop” was “lack of time to explore issues in depth.” In the comments for “most useful things,” three participants noted the discussion of the summaries, two the matrix, one participant noted “re-energise the group” and another “further developing group identity, regathering/harnessing group energy, looking forward as a group.” In the “other comments” one participant noted that it “was useful as a forum for discussions for the WAC at this point in time.” In her reflections emailed to me after the workshop, the facilitator noted that there appeared to be much goodwill on the part of the participants to assist in the research and to use the process to further the WA Collaboration’s goals and organizational development.

Conclusions
The workshop was fortuitous for the Collaboration in its timing, taking place between a phase characterised by early development, consultation and pooling of resources, and the prioritisation and implementation the group was about to embark on, where differences were likely to arise over specific policy issues. The workshop therefore provided an opportunity for the Collaboration to take stock of where its founding organizations were situated with regard to approaches to sustainability, and to begin looking at how to use this knowledge in future collaborations. Until then the Steering Committee had not had much opportunity to explore particular policy issues in depth, and several of the participants noted in the interviews that conflict is often known to arise during the development of priority actions on policy issues. The workshop gave the group a chance to begin exploring the range of perspectives on issues such as poverty within Australia, and the relationships between population, immigration and
‘carrying capacity’ of Australia, which according to one participant were difficult but important issues that often got “swept under the carpet.”

The reflection and clarification the summaries and matrix stimulated, which suggested that assumptions of each other are made easily but take time to correct, proved to be significant for the group. The workshop demonstrated that the group encompasses an array of concerns, and at the same time involved many instances where organizations realised they had a closer position on things than they had previously thought. The process provided some space for exchange at a deeper and transactional level, and was an opportunity for them to extend their understanding of each other, and in turn, of sustainability. It also allowed them to experience and therefore be more aware of the benefits of such dialogical space for the kind of work in which they were involved. As it was only a three hour session, the workshop was limited in its capacity to elicit the various experiences and perspectives relevant to sustainability within the group and provided only a short space of time for reflection. It made clear to the group that they would benefit from more opportunities to explore common ground and work through particular policy issues.

**Discussion paper and feedback session**

As follow-up to the workshop, I prepared a *discussion paper* in October 2003 to which I invited the Steering Committee members to respond. The paper was aimed at providing reflection to the Steering Committee of the outcomes of the entire interview-circulation-workshop process. Through the paper I reported to the group key issues that had emerged together with my reflections; the paper highlighted my own suggestions as well as those participants had made regarding practical measures for how the Collaboration could continue to explore their commonalities and differences, and strengthen their understanding and collaborative capacity. These suggestions are discussed further later in this chapter.

The discussion paper was structured as follows:

- introduction (including purpose and outline of workshop to remind participants);
- ‘snapshots’ of the organizations that participated (more for benefit of future members of the SC or outside readers—indeed, new members were later given a copy of the paper);
• a summary of the ‘stand-out’ issues that emerged from the workshop;
• discussion of significant points and issues that emerged during the workshop (examples of some cooperative work that had occurred or had the potential to occur between the organizations of the SC were included in this section); and
• suggestions for the WA Collaboration process, including practical ways of incorporating opportunities for dialogue and deeper exchange that had emerged during the intensive process.

(The complete discussion paper is provided in Appendix 6).

The discussion paper was instrumental in reflecting to the participants the outcomes of the intensive process, including the ideas generated about effective processes for collaboration. Many of the points raised in the discussion paper have already been discussed in this chapter, including some of the practical measures suggested by participants for expanding deeper dialogue in the Committee meetings. In this way the intensive process was instructive and useful.

The discussion paper also raised the issue of the varying approaches to the Collaboration’s relationship with government that emerged from the discussion of the matrix, and the need for this to be addressed. Furthermore, it highlighted the need for the Collaboration to articulate its role to government. The final section of the paper outlined the role of the intensive process in building understanding and the collaborative foundation of the WA Collaboration, and recommended that the Collaboration incorporate such work into its everyday activities if it wished to realise its potential to integrate a range of concerns.

In February 2004 the Committee provided feedback on the discussion paper during one of its regular meetings through a discussion session I organized and recorded. As a guide for the discussion I prepared a handout of key points made in the discussion paper and a list of statements to stimulate comment (the handout is attached in Appendix 7). The group generally agreed with most of the statements in the handout and thought the discussion paper itself was an accurate and useful follow up to the workshop. I transcribed the feedback fully so that I could consider the responses further, and prepared a brief summary of the points which I fed back to the Coordinator for her reference. In particular, Conservation Council representative B commented “there’s a
bunch of work coming out of these sort of things and I was just wondering if there were some things identified in the paper that we need to do…to put a timeline on that.” A few participants commented that difficult policy issues required a lot of discussion and that the current organization had limited capacity for this; the Coordinator commented “it’s almost like we need two separate meetings,” one for the “business side” and one for the dialogue or “collaboration aspect of it.”

At this stage of the discussion the conversation turned to how the WA Collaboration could provide space for extended dialogue both within the Committee and the wider community of participants. Conservation Council representative B believed the Collaboration needed to “actually put aside some time” for this and raised the idea of saving the difficult and deeper discussions for sessions over “dinner and drinks,” something that had been alluded to by a few participants in the interviews and workshop. In response, the ATSIC representative suggested the colourful name “Wine, cheese and world peace,” which was initially used by the Collaboration in their advertising for the Conversation Cafés that occurred after the intensive process. In this way the feedback discussion session was instrumental in identifying how the group could provide for special forums in which in-depth discussion of sustainability issues and deeper exchange could occur.

Other discussion in the feedback session included:

- what sustainability meant respectively from a social justice or environmental perspective, and how these meanings overlapped;
- that the group needed to continue working on difficult issues and at the same time pick an issue that they could more easily pursue immediately;
- that an integrated approach to management of urban growth would attract public interest and be a good topic for discussion because it involved both equity and environmental issues, yet had not been tackled sufficiently; and
- that poor examples of urban development often occurred in places where members of the community were not sufficiently consulted or involved, and that the Collaboration might help to address this in some way.

In concluding the session, I asked the participants whether the intensive process had been timely and the group believed it had.
OUTCOMES OF THE INTENSIVE PROCESS AND THE CONTINUING WORK OF THE WA COLLABORATION

At a time when the WA Collaboration had ‘breathing space’ between completing their Community Sustainability Agenda and implementing particular action areas, the intensive process helped the Steering Committee take stock of the diversity they brought to the collaborative initiative and the commonalities and differences that affected their work. It also raised some important process issues for the future development of the initiative. The intensive process generated both qualitative development of the transformative nature of the collaborative initiative and the identification of concrete, practical ways to incorporate discourse at a transactional level. This final section of the chapter discusses these outcomes and then turns to what they might mean for the future development and work of the WA Collaboration.

The relevance and effectiveness of the intensive process can be attributed to the participatory approach I took to the research, and particularly to the involvement of the Coordinator, facilitator and Steering Committee in the design of the process. Furthermore, the group’s openness to my continued observation of their progress, and the Coordinator’s willingness to work collaboratively on papers about the Collaboration, allowed for my involvement in the group’s ongoing work of incorporating opportunities for transactional level exchange. This involvement was central to maintaining the momentum for such work.

Core outcomes

The intensive process had several outcomes, one of the most significant impacts being the development of greater awareness on the part of the Steering Committee of their organizational approaches to sustainability, and commonalities and differences in perspective. Part of this major outcome was the group’s appreciation of the role of deep, reflective dialogue in supporting collaboration, and their awareness of the need to incorporate more opportunities for such dialogue in the WA Collaboration’s activities. Through the intensive process the group was able to experience the value of such work and was given the opportunity to reflect on their fundamental purpose of integrating perspectives on sustainability. They acknowledged the need to find opportunities to include such work in the ongoing activities of their organization. In sum, the intensive
process encouraged a focus on the process of collaboration and the necessity of developing a culture of reflective exchange.

Some of the other outcomes of the intensive process have already been highlighted, including comments from participants that the process had helped re-energise the group and develop group identity, and that it had given them time to look forward as a group. The process also helped the participants consider their respective expectations of the collaborative initiative.

Overall, the intensive process provided impetus for the group to continue the work of creating opportunities for deeper exchange throughout the organization. In the following sections I discuss two initiatives that were practical outcomes of the intensive process, the first at the wider group level and the second specifically for the Steering Committee.

**Conversation Cafés**

As highlighted earlier, ideas that inspired the WA Collaboration’s Conversation Café initiative were raised during the interviews and workshop of the intensive process, and again during the feedback session I held with the Steering Committee in February 2004. The feedback discussion generated ideas and enthusiasm for organising more informal forums that, with the help of good food, wine and company, could make difficult issues more approachable. In this way the Conversation Cafés were intended to make space for deeper level dialogue through a “convivial evening gathering of the WA Collaboration” (WA Collaboration flyer July 2004). The Collaboration’s other regular events such as their workshops and forums tended to be task-based, such as deliberating and responding to government sustainability and planning strategies. In contrast, the Conversation Cafés were exclusively designed to “dig a little deeper’ into the commonalities and differences between social and environmental perspectives on sustainability” (WA Collaboration flyer July 2004).\(^2\)

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\(^2\) Conversation Cafés and variants of the technique have been used around the world to stimulate democratic debate and dialogue about issues of concern to communities. Further information about the technique can be found at [http://www.conversationcafe.org](http://www.conversationcafe.org).
Over 2004 and 2005 the WA Collaboration held five Conversation Cafés. These provided open discussion forums over dinner and drinks (affordably priced and usually organic) in the relaxed setting of a café, usually centrally located and accessible by public transport. The Conversation Cafés have provided opportunities for uninhibited, quite comprehensive and often personal discussion about sustainability issues. The only structure has been a set topic with focus questions, used to stimulate and guide discussion. Conversation Cafés have been held around the following topics:

- “What can we do to encourage more sustainable consumption in Western Australia?” (July 2004);
- “What are your personal criteria for deciding whether something is ‘sustainable or not’?” including “what we might draw out of everyone’s personal priorities to help inform processes for sustainability assessment” (September 2004);
- “Keeping up the interest in progressive issues in a low interest world” (February 2005);
- “Making sustainability urgent to decision-makers” (May 2005);
- “Fair food: getting sustainability on the menu” (August 2005).

The Conversation Cafés have usually been opened with an introduction by the Coordinator about the role of the WA Collaboration in bridging difference and integrating perspectives, the purpose of the forum to encourage this, and the need for participants to be open to considering all views. I participated in all the Cafés held during the research period and observed that the participants came from a range of backgrounds and work areas, and that new participants appeared at every session. In my experience, the diversity of perspectives made for some very lively and engaging discussions, while the setting and the small group format encouraged extended and transactional level exchanges. There seemed to be a common tendency among many people to use stories or at least fragments of narrated experience to express certain knowledge and values. The informal nature of the sessions provided opportunities for participants to network with others working towards sustainability in various fields. From my observations and conversations with participants after the events, the Conversation Cafés helped build understanding of sustainability issues, trust in others and connections. In this way they helped create social capital and capacity in the community for engaging with and progressing sustainability.
While the Conversation Cafés are intended to be open events that help expand the community of people participating in the WA Collaboration, it is unfortunate that they did not have stronger participation from the members of the Steering Committee. It seems a missed opportunity for interaction and exchange of perspectives between the Steering Committee and wider Collaboration. It is also unfortunate that the Collaboration did not provide more Conversation Cafés during the research period, since many more issues could have benefited from extended discussion.

**Introductory news sharing and policy discussion sessions in Steering Committee meetings**

During the intensive process several suggestions were made by participants about ways in which the Steering Committee could improve their collaborative process in terms of exchange of perspectives. Following these suggestions, and in response to the discussion paper of the intensive process, the Coordinator decided to include sessions at the beginnings of Committee meetings during which the members could have opportunities to share particular news, concerns and views about issues related to sustainability. These were intended to ensure discussion occurred before the Committee attended to administrative matters and other business. In this way the intensive process contributed to improving the Collaboration’s meeting procedure.

The news sharing sessions were initiated in November 2003, and in the March 2004 Committee meeting the Coordinator reminded the group that information sharing, together with exchange of perspectives, was meant to be the strength of the WA Collaboration, and that this was what the introductory session on the agenda was designed to foster. The simple exercise of expressing current issues and concerns for the organizations involves sharing knowledge and articulating values. The sessions have provided members with opportunities to convey the issues their organizations have been grappling with, have allowed members to develop understanding of issues from various perspectives, and have helped identify possibilities for joint action. The introductory sessions have also been important for building awareness of the diversity of positive work being undertaken by the groups and the way in which the various work contributes to a common purpose. In this way the sessions have helped to boost morale and resolve.
The introductory sessions later broadened into policy discussion sessions stimulated by topical issues. These provided greater opportunity for the members to inquire into each other’s views and respond, rather than simply express their own organization’s views. Several of the policy discussion sessions involved consideration of ‘living within our means’ and how the WA Collaboration might promote more sustainable patterns of living in the wider community, and especially more sustainable consumption. The discussions related to what it might mean to live within our means at personal and societal levels, and environmentally and economically. They raised issues such as the long working hours occurring in Australia, the high levels of personal and household debt, the way in which the media promotes consumption as a reward for work, the way in which high levels of consumption are depleting our natural resources, and global inequality in levels of consumption. An outcome of the discussions was the development of a discussion paper entitled ‘Living within our means’ as part of an awareness-raising campaign about sustainable consumption.83

A couple of the discussions related to sustainable tourism and Tourism WA’s ‘Holiday at Home’ promotion (marketing of travel to regional areas of WA). The organizations of the Committee generally supported the encouragement of travel within WA, and suggested environmental benefits from reduced distances of air travel such as lower greenhouse emissions, and social benefits such as jobs and revitalisation of towns in regional areas. The Conservation Council considered the implications for tourism in neighbouring developing countries, but suggested that people could be encouraged to donate to international aid agencies and support developing countries in this way rather than make them dependent on tourism. An action noted from the discussion was to write a letter to the relevant Minister outlining the Triple Bottom Line impacts of the tourism industry in WA.

A number of the policy discussion sessions involved deliberation of the future direction and operation of the WA Collaboration, and in this way gave the group the chance to reflect on their process and the organization’s development, and how they would like to see it develop into the future. As examples of other topics, a session in May 2005 focussed on the federal budget that had recently been handed down and its social justice implications, and one in February 2005 related to a canal that had been proposed by the

83 The paper is accessible at www.wacollaboration.org.au.
opposition in WA to divert water from the north (the Kimberley region) to Perth in the south. It was agreed among the Committee that this was not a sustainable solution to the impending water supply crisis, with the group concerned about possible environmental impacts in the Kimberley. Furthermore, Unions WA noted the danger of a public perception that we ‘can leave the tap on,’ and the Council of Churches stressed the need for people to take responsibility for conserving limited water.

A policy discussion that occurred at a Steering Committee meeting in July 2005 around the issues of sourcing of food and food labelling is particularly relevant because of the way in which it revealed the complexity of the issues and the importance of further exploration of the differing perspectives of the member organizations. It illustrates the difficulties faced in approaching certain issues from a sustainability standpoint and the need for transactional level exchange to better understand the various dimensions and tensions inherent in an issue.

At the time of the meeting, the issue of broadening mandatory country of origin food labelling requirements had been topical in local media and had attracted considerable public interest.84 Only the Council of Churches, Unions WA and the Conservation Council were represented at the meeting but there were several tensions evident even between these organizations. Despite a sympathetic view regarding the importance of limiting, where possible, ‘food miles’ (the transportation energy costs of products) and the ecological footprint of certain products, there were differences in priorities between the organizations. For example, while Unions WA took the view that locally produced food products were good for the local economy and local employment, for ecological reasons the Conservation Council advocated both local and global, depending on the product (for example, rice production in Australia has in many cases been unsustainable because of the limited water resources where it has been grown). The Council of Churches, in line with their work in the area of overseas aid and development, raised the issue of poverty in the developing world and stressed the importance of allowing developing countries access to the markets of other countries so that they are less reliant on aid. The discussion among the members also raised the point that because Australia

84 For further information about the issue see the WA Collaboration website. Country of origin food labelling requirements for unpackaged food came into force in June 2006 and changes to the requirements for packaged foods (including having a separate statement identifying country of origin on packaging) is being phased in over 2006 and 2007. For further information about the changes see http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/.
is so vast and because energy consumption differs greatly between various modes of transport, the energy costs of transporting some products within the country may not necessarily be lower than transporting them from neighbouring countries. All the organizations nevertheless supported country of origin food labelling because it allowed consumers to make more informed choices. The development of a draft position statement about food issues was noted, and a Conversation Café was held in August 2005 on the topic of fair food.

Active development of transactional space

The Conversation Cafés and introductory sessions of the Steering Committee meetings have provided important spaces for transactional level exchange and are significant outcomes considering the Collaboration had a busy schedule at the time the intensive process ended: they were already organising numerous events and policy forums, and had limited time and resources. Apart from these initiatives, the WA Collaboration generally became more conscious of incorporating opportunities for deeper exchange into its regular activities after the intensive process. As discussed in Chapter 5, the Collaboration used Open Space Technology for a community forum after the intensive process, a meeting format that allows for freer and more extended small group dialogue, and for participants to set their own agendas for discussion.

The fluidity of participation in the wider network and Steering Committee, as well as the Collaboration’s tight schedule and the tension between action and dialogue, has posed significant challenges for developing the transactional space of the organization. Nevertheless, measures such as the intensive process can help build trust and the capacity to strengthen collaborative working relationships. Because some of the same people are still involved in the Steering Committee, the group has the collective memory, knowledge and ability to continue such work, which is particularly important when new members become involved or when the group faces changes in direction.

In her interviews in 2004, the Coordinator commented on both the potential and the challenges for developing transactional space within the WA Collaboration:

I think that there’s two levels that we have to talk about [regarding transactional space]. There’s the Steering Committee level. It’s foregrounded in how the Steering Committee thinks about things. I think that kind of situation that we create when we have people sitting around the table is a very kind of open “well what do you think about that, where’s your organization coming from?” It’s quite conducive to that. With the broader network of the Collaboration it’s really hard to do because we’re running an open process, we’re constantly getting people who it’s the
first time they’ve come along to something. This stuff takes time; you kind of need to create a bit of a community around it, so I think it’s really hard to do.

…you know that we’ve been trying to get this evening event to do just this, to just have a conversation that’s not outcome driven. It’s just about sharing and values, and I’ve been looking at a particular method called Conversation Cafés…it’s a really simple approach but it’s just about opening a space for conversation and giving people specific directions in how they should converse. It gives them suggested ways of digging a little deeper into conversation.

At the same time the Coordinator’s commitment to facilitating the development of transactional space was reflected in her comments:

I’m just thinking about a way that I can change my practice to be more explicit about it up front in organising those community workshops, say “look, the Collaboration was set up with this aim to try and get greater understanding between different perspectives,” and “I really encourage you during this workshop to listen to other people and really think about the implications of what you’re talking about”.

The WA Collaboration’s review of its structure and operations:

workshops on future directions

The WA Collaboration was in a particularly active phase of its development at the time of the intensive process. However, later in 2004 the Steering Committee became more preoccupied with the future of the organization and was involved in two workshops facilitated by an independent consultant to review the roles, direction and structure of the Collaboration and create greater clarity of vision around its future. I was involved in the planning of these workshops and helped analyse the discussions and prepare reports of them. This continued involvement in the Collaboration’s development provided me with further insight into the organization and allowed me to remind the group of the role of transactional exchange.

At the time of the first workshop on the Collaboration’s future directions I had recently conducted the second formal data collection phase for this thesis of in-depth interviews with two people closely involved in the WA Collaboration and two in government sustainability policy-making (as discussed previously). These included four hours of interview with the Coordinator of the WA Collaboration in order to gain greater knowledge of the WA Collaboration process. The semi-structured interviews were an opportunity for the Coordinator to reflect on the WA Collaboration with a responsive and critical party, and to identify both the achievements and disappointments of its process so far.
While these interviews with the four participants were a separate process, they were able to inform the future directions workshops because they had a strong focus on the purpose and role of the WA Collaboration. I fed some of the key insights and reflections from the interviews on this subject back to the Coordinator in a short summary document (with the other interview respondents’ comments being anonymous). It was necessary for the document to be as concise as possible so that it could be user-friendly feedback for the Coordinator in her preparation for the workshops. The key insights from the interview respondents included:

- the tensions in fulfilling the multiple roles of the Collaboration;
- the tension between being idealistic and being pragmatic, both of which were seen as important by the government respondents;
- the importance of being a voice for the collective values and visions within the community sector;
- the suggestion made by government that the WA Collaboration process needed to involve a greater depth of dialogue to get to the heart of issues and develop common values and vision; and
- the need for more issue-based discussions that can help expose and negotiate diversity of perspectives.

The summary was used by the Coordinator as a reference point during the first future directions workshop, which indicates the research was helpful at another important stage in the WA Collaboration’s development.

A key outcome or recommendation from the future directions workshops was that the Collaboration would benefit from a third level of participation, additional to the Steering Committee and the broader, nebulous community of participants. This third level would be a type of policy reference group or issues forum that would encourage extended discussion of policy issues and the Collaboration’s projects. Besides the Steering Committee, the Collaboration only offers a wide and nebulous network through its community policy forums. The forums have in general had limited opportunities for the in-depth discussion required to develop the integration of perspectives the Collaboration strives for across its participation—integration central to moving sustainability forward. The idea of forming some type of issues forum remains an option for the WA Collaboration in the future. It was suggested that such a group could consist of regularly participating, committed members (individual participants or
participants associated with organizations) who are engaged with sustainability issues in some way. An issues forum would provide a much needed space for extended discussion of policy issues and space for deeper exchange around issues.

The intensive process conducted with the Steering Committee has ongoing significance regardless of changes to the Collaboration’s direction, structure, coordination, membership or participation. It was designed to foster a culture of reflective exchange in the organization, and indeed encouraged the Committee members and Coordinator to be more aware of the place of such engagement in the development of the Collaboration. This is part of the organization’s documented history and can be passed on to future participants.

**Areas in which the WA Collaboration could further expand transactional space**

There are a number of areas that can be identified in which the WA Collaboration would benefit from transactional exchange. While this exchange could be facilitated in a variety of ways, Open Space and storytelling are particularly useful processes. As previously discussed, Open Space has already been used to effect in the Collaboration’s events and is a flexible, simple and inclusive method that can be used for any size of group (around a given theme, people self-organize into more specific conversations). Storytelling (or at least sharing of fragments of narrated experience) and reflection on experience are also important communicative activities for the areas discussed below because they help stimulate dialogue and active inquiry.

**Expansion of perspectives over time through collaboration**

As discussed earlier, the Steering Committee participants have already experienced expansion and shifts in perspectives from the collaborative process. The Committee would benefit from ongoing discussion of how their organizational perspectives have been informed or developed from being involved in the Collaboration, as this would enable the group to gauge the level of integration of perspectives and whether certain views overlap or remain distant. Hearing about the effects of collaboration can boost resolve in the collaborative initiative and awareness of its possibilities and limitations. The process is also important for bringing new members up to date with the varying approaches and common ground.
Reflection on perspectives and how they have been expanded through involvement in the Collaboration’s events would be similarly beneficial for the wider group of participants. The process would help build understanding, trust and enthusiasm for being involved, and could be incorporated periodically into workshops or Open Space gatherings.

**Discussion of difficult or deep-seated policy issues**

As the food policy discussion illustrated, there are a number of issues that are particularly complex when approached from the standpoint of progressing sustainability. Contentious policy issues needing deeper level discussion include urban development and transport, management (including supply and pricing) of basic utilities, consumption, population and immigration. When participants have opportunities to express what they see as important for a particular issue, and to listen to the beliefs and reasoning of others, they are more likely to understand alternative perspectives and broaden their own. Using techniques such as Open Space, participants in the wider group meetings could be invited to convene conversations about issues they are grappling with or find untenable. More time for policy discussion is also needed at the level of the organizations driving the Collaboration.

**Sharing of success stories or intense learning experiences**

This is important for the Steering Committee and wider group meetings to assist with recognition of positive work being done and how it was achieved, and with identification of possibilities for collaborative work. The people attending the wider group events tend to work in a range of sectors and fields and would benefit from hearing how others are contributing to progressing sustainability in various ways. This sharing of experiences is something that occurs to a degree indirectly in the events but could be expanded through events focussed on it.

**Sharing of experiences and views about the collaboration process and of expectations about the organization**

Because the purpose and roles of collaborations evolve over time, it is important to revisit on an ongoing basis where the group is heading. Discussion about this is crucial within both the WA Collaboration’s Steering Committee and wider group meetings.
Many people involved in the wider events are regular participants who care about the development of the Collaboration. These participants can provide additional insights to the Coordinator and Committee on where they think the organization has been progressing or not, where it could add value in the future, and potential projects, partnership opportunities and processes for improving collaboration. During the intensive process the majority of the Committee members noted that they thought the Collaboration should work on its relationship with government; therefore the ways in which this could occur also need to be discussed in an ongoing fashion.

CONCLUSION

Involvement in the WA Collaboration’s development process through a participatory research approach allowed me to bring together theory and practice, and develop a process with the participants that could assist them in finding opportunities to incorporate transactional space into the organization. The work helped the organization come closer to realising its potential as a forum for the transformative discussion needed to support joint action towards sustainability. A major part of this influence occurred through the intensive process discussed in this chapter. Equally significant, however, was my ongoing engagement with the organization over several years.

This chapter has illustrated the ways in which the Collaboration benefited from the intensive process and how the process was instrumental in generating impetus for work at a transactional level. It has discussed the simple but significant ways in which the Collaboration took this work on board despite its busy schedule. It has demonstrated that despite immediate concerns and time and resource constraints, the Collaboration endeavoured to create space for deeper exchange in existing commitments as well as through specialised sessions such as Conversation Cafés. The intensive process was but one effort to develop a more robust foundation for collaboration around sustainability, and the challenge remains in ensuring space for the dialogue necessary to generate shared outcomes and guide and support action.

The intensive process for developing transactional space can adapted elsewhere by those wanting to further sustainability through participatory and collaborative approaches. It can inform various multi-stakeholder situations and is of particular significance for those initiatives set in the challenging context of progressing
sustainability. The final chapter of the thesis distils what was learnt from the research into principles and practical considerations for developing transactional space, and discusses particular circumstances in which transactional space would be beneficial.
Chapter 7
Developing transactional space in deliberative and collaborative situations: lessons learnt and conclusions

This thesis has been concerned with the challenges presented by the sustainability agenda and in particular with the challenge of developing participatory processes that can be effective in the face of a diversity of participants. As a broad-ranging and integrative approach to governance that seeks to bring together social, economic and environmental objectives, sustainability necessitates the involvement of differing forms of knowledge that can be drawn from stakeholders in government, industry, civil society and community. Added to this challenge is the tendency for sustainability and the issues surrounding it to be context-specific and contested. Fundamental divisions within society and differences in perspectives often occur with respect to complex issues such as global warming and climate change, nuclear power, population, water management, genetically modified crops, mining and urban planning. As discussed in Chapter 1, this makes discussions about sustainability fraught but at the same time provides a stimulus for critical discourse in which richer understanding of issues and more shared approaches might be developed.

I have therefore argued in this thesis that not only are networked, participatory and collaborative modes of governance essential to the collective formation of strategies for sustainability, but also deliberative democratic processes that allow for extended discussion, dialogue and learning. Chapter 2 explored these relationships arguing that a decline in the legitimacy of governments, and a recognition of the complexity of policy issues and the overlaps between them, have contributed to a shift towards a more participatory and networked governance involving a range of actors and partnership initiatives. At the same time, deliberative democratic processes have gained currency for their capacity to generate more informed and comprehensive views among participants.
I discussed this overall context as being conducive to progressing sustainability because of its ability to generate more far reaching understanding among participants and more relevant and mutually beneficial outcomes. However, I also raised difficulties such as power imbalances, differing values and perspectives brought to exchanges, and the need for consideration of absent or differently situated ‘others,’ human and non-human (as Eckersley argues). Together with this, I considered the specific challenges for collaborative initiatives, including negotiation of purpose and differing cultures and priorities, and the tendency for participants to underestimate the time required to work collaboratively and develop in terms of integration. The chapter therefore highlighted the importance of fostering a depth of dialogue and learning in deliberative and collaborative processes and argued that if sustainability is to be progressed, processes must foster engagement with fundamental differences in background and perspective.

Following this exploration of the problem, Chapters 3 and 4 turned to how such deeper exchange might be developed in participatory, deliberative and collaborative processes. I argued that these processes could be enriched by greater opportunities for critical and reflective dialogue involving explication of background experiences, knowledge and perspectives. While this dialogue is one of many aspects affecting the success of deliberative and collaborative processes, it is nevertheless a vital one because it is central to developing understanding between participants. Dialogical processes that involve participants sharing knowledge and experience can help to reveal values and priorities and create shifts in thinking. In Chapter 3 I therefore discussed a range of literature related to developing critical, reflective dialogue and drew together the key elements into a discussion of the concept of transactional space, which has been used in the thesis to focus on the necessity for a depth of exchange in processes surrounding sustainability.

The literature informing the development of the concept included: Mansbridge’s and Gutmann and Thompson’s consideration of self-interest and the need for an understanding of reciprocity to combat it; Young’s arguments for multiple communication modes as a way of dealing with power imbalances and creating inclusive deliberation; Cranton’s discussion of transformative learning theory as a way to encourage critical reflection in learning environments; Sterling’s discussion of learning for sustainability as requiring reflection on assumptions, deep shifts in thinking.
and a commitment to collaborative inquiry; Schön and Rein’s argument for frame-reflective policy inquiry in which the underlying structures of belief and perception affecting understanding of issues are uncovered and rethought; Forester’s exploration of participatory conversational or storytelling rituals as vehicles for social learning and transformation in understanding; and McCoy and Scully’s argument for the union of two strains of public talk—dialogue and deliberation.

After reflecting on the key insights and overlaps between these literatures, Chapter 4 explored a selection of participatory and deliberative processes in order to illustrate how critical, reflective and potentially transformative exchange might be fostered in practice. The discussion revealed that there are processes in a range of contexts providing innovative ways to encourage reflection and dialogue in discussions of complex policy issues and plans. It also highlighted, however, the difficulties of fostering a deep level of exchange in practice, and the need for further development of participatory and collaborative processes in this regard. Issues emerging, particularly from Hunt et al.’s examination of deliberative and dialogical processes, included the energy and discipline required on the part of participants to remain open to divergent perspectives and ways of communicating, the sheer amount of time required for this, and the dangers of short-circuiting the preliminary stages of dialogue vital to developing trust. Another consideration emerging was the potential of processes integrating stakeholder and citizen participation to bring together differing concerns and perspectives, and thereby provide resources for the development of transformative dialogue.

The discussion in the second part of the thesis then shifted to a case study of the WA Collaboration in order to examine the realities of developing transactional space in practice. In Chapter 5 I discussed the WA Collaboration’s various activities to illustrate both the considerable potential for transactional space and the need to develop this by better accommodating opportunities for in-depth discussion and reflective dialogue. Barriers and challenges included limited resources and time available to participants, and a tendency to be outcome-driven and focussed on addressing immediate issues.

Against this backdrop, Chapter 6 detailed the intensive process undertaken with the WA Collaboration’s Steering Committee to foster transactional space. By providing an
opportunity for exploration of the differing organizational backgrounds and perspectives, this process aimed to help:

- develop a conscious appreciation of the value of critical and reflective dialogue;
- foster a culture of reflective exchange in the organization; and
- identify simple ways to provide ongoing opportunities for reflective exchange.

This intensive process was a major component of the formal research with the WA Collaboration, but equally as important was the ongoing observation and participation, and my working relationship and collaborative writing of papers with the Coordinator. Also important for the overall research were the in-depth interviews I conducted in 2004 with two key policy makers in State Government, the Coordinator and a person heavily involved in the WA Collaboration in its early phase of development. The research with the WA Collaboration was a form of engaged research that was very much informed by participatory action research approaches in which researchers typically engage in a continuous and meaningful way with research participants and practitioners to effect positive change.

This collaborative approach enabled me to develop a process with the Steering Committee and Coordinator that was relevant to the group and useful in helping them incorporate transactional space into their everyday operations. Apart from the direct outcomes of the Conversation Cafés and modified Steering Committee meeting procedure (the addition of exclusive time for news sharing and policy discussion), the intensive process helped the Committee take stock of the diversity they brought to the collaborative initiative and the commonalities and differences that affected their work. It also helped them consider their respective expectations of the collaborative initiative and raised some important process issues for the future development of the initiative. In sum, the intensive process generated both qualitative development of the transformative nature of the collaborative initiative and the identification of concrete, practical ways to incorporate discourse at a transactional level.

Overall, the process embedded an awareness of the need for deeper exchange and provided impetus for the group to continue the work of creating opportunities for exploratory and reflective dialogue. This impact is evident in the WA Collaboration’s strategic plan developed over 2003 and 2004, which has, under the focus area ‘To
strengthen the WA Collaboration,’ the following aim: “Provide greater opportunities for examining the connections and differences between social, environmental, cultural and economic sustainability during WA Collaboration events.”

For a number of reasons, the WA Collaboration in general provided a useful context in which to analyse the development of transactional space in processes surrounding sustainability:

- it was an initiative explicitly focussed on progressing sustainability through collaborative work;
- it brought together a range of organizational and individual backgrounds and perspectives, and as such possessed considerable potential to provide space for expansion of understanding of issues related to sustainability;
- it involved relatively open-minded people, and good group dynamics, and was in these ways conducive to developing transactional level exchange and strong working relationships.

The following must also be acknowledged, however. The cooperative culture, and the many similarities between the perspectives and priorities of individuals and organizations, meant it was difficult to ascertain how easy it would be for organizations with different cultures and circumstances to foster transactional level exchange. Furthermore, the WA Collaboration had a limited amount of deliberative activity. Steering Committee meetings, and events involving wider participation, were limited in frequency due to resource and time constraints, and often focussed on addressing topical or immediate issues related to particular policy development processes. This meant limited opportunities to explore in detail and at a transactional level persistent, challenging issues, such as:

- pricing of goods and services to reflect environmental concerns and the possible tensions between such initiatives and social justice objectives;
- sourcing of food and food policies in relation to economic, social and environmental objectives;
- consumption and concepts of Australian carrying capacity, global carrying capacity, ecological footprint, and fair earth share as they relate to social justice, ethical and environmental concerns; and

85 For the full strategic plan see http://www.wacollaboration.org.au/.
• urban growth management, the environmental and equity impacts of the resources boom in Western Australia (a contemporaneous steep increase in housing prices), and possible tensions in this between the perspectives of the WA Collaboration organizations, including Unions WA, WACOSS and the Conservation Council.

Many of these issues were raised at some point in this thesis but for reasons outlined above received limited attention during the activities of WA Collaboration. The Collaboration participants would have benefited from more exchanges around such complex issues, and more opportunities to work through commonalities and differences of perspectives surrounding them. Such exchanges would have no doubt revealed some deep-seated conflicts and even impasses, but would have also helped to identify paths forward and possibilities for collaborative work. There is the danger that without adequate and deep enough dialogue, groups like the WA Collaboration may act on apparent or superficial common ground rather than on genuine synergies, and that they may fail to examine closely enough the tensions and barriers that often emerge at the stage of making specific recommendations for action.

In 2005 the Steering Committee became increasingly concerned with securing funding and ensuring a future for the organization. Such a shift in focus, together with the already limited space for dialogue and deliberation, made it difficult to evaluate the degree to which developing reflective exchange was likely to be embraced by such organizations in an ongoing fashion. Nevertheless, the research with the WA Collaboration over 2002 to 2006 demonstrated that such collaborative initiatives can be receptive to the notion of developing a culture of reflective exchange despite existing pressures and commitments.

It would have been interesting to have studied the development of the WA Collaboration after the end of the research period in August 2006, since this was a ‘crossroads’ stage for the organization. The Collaboration had little funding left and the Coordinator, who had worked with the organization since its beginning, ceased employment with the organization at this time. At the same time, the members of the Steering Committee were committed to ensuring the existence of the WA Collaboration and continuing the work. In October 2006 they were successful in procuring funding
from the State Government adequate for the employment of a part-time staff member to coordinate the work of the initiative for approximately one year. This new coordinator will have the benefit of the many documents prepared about the WA Collaboration and the research conducted with the group. I continue to maintain an active interest in the development of the organization.

Raised at the outset of this thesis were certain aspects of the research methodology, including the issue of generalisability in terms of case study research and action research (both focus on the particular and generate primarily local knowledge). Case study and action research have in common a tension between generalisability and particularity, as well as a use of triangulation to combat this. Exploration of various information sources and perceptions in this thesis has supplemented the case study and provided a means to identify ways in which the research provides local knowledge and has wider significance. Collaborative initiatives have particular circumstances, but the research can inform many participatory situations in which diverse groups of people are grappling with complex issues and working towards integrative and shared solutions.

**Lessons learnt**

While the research with the WA Collaboration demonstrated how transactional space can be actively developed, it also shed light on the limitations faced by collaborative initiatives and the difficulties of creating space for reflective exchange in participatory and deliberative situations in general. Together with my analysis of participatory theory and practice in the first part of this thesis, the research has led to a number of conclusions about developing transactional space in practice.

**Reflective, transactional level exchange needs to be actively fostered**

Dialogue and deliberation are fundamental to the successful operation of initiatives like the WA Collaboration, but opportunities are often limited because of full schedules. Reflective dialogue in particular is often neglected. Despite the central role of dialogue in building working relationships and in informing and supporting action, generating concrete outcomes often takes priority and tends to relegate reflective dialogue to the backburner or to chance occurrences. Deliberative processes in general, whether in the non-government setting or in initiatives hosted by government, are often oriented towards task-based discussion and developing recommendations in the limited time
available. While tightly structured processes are clearly important for ensuring outcomes, they often mean inadequate opportunities for dialogue, reflection and learning.

Such processes can greatly benefit from more time allocated for extended inquiry in which participants can build greater understanding of issues and the differing perspectives surrounding them. Questioning and exploration of thinking behind views is necessary to get to the heart of the issues in question and to develop more collective approaches. The intensive process with the WA Collaboration demonstrated how dialogue and inquiry can surface differences and commonalities related to issues such as population and sustainable consumption. Organizations interested in progressing sustainability, particularly collaborative organizations involving diverse participants, must therefore place importance on reflective dialogue if they are to realise their potential as spaces for learning and transformation. Reflective, transactional level exchange can be beneficial whether it be simply incorporated into existing activities, as in the case of the WA Collaboration’s Steering Committee meetings, or expanded through sessions specifically targeted at in-depth discussion and dialogue, as in the case of the WA Collaboration’s Conversation Cafés. Organising specific sessions may sometimes be necessary to make sufficient space for such a level of exchange.

**Developing opportunities for reflective, transactional level exchange can be challenging and constrained by a number of pressures, all of which contribute to a tendency to privilege action over dialogue, and outcomes over process**

*Limited resources, funding instability and project rather than process orientation*

Grants systems for non profit and community-based organizations tend to be geared towards short-term, project-based funding, and result in a lack of core funding to support organizational learning and ongoing development. Therefore, by necessity, the people involved tend to be outcomes- rather than process-oriented, and focussed on achieving their aims as quickly and efficiently as possible. Although some voluntary sector partnership initiatives come to the end of their useful life or are replaced by other initiatives, with secure funding, many have the potential to develop into genuinely collaborative spaces and into more effective operations as they build on and expand their work. Indeed, in the case of the WA Collaboration there are many more areas in
which it could make important contributions, such as helping develop similar partnerships or networks in different regions of WA, and facilitating community driven sustainability indicators projects and greater community awareness of sustainability in general.

Multiple roles, tensions in priorities and differing expectations about the initiative
Peak community sector organizations and partnership initiatives alike tend to have multiples roles (such as policy advocacy, being a ‘think tank,’ providing support for members, community education and capacity building) and as a result juggle various projects. A suite of existing activities and established modes of operation can restrict the likelihood of organizations making the time to modify their practices or organize additional opportunities for discussion and reflective dialogue. Furthermore, members and participants often have differing views about where the initiative or organization should be putting its efforts and what the possibilities are. Added to these constraints is the inordinate amount of time that can be spent on identifying potential funding sources and securing resources as initiatives approach the end of their funded life, together with the considerable time it can take to agree on the best ways to spend limited resources. All of this contributes to a tension between addressing pressing issues and making time for the deliberation and reflective dialogue that can develop more informed approaches and strategies.

Limited opportunities and capacity for participation, and discontinuity in involvement
Those who drive or participate in the activities of non-profit organizations are typically time poor and therefore have limited ability to be involved. At the same time, such organizations continuously attract new participants. Hence, while it can create diversity and enrich initiatives with vitality and a wider pool of knowledge, fluidity in membership or participation can make developing collaborative relationships and a shared store of knowledge difficult. Infrequent meetings, their voluntary nature and the often small amount of time participants have available to participate, magnify the negative effects of such circumstances and limit opportunities for in-depth discussion, deliberation and reflective dialogue.
The extent to which transactional level exchange can be fostered depends on the context and people involved, that is, the level of conflict among participants and group dynamics

While transactional space involves supporting deliberations with the reflective dialogue needed to generate mutual understanding around policy issues, and in this way can help address conflict and disagreement, it is not a concept I use to focus on conflict mediation and resolution, which are well-established fields of work. Expanding transactional space can help alleviate problems and misunderstandings, but the emphasis is on strengthening the foundation for practice by fostering mutual understanding and in turn good working relationships. Collaborative or deliberative situations in which participants approach their discussions with a degree of goodwill and openness are more conducive to developing transactional level exchange. The context of the WA Collaboration Steering Committee was relatively conducive to engagement at a transactional level because it was a cooperative group of people who, while passionate about their particular areas of concern, seemed to be attuned to that way of working and committed to exploring the possibilities presented by their partnership. At the same time, the group demonstrated that divergence and conflict can occur even among relatively likeminded people with overlapping worldviews regarding social change. The Collaboration’s other activities (its regional workshops, summit, forums, Conversation Cafés and other events) clearly involved a considerable diversity of people but a fair degree of openness and goodwill nonetheless.

Transactional space can help harvest the diversity inherent in collaborative and deliberative situations through frequent opportunities for reflective dialogue

Regular opportunities for discussion and dialogue are vital for negotiating and utilising the diversity of knowledge and perspectives present, and ultimately for developing more robust approaches to issues. When participation is fluid (such as in open forums), a depth of exchange can reveal a rich store of knowledge to draw upon. When participation is relatively continuous (as in steering committees), frequent opportunities for reflective dialogue are crucial for developing understanding for joint work. The change of format of the WA Collaboration Steering Committee meetings to include up-
front time for policy discussion allowed time for important discussion around issues such as sourcing of food locally versus globally, living within our means/sustainable consumption, and water supply in Western Australia. As noted earlier in the thesis, Rochester and Woods (2005) recommend setting time aside for discussion where dialogue and strong engagement with particular issues can occur. Because collaborative initiatives tend to get caught up with working towards outcomes rather than towards strengthening the process of collaboration, Rochester and Woods argue that such sessions are vital for the development of an initiative.

From the research with the WA Collaboration and analysis of available evidence about participatory processes, collaboration and organizational development, I have concluded that, despite constraints, it is possible to make space in practice for transactional level exchange, and to engender an appreciation of reflective dialogue as a necessary and valuable process. In the case of the WA Collaboration, the work helped develop mutual understanding and a collaborative foundation, and led to practical initiatives that enriched the work of the organization. The experience has relevance for other participatory and collaborative circumstances in which diverse participants are involved, and for this reason I have distilled a number of principles and suggestions for developing transactional space that can inform similar processes.

**Principles and practical considerations for developing transactional space**

...you will find examples everywhere you look of committees and advisory groups that bring a variety of perspectives together. There is nothing new about that at all. It’s about whether it’s a kind of forced trading situation and people are just trying to just win something over the other, or it’s whether that group is being facilitated or led to create something new...what I think I understand about transactional space is it’s somehow trying to create something new.  
(Coordinator of the WA Collaboration)

As the intervention with the WA Collaboration revealed, small changes to established modes of operation can create opportunities for reflective dialogue and building understanding of differing perspectives. Out of this experience and my wider examination of creating reflective exchange in theory and practice, a number of principles and practical considerations can be identified. The principles provide scaffolding for transactional space that can be developed through practice according to differing contexts, needs and cultures, and the particular experience, skills and preferred techniques of facilitators. Processes and methods used by practitioners tend to be
affected by the dynamics of the situation and by considerations such as resources and timelines.

The principles and practical considerations discussed in the following sections represent aspects that were consistently raised in the literature. In particular, they draw on the various arguments of authors discussed in Chapter 3 about the conditions for effective communication and deliberation, such as reciprocity, inclusiveness, critical reflection and transformative learning. Also informing them are the interviews conducted in 2004 in which participants reflected on the concept of transactional space and provided insights into its application. Furthermore, while the WA Collaboration context provided only glimpses of the potential of transactional level exchange, it also demonstrated that many of the aspects discussed below can be actively fostered.

Central to developing transactional level exchange are the conditions of goodwill, commitment and responsibility; openness and reciprocity; and flexibility and collaborative learning (as Figure 2 illustrates). These are inseparable from, but can create a foundation for, other qualities such as mutual respect, trust and understanding. Qualities such as these can foster an appreciation of richness and diversity, and can together create an environment for the development of expansive thinking and transformative common ground. Through three, nested levels (starting with the core circle and moving outwards), the following diagram (Figure 2) represents these principles as interdependent, and indicates the need for an integrated approach. At the same time, sectors are used within the diagram to suggest there are clusters of particularly related qualities besides those that are grouped in levels. Arrows continue past the biggest circle to suggest the process is ongoing. This structuring is intended to make the principles more accessible. A discussion of the principles and their relationships follows Figure 2.
Core principles (1st level)

Goodwill, commitment and responsibility
Fostering transactional space relies on the value participants place on developing understanding with those they are working with, and on a recognition that this takes time and effort. The WA Collaboration was particularly conducive to this because it was formed explicitly to provide a space for dialogue and collective learning around sustainability, yet, as the research revealed, this intention required conscious attention to be developed. Transactional space requires commitment to creating a safe, dialogical and deliberative space, and enthusiasm to learn and act together. In sum, it starts with a positive approach and some sense of solidarity—that ‘we are in this together.’ Participants therefore have a sense that they are one of many wanting to express their views, and acknowledge shared responsibility for maintaining an environment in which all can contribute to outcomes.
Openness and reciprocity
As discussed in Chapter 3, difference of interest and self-interest can present barriers to developing collectively-supported outcomes, but can be addressed when they are explored and negotiated and when participants maintain an overall awareness of the need for reciprocity and mutuality. A sense of openness to what occurs in the discussion space can encourage participants to express their thoughts freely and with honesty. Participants recognize that actively listening and considering all views are necessary for the process to work fairly for all involved and to reflect their individual and collective aspirations. As people often seek to be understood by sharing their experiences, openness to various forms of expression is required. A mindset of openness on the part of all participants can ensure processes involve appreciation of diverse backgrounds, knowledge and perspectives rather than simply tolerance. At the same time participants must keep in mind their role in the productiveness of the process by helping to ensure that there is time for everyone to contribute and that some people do not dominate. Such a commitment to open dialogue and active listening was an explicit guideline for the WA Collaboration’s Conversation Cafés.

Flexibility and collaborative learning
Implicit in these principles is an ethos of flexibility and collective learning in which participants are committed to reflecting on their interactions with others, and are open to learning from and with others. They recognize that there will always be limitations to their own knowledge, experience and perspectives (whether they be an individual, a representative of an organization, a ‘specialist’ or an ‘official’), and approach the space with a willingness to draw upon the diverse knowledge and resources present. Participants gain an appreciation of the particularity of each person’s knowledge and of the ways in which this knowledge might be able to contribute to their collective efforts. In the case of ongoing participatory spaces and partnership or collaborative initiatives, they are committed to ongoing review and development of their processes according to collective needs.
**Inner circle principles (2nd level)**

**Mutual respect**
The above qualities support this next level of principles. Mutual respect develops when participants demonstrate a degree of goodwill and commitment to the success of their discussions. It develops when participants have some sense of shared purpose, whether that purpose is to contribute to the development of a policy strategy in the case of a government-hosted community engagement process, or the purpose is to contribute to action towards sustainability as in the case of a community-driven initiative formed around sustainability. Mutual respect also builds when participants acknowledge that reciprocity is crucial for all to contribute to this collective purpose. Furthermore, by being open to what occurs in the discussion space and by remembering that considering all views is necessary for the process to work fairly for all, participants are more likely to gain some appreciation of the concerns of others and respect why they have certain views. Development of mutual respect was evident in the WA Collaboration’s Steering Committee as member organizations gradually gained an appreciation of each other’s areas of work and passions for change.

**Trust**
The development of trust is fostered by the above qualities. Participants acknowledge that creating an environment in which they approach their discussions with goodwill, responsibility, openness and willingness to learn is important for each of them to feel safe to express themselves and expose themselves to potential criticism. Likewise this environment is necessary for people to question constructively other views without damaging relations. Such an environment needs encouragement (from both facilitators and fellow participants) and individual courage: when people start to openly express their underlying beliefs and concerns, in turn, others are more likely to begin to explicate their perspectives and underlying interests. In this way people can develop a degree of trust in the process and in each other. In the case of ongoing participatory or collaborative initiatives, trust is likely to increase as working relationships develop. Indeed, in the evaluation of the intensive process, WA Collaboration Steering Committee participants indicated that they were beginning to form a sense of ‘group identity,’ suggesting an appreciation of and trust in one another’s involvement.
Understanding

Understanding, trust and mutual respect are mutually supportive qualities. When participants begin to respect one another and their role in the process, they are more likely to be open to developing understanding of differing views. Likewise, developing understanding often increases respect, which may not necessarily mean appreciation and agreement but is at least acknowledgment. Trusting one another to act fairly can encourage participants to be open to expressing themselves and to reflecting on the value and limitations of their own views as well as those of others, and in this way can increase mutual understanding. Likewise, trust is often fostered when greater understanding is developed.

*Outer circle principles (3rd level)*

**Diversity and richness**
Fostering transactional space relies on the recognition by participants that there will always be a degree of diversity ‘in the room’ or ‘at the table,’ and differing knowledge, experiences and perspectives. While these differences can create tensions and conflict, as Young in particular reminds us, they should also be recognized as providing opportunities for learning and resources for creating more informed deliberation. That is, they should be approached as bringing richness to the discussions. Participants are therefore aware that considering the particular views and perspectives present creates new and more comprehensive understanding, and in turn potential for discovery of synergies and common ground.

**Expansive thinking and critical, reflective dialogue**
These connect strongly with a mindset of openness and learning, which can encourage participants to think expansively and be reflective during discussions. A depth of perception and richness of knowledge can be generated by the deliberative exercise when participants are open to engaging in both a reflective and critical way, and help create a safe environment in which to do so. Participants recognize the value for creating more robust outcomes of enlarging their understanding and developing more comprehensive knowledge and perspectives on issues. They are reminded that their views are necessarily partial and particular because each person has differing outlooks and backgrounds, but that at the same time they can discover commonalities. As Young
and Eckersley in particular argue, participants can gain shared access to a fuller, more comprehensive perspective through dialogue that is inclusive and reflective of their own views and those of others.

**Transformative common ground**

Participants maintain the awareness that their ultimate purpose is to find common ground in approaches to issues and agreement on paths forward. In the case of ongoing initiatives, participants maintain the fundamental importance of seeking and developing common ground for their collaboration to make a difference. Rather than being the lowest common denominator of outcomes, this common ground represents a rich and robust commonality arrived at through expansive thinking and critical, reflective dialogue. That is, common ground can be transformative in nature when participants work together towards discovering the best possible solutions to problems and ways of acting through deep discussion and dialogue. Transformative, shared approaches go beyond the status quo and beyond seeking the most comfortable, easy or speedy of outcomes. Transformative common ground is generated through participatory experiences that facilitate individual and collective learning, and means participants metaphorically arrive at a ‘different place’ from where they started before the reflective, dialogical process.

**Process considerations and suggested strategies**

Supplementing the principles explored in the preceding discussion are a number of practical considerations relevant to the development of transactional space that have been drawn from the WA Collaboration experience and the wider research. While facilitation techniques can often be particular to circumstances, the following discussion includes a number of specific practices that can encourage a transactional level of exchange in many participatory and collaborative situations.

**Facilitated, semi-structured sessions and fair process**

Facilitation is vital for creating discussions that are inclusive of the range of perspectives present and that allow opportunities for all participants to contribute. Structuring and careful guidance of processes can ensure they are productive regarding the aims of the session and in terms of generating a depth of exchange for those aims. Practitioners (such as coordinators of initiatives) can be supported in this by the
engagement, where applicable, of independent facilitators, consultants or researchers. This collaborative work can enrich the process and give practitioners opportunities to reflect on practice. The intervention of outsiders is often more effective if they have some understanding of the context and people involved, or at least are willing to become better informed by working closely with coordinators. Based on their experience with facilitation of multi-stakeholder processes, Lambert et al. (2005) argue that “while neutrality is desirable, it is important that the facilitator can interpret the different values and positions presented and their implications for an outcome, in order to progress any impasse that might arise” (8). Regarding discussions about environment and natural resource management issues, they argue that “the facilitator will often fulfil a role as ‘cultural translator’ – interpreting the different languages used and the value sets that underpin them” (8).

Structured or guided opportunities for transactional level exchange can be incorporated into regular activities or provided through exclusive sessions. While this can greatly enable reflective and transformative dialogue, there are some important considerations. From their experience with dialogical, participatory processes (discussed in Chapter 3), Hunt et al. (2003) identify some persistent tensions:

- an informal, relaxed approach and less structured design can create an environment for genuine dialogue and deeper level engagement, but the lack of formality can sometimes suggest a lack of clear purpose and make participants feel less confident with the process;
- strong facilitation can help moderate dominant participants (such as stakeholders with established arguments occupying the dialogical space), ensure more equal participation and bring efficiency, but can also inhibit the group’s ability to take shared responsibility for the process of developing understanding and learning.

Although overall facilitation or monitoring is crucial to maintaining a space for open exchange, small groups with peer facilitation (where a participant volunteers to take on the role of facilitator) can be effective in allowing the group to take collective responsibility for their process if dominance, on the part of both peer facilitators and fellow participants, is kept in check by the whole group.
Establishing ground rules or terms of engagement

The development of some form of shared guidelines for discussion can not only ensure discussion stays productive, but also maintain a fair and inclusive process and create an environment conducive to genuine exchange. Hunt et al. (2003) argue that explicit discussion guidelines provided to all participants can be beneficial in encouraging them to “give way to others who have spoken less,” “draw others in,” “demonstrate interest in each other’s contributions,” and in general “make conversational space for each other” (26). While in practice ground rules are often overlooked, awareness of such terms of engagement can be increased if they are developed in a participatory way or if groups are at least given the opportunity to consider and clarify them. Guidelines may explicate principles such as those presented earlier and may also contain direct statements such as ‘speak openly and honestly,’ ‘listen carefully to what others have to say,’ ‘keep comments brief and to the point of the question,’ and ‘stay on task.’

Ground rules can highlight the importance of providing reasons and explanation for statements, as well as the role of active listening and reflection.

Small group discussion

While plenary discussions have their place, small group discussion can be particularly conducive to reflective and transactional level exchange. Small group discussions involving up to approximately eight participants foster inclusiveness, trust and the development of closer understanding, as fewer people means participants are more likely to have a chance to speak and time to reflect and get to know others. On the whole they tend to be less inhibiting than speaking out in a large group. As discussed in Chapter 4, study circles provide a significant model for localised small group discussions that can connect with a larger group of deliberators and a community initiative. As McCoy and Scully found with the study circles, Hunt et al. (2003) conclude that small group sessions (in groups up to approximately ten participants) tend to be more conducive to deliberation than plenary discussions and to generate “the most inclusive and far reaching discussion” (36).

87 These were some of the discussion ground rules of the Perth Coastal Planning Strategy Overarching Workshop held in 2005 at which I was a facilitator.
Informalities, warm-up activities and developing trust

...what you're describing is more like developing a relationship than just trying to communicate in a more constrained fashion, and developing a greater understanding of the individual and where they're coming from helps create a greater level of confidence, well confidence in the other person and trust I guess, and communication is always more effective if there's trust.

(WA Collaboration Respondent)

Preliminary activities and warm-up techniques help create an environment conducive to open discussion, reflective dialogue and enlargement of thinking, and are useful in the early stages of discussion as well as throughout sessions. In the case of ongoing initiatives, informal activities and opportunities for conversation are important throughout to acquaint continuing and new members and to generally maintain connections between people as they come and go from participation in the initiative.

- **Greetings and introductions** are important for establishing a sense of who is involved and their expectations for the session, and in some cases establish why they are participating. Regarding sessions involving both individuals and representatives, Hunt et al. noticed a sense of "unfocussed distrust" of stakeholders when public participants entered a situation "cold" or unaware of the roles of the stakeholders involved (2003, 29).

- ‘Ice-breakers,’ ‘getting to know you’ activities and various games involving physical activity can promote interaction and communication, and as such supplement heavy task-based discussion. Commonly used techniques such as ‘find someone who…’ and ‘find three people with the same…’ can assist with personal connections and discovery of similarities among people.

- **Physical continuums or clusters** (where people stand in relation to certain aspects of a subject) provide relaxed ways of engaging people with the subject matter and with each other’s views, and can be coupled with in-depth discussion.

- As warm-ups to challenging discussions, simple techniques such as discussion in pairs and turn-taking or ‘rounds’ can be particularly effective in providing opportunities for people to both express themselves and listen to others.

On the whole, relaxed activities such as these help build familiarity, trust and working relationships, and support more formal discussion and deliberation. They are effective processes when balanced to be long enough to allow time for meaningful dialogue, and short enough to maintain interest and be efficient regarding time limits. They provide simple and easy introductions to difficult discussions. From their experience, Hunt et
al. (2003) argue that warm-up activities are important for making people feel comfortable to speak but should not be too “unfamiliar or challenging” (26).

Several of the authors discussed in Chapter 3 highlight the importance of informal activities and personal interaction during deliberative processes. Forester (1999), for example, emphasizes the role of participatory rituals in enabling participants to develop familiarity before solving the problems they face, including informal drinks before deliberations, meal breaks during intensive workshops and storytelling. He argues that these opportunities for dialogue can allow for the expression of particular details and concerns relevant to the overall discussion.

**Mutual sharing of knowledge and experience, and exploration of tensions between perspectives**

As I have argued throughout this thesis, a depth of dialogue and exchange is more likely to occur in participatory and deliberative processes when participants engage with the tensions inherent among their varying perspectives, values and commitments, as this is how they develop an appreciation of the complexity of the issue in question and greater understanding of how to address it. This level of engagement can be challenging and uncomfortable for participants, but is nevertheless central to developing integrative approaches. Careful facilitation can ensure discussion stays civil and productive rather than antagonistic.

A key activity that promotes critical, reflective dialogue is the relaying of experience to fellow participants. This was discussed in detail in Chapter 3 where I explored the arguments of several authors about the importance of reflecting on personal experience and storytelling rituals for allowing people to connect with issues at a deeper level and for revealing particular knowledge and values. As illustrated in Chapter 5, the process of working through a particular policy issue provides an effective context in which participants can share their knowledge and experiences, and reflect on their varying perspectives and assumptions. Sharing of personal experience is particularly meaningful when participants are committed to active listening and genuine inquiry. As people learn more about other people’s views and why they think that way, their beliefs and values are likely to seem less remote and more familiar. Through this process, people can begin to appreciate ways in which their views and thinking might be more
connected than previously assumed. In his discussion of the tenets of effective communication, social psychologist and commentator Mackay (1998) stresses the need to allow ample time for communication, a conclusion also made by Hunt et al. (2003): “[c]ommunication is a gradual process, and trying to rush it may have the effect of leaving the process permanently stranded at a superficial level” (161). Regarding listening, he believes that “people are more likely to listen to us if we also listen to them” (157) and emphasizes the transactional nature of it, and the effort and goodwill required.

When I listen, I am involved in the transaction: I am not just hearing what you say, but am attending, understanding and interpreting…listening is an act of commitment (143, emphasis added).

There are many examples of where reflective techniques have been employed in creative ways to improve deliberative and organizational processes. Simple techniques commonly used include a) participants visualising or sketching on paper a place that is special to them, and discussing the place and why it is significant for them in pairs or in a small group, and b) participants thinking about how their values have been formed or shaped, and sharing it with a partner or the group. Collage work can similarly encourage participants to think and interact reflectively. For example, as part of the Integrated Assessment (IA) focus groups discussed in Chapter 4, participants created group collages according to the scenarios ‘business as usual energy use’ and ‘strong reduction of energy use,’ which they then discussed with the entire group (Kasemir et al. 2003). The process is an example of a way to give participants an opportunity to engage with issues related to sustainability, such as climate change and energy use, at a deep and reflective level where they can express their beliefs through images, dialogue and collaborative work.

Another process using creative activities to stimulate dialogue and reflection is values mapping (Lambert et al. 2005), which has been used to facilitate discussions between diverse stakeholders about protecting the habitat of migratory shorebirds in Australia. Using “maps of the area in which environmental, land use or natural resource planning is required,” participants “identify visually what they value about the place, without reliance on language specific to that sector” (6-7). Values mapping has been successful in stimulating partnerships: stakeholders who had not previously collaborated or even been in discussion with each other formed teams and were “successful in attracting project funding for various natural resource management outcomes” (9).
A further example of a way to facilitate reflective dialogue is the *formalised storytelling processes* discussed by McDrury and Alterio (2000). They argue that storytelling helps people in organizations learn about themselves and their practice because it accommodates conscious and creative reflection, and fosters the development of new understanding and appreciation. Facilitation of these processes, including asking participants to focus on story content and associated feelings, can encourage dialogue and reflection and prevent participants reacting superficially to the stories or reverting to “response stories” (70). McDrury and Alterio argue that facilitation is important to enhance the safety of the teller and move the storytelling process through its various stages. They recommend groups of between 6-8 people, as “fewer that six limits the range of perspectives offered” and “more that eight results in excessive time to process a story” (70). Involving a range of perspectives “shifts how the situation is viewed and leads to different responses being seen as appropriate” (71).88

**Process variety for integrating reflective dialogue with task-based discussion**

Because people approach issues differently, *integrating reflective work with action-oriented discussion* and *recognising the differing working styles of participants* are important for combating both over and under participation, and for maintaining a balance between building understanding and enabling change. In his facilitator’s guide to collaborative planning, Robinson (2005) stresses these aspects. He argues that variety is essential for creating effective sessions, and highlights the importance of structured interaction, opportunities for participants to share their own stories, and breaks for conversation and networking.

Innovative and creative ways to engage participants in dialogue are necessary to make challenging discussions more interesting, relaxed and comfortable. For example, the use of performance to help convey differing experiences and perspectives (as discussed in Chapter 3) can be enjoyable yet encourage strong engagement with the subject matter. Multi media and information technology can also be utilised, as in the case of the IA focus groups discussed in Chapter 3. Dürrenberger et al. (1999) point out, however, that “[i]nput that is too sophisticated and ‘expert’ is generally not well received, or may even demotivate participants” (348). Another flexible and creative

88 For further discussion of the use of such processes for organizational learning and development, see Brown et al. (2005) *Storytelling in Organizations.*
tool is mind maps, which can help groups identify and explore visually the key aspects surrounding a topic, and the connections between them.89

Relatively unstructured processes such as open space sessions (discussed in Chapters 5 and 6) are often effective in allowing space for unrestricted dialogue and learning. The open space method affords participants flexibility, ownership of and responsibility for the process, and in this way encourages them to be particularly aware of the impacts of their behaviour on the process. However, open space requires general goodwill and has been seen by some (for example, the WA Collaboration Coordinator) as being suited to relatively harmonious groups, rather than groups carrying considerable difference and conflict. It is also suited to forums organized by ongoing community sector initiatives which tend to attract people with a degree of prior knowledge about the subject in question.

Applications of transactional space
As this thesis has illustrated through the case study of the WA Collaboration, transactional space and the principles and strategies discussed in this chapter, can support collaborative initiatives and the participatory processes surrounding them. Transactional level exchange can particularly benefit ongoing, small group situations such as steering committees where participants are building working relationships and a foundation for collaboration. The intensive process conducted with the WA Collaboration Steering Committee was effective because relatively like-minded people with a common purpose were involved, and because they recognised the benefits of creating space for a depth of discussion and dialogue in their ongoing activities.90 However, transactional space has relevance for a number of other situations in which a diverse range of people are involved in grappling with complex and contentious problems. The following discussion outlines these contexts, drawing on the interviews

89 Mind maps start with a word or image reflecting the topic in the centre of the page or whiteboard, and participants (individually, in small groups or as a whole group) then build a map outwards in words using various fonts, cases and graphics for significance. I have experienced this tool used in different workshop contexts and have found it to be useful in revealing a wealth of thoughts and ideas about a subject or system under concern. See www.mind-map.com for further information.
90 In Appendix 1 I provide several examples of collaborative initiatives related to sustainability emerging in Australia, Europe and North America. These various groups at both local and peak group level illustrate the types of settings that could benefit from the research and working framework. They bear similarities to the mix of groups and range of interests involved in the WA Collaboration, and are therefore likely to benefit from the incorporation of greater opportunities for reflective exchange.
conducted with two senior state government policymakers involved in sustainability, the WA Collaboration Coordinator and another person closely involved with the WA Collaboration.

Transactional level exchange can enrich deliberations at any time in a participatory process or in the development of a collaborative initiative because it can help to balance task-based discussion (where participants respond to issues) with critical, reflective dialogue (where participants explore knowledge and experience surrounding issues). However, there are certain times when transactional exchange is particularly important for ongoing initiatives and organizations; incorporating opportunities for in-depth discussion and reflective dialogue is especially beneficial:

- in the early stages of the development of an initiative to help establish a degree of understanding of the diversity present and a foundation for working relationships;
- when new participants enter the deliberative or collaborative space to foster the connections and understanding that can support deliberations and problem-solving;
- for discussion of complex and challenging issues that require considerable understanding to form robust approaches;
- for identification of priorities and action planning;
- for evaluation of the progress of the initiative in terms of collaborative capacity and overall goals; and
- at transitional and ‘crossroads’ times in the life of the initiative to support clarification of purpose and direction.

Incorporating opportunities for dialogue is essentially about providing periodical ‘timeouts’ in which participants can step back from action-oriented discussion and together reflect on the complexities involved. As discussed in Chapter 2, several authors have highlighted the importance of having this time to reflect for the development of initiatives and organizations. Rochester and Woods (2005) found that members of collaborations have found it useful in the early days of collaboration to organize ‘away days’ to discuss difficult or meaty issues – sometimes with an independent facilitator. This gave them the time and space to reach agreement on some fundamental matters that underpinned the collaborative enterprise” (2005, 22). Gadja
(2004) likewise recommends periodical workshops specifically to assess the development of the endeavour in terms of integration and extend collaborative relationships. She argues that this discussion time is important to acquaint new members and to refresh or reorient understanding about what the group is collectively trying to achieve.

Transactional space is also relevant for government policy development processes and associated public and stakeholder engagement processes. During a discussion of the concept of transactional space, Government Respondent B suggested that exploration of a diversity of perspectives could help create better policy outcomes and considered how this might be done in practice:

> I would probably support the thesis that those sorts of exchanges can inform cultural change and a better understanding of the diversity of views, and therefore potentially better policy outcomes. What it implies is that government should be enabling those sorts of opportunities to occur, and again I guess from a purely practical level I’m wondering at which point would you do that in the process of developing policy…

He suggested transactional space might be important for early work in policy development but believed it would need to be integrated with practice:

> Ideally you would probably do it at the front end of a process so that you have a richness and the diversity and the shared understanding at that point, and ideally you would probably also do it at the point of developing the strategic directions that you want to put out. I guess it sounds to me though like it potentially could be quite a resource intensive process, and there’s always a balance in government between talking and doing. So at what point do you keep talking about something versus get on and do something, or is it possible to do the talking and the doing at the same time, the talking while you’re doing perhaps (emphasis added).

This supports the argument that transactional level exchange must be integrated with regular practice and especially with action-oriented or task-based discussion, so that the reflective dialogue and learning can inform ongoing work.

Government Respondent B considered transactional space in terms of past and future practice:

> So if I was to compare that kind of philosophy I’d say that—and apply it across what’s happened historically with the Sustainability Strategy—there might have been some portions of that transactional discussion early on in the process, although not from a blank sheet of paper perspective. Perhaps that wasn’t ideal…the question is whether the formal forums that we’ve established like the Roundtable are going to provide those kinds of opportunities.

Multi-stakeholder roundtables and advisory bodies can benefit from expansion of transactional space in a similar way to community sector collaborative initiatives: they typically involve a range of participants (including people from the private, government and community sectors), and their purpose is to bring together diverse knowledge and
perspectives on sustainability, and utilise its potential in their advice and work on particular projects.

Government Respondent B saw the transactional space approach as pertinent to exchanges between government and non-government organizations, and to **collaborative exchanges within government**:

It’s very applicable not only with government and non-government exchanges but within government exchanges as well because so often public sector agencies come to defend a certain position, whether it be a formal position held by the department or not, and part of the challenge of good governance is to remind people that they’re there to come with the best possible outcome that they can achieve, not to defend turf on behalf of their department, and that brings up all sorts of issues about ways of working…

…it becomes very important in the context of partnerships because often we’ll be asking our agencies to be there thinking creatively about new ways of doing business, not just resorting to their own core business, and working together in ways that they haven’t worked before…

He noted the relevance of transactional level dialogue for “**discussions about what sustainability means**” (emphasis added) and understanding of differing beliefs and views.

It’s that kind of “what are you really going on about?” sort of discussion, is probably very useful to have that sort of dialogue. It’s about getting a richer understanding of different people’s perspectives and hopefully moving forward on that basis…deeper questioning around views…”Why do you hold that view?” “Tell me more about what sits behind that?” That kind of getting beneath the surface stuff. “What’s led you to believe that this is the case?”

Another context he suggested as relevant was “**challenging the notion of roles and responsibilities among government, civil society and industry sectors**” (emphasis added).

…you know, “what is really the role of government in this area?” “What is really the role of industry?”…also challenging some of the hard fought turf that individual parts of society have built up over time…so, “what are the challenges for the conservation movement for sustainability? What are the shifts that they are going to make, in the same way that government has to make and the same way that industry has to make, around the concept?”

Government Respondent B also highlighted the importance of dialogue around the **development of ‘true measures of progress’ and sustainability indicators**.

I think possibly a broad dialogue around what we mean by ‘true measures of progress’ with broader parts of the community is probably something that the government should consider doing at some point. Ah, I think that is probably a good opportunity to get engagement going with the general community which has a two-pronged intent—one is to genuinely understand what people would understand to be progress and how we might define that in the context of sustainability indicators, and another one would be a process of making people more aware of the multiplicity of factors that contribute to sustainability.
As outlined in Appendix 1, sustainability indicators projects driven by local organizations, authorities and/or communities are emerging in many parts of the world (including Australia and North America), and are designed to be collaborative efforts and to engage a diverse range of people. In such processes, transactional level dialogue can help address tensions between people’s values, visions and priorities for their locality, city or province. A deep, reflective level of discussion is also necessary for participants to gain an understanding of the different dimensions of sustainability, and how they impact on one another in relation to the particular issues they collectively face.

*Sustainability assessment*—where environmental, social and economic impact assessments are combined to contribute to an integrative and strategic appraisal of a project, plan, program or policy—is another area that will require processes for addressing tensions between interests. Several state government agencies in Western Australia have been grappling with the development of viable sustainability assessment processes, such as a mandatory sustainability checklist for new housing. The appraisal and integration of social, environmental and economic objectives is a challenging process that can involve making difficult decisions. This is where developing more comprehensive understanding of the suite of issues through critical and reflective dialogue is fundamental to the acceptance and level of sustainability of the outcomes. This level of exchange can facilitate access to the perspectives, beliefs and values behind statements and help build understanding of potential opportunities.91

Sustainability assessment of policies, programs and plans within government is something that Government Respondent B believed could benefit from “stronger engagement” and dialogical processes, and he also stressed that, in general, discussions surrounding processes for sustainability would need to be ongoing in nature.

Government Respondent A had similar comments to Government Respondent B, and in particular, commented on the need for greater space for discussion and dialogue *in the early stages of planning a project*, rather than having public and stakeholder engagement at a later stage. He rather colourfully discussed the way in which planning and approvals processes, particularly at the local level, could benefit from exploration of differences in interests up front in the process.

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91 For further discussion of sustainability assessment processes see Brown (2005), and Pope and Grace (2006).
local government for example is always punch drunk over differences because they receive a barrage of them and find it hard to deal with sometimes because it’s so intense. And they haven’t always got the processes in a way that can enable creative use of those differences. It’s just left open to a very simplistic idea of how many people want something and how many people don’t want it, and the politics of that can be quite negative. So in the planning system they most need the creative transactional spaces (emphasis added).

The environmental processes of assessment are similar. You often need far more work at the transactional space which is where options are being developed, rather than a fully fledged project that has got a now open-ended “what do you think about this?” where there’s only one option…that transactional space needs to be created where social, economic and environmental factors can be brought together and options thought through (emphasis added).

He described how a more transactional space would occur in this context:

…the main thing is to see an options-oriented space to be created so that at the point where a project or an idea is being developed there is an opportunity created for key stakeholders to throw it around…then you get the dialogue and difference beginning at that point of where you are developing the options, and that is I would think the hardest thing that is yet to be done.

He discussed the role of local and state government in creating this space for dialogue across difference in the “scoping stage” of projects:

…almost every local government could create a transactional space involving key stakeholders who are brought together around a project concept and have the opportunity to express their point of view in the dialogue where their views are debated, rather than in the newspaper after it comes forward, and you then have this process of who shouts loudest…

But every agency has a part to play in decision-making on projects and they need to have their funding processes and their project appraisal systems more open to a transactional space that can work through options in a sustainability framework…Doesn’t have to be long, just has to be done rather than not done, and you’ll get very significant differences once that begins to happen.

The relevance of transactional space to local level issues and planning processes was also raised by the Coordinator of the WA Collaboration who commented similarly on the degree of tension and conflict that often emerges and needs to be addressed:

It kind of seems to make most sense to me, what you’re talking about, at perhaps a regional or local level where people really are kind of rubbing up against each other. I don’t mean that in a physical way [laughter], but you know, when I’ve talked before about the frustration of community organizations about stuff not happening, one of the areas where that frustration is coming from is the Kimberley, which is an area with some hugely competing demands…it seems to make most sense at that kind of a level, where there are directly competing interests and competing worldviews and some really divergent viewpoints…

Processes opening up transactional space can greatly benefit collaborative working groups around local projects, because these usually attract people with a variety of interests and backgrounds. Local government and community processes can also benefit because of the tensions over local decisions that impact directly on residents. There are often high stakes for participants of consultation and visioning processes surrounding urban redevelopment and revitalisation. Deep-seated tensions frequently emerge in such cases and need to be dealt with through dialogue that reaches the level
of differences in beliefs, values and priorities. Allowing time for exploration of differences can help to avoid disappointment and false consensus. Extended dialogue is particularly important when groups are at the stage of going beyond visions and broad goals to identifying specific recommendations for action. This was a key point made by some of the Steering Committee members in their 2003 interviews and most of the four respondents in the interviews in 2004. They suggested that this stage of discussion can be contentious and challenging and that the specifics of issues and their solutions therefore needed to be worked through carefully, and so too, the differences in views surrounding them.

This section on potential applications and beneficiaries of processes that expand transactional space has highlighted a number of different contexts in which reflective exchange is important. It has also demonstrated that the notion of transactional space has significance for a number of levels of activity, including:

- the dynamics and productiveness of discussion and deliberation in participatory or collaborative situations;
- the organization (in terms of its development and the effectiveness of its processes);
- collaborative or partnership initiatives within or between government, private and community sectors; and
- governance and institutions (in terms of approaches involving an awareness of the need for a depth of engagement and dialogue in policy development).

Returning to the bigger picture: progressing sustainability through participatory processes

This thesis has been concerned with the immense challenge presented by sustainability, a concept that has emerged globally over the past few decades in response to pressing environmental, social and economic issues. Sustainability, as distinct from sustainable development, is essentially about an ethical and holistic approach to the world. It can be understood as a shared journey towards a more harmonious state of living in which people choose to develop in ways that are more just and sustainable for all life on earth. Underpinning the approach is an understanding of the complexity and interconnectedness of human and ecological systems. The notion of sustainability implies the fulfilment of human needs (such as shelter and clean air and water), rights
(such as freedom) and aspirations (such as being part of a community and prospering within it), but equally implies the dependency of human wellbeing on ecological systems and the integrity of all life on earth. Sustainability presents the challenge to individuals and organizations of all cultures and walks of life to take responsibility for the impacts they make upon the earth and its people.

While such ideas may sound like common sense, the transition to sustainability is far from simple. Firstly, familiarity with the concepts of sustainable development and sustainability continues to be limited within the general public. Secondly, and importantly for this thesis, people tend to have vastly divergent conceptions of what ‘sustainability’ means and entails because of their differing backgrounds, interests and values. This has disadvantages in terms of requiring considerable debate and resolution of conflicting views, but advantages in terms of stimulating learning and encouraging people to refine together what it is they would like to do or see done to create better outcomes across the board. This discussion is vital if sustainability is, in the words of Government Respondent B, to provide a “very powerful unifying concept,” rather than simply a concept that “becomes all things to all people:"

…one of the tricky things for me has been reconciling the multiple views that people have about the concept of sustainability and the fact that so many interest groups, not just government, have attempted to embrace the concept for their own purposes. And that’s been a real challenge because at one level sustainability is a very powerful unifying concept, at the other level it can be so broad as to be almost meaningless, and there is that very fine line between making sense of it and applying it in a government policy setting, and being criticised because it becomes all things to all people.

He encapsulates the challenge we face in seeking to work together to create a better world, and at the same time highlights the potential of sustainability:

Society has multiple values. Many people want a clean environment. Many people also want employment and wealth and long term futures, and I think that sustainability as a context and as a new way of looking at things can provide the opportunity to hold those multiplicity of values, so long as it’s not a weak interpretation of the concept, so that it’s not about the trade-off stuff…it comes with it a sense that it does require us to do things differently.

This thesis has engaged with what I see as a fundamental challenge for developing in a more just and sustainable manner—the participatory, collaborative and, moreover, deliberative processes required within governance to generate better strategies and better outcomes. A ‘networked governance’ involving participation and collaboration has been promoted by many as the way forward for sustainability, yet how this works in practice requires much greater attention. As this thesis has argued, sustainability is contested, fluid and iterative. It is dependent on particular contexts, needs and values.
This means that while action may be imperative to change the course of destructive pathways, so too is deliberation and dialogue, as this can enable people to build understanding of the diverse concerns related to sustainability and form shared pathways forward. In-depth discussion and dialogue can help people learn from the past and make more informed decisions for the future.

Such an environment for public debate must be actively fostered. This thesis has argued that within the participatory and collaborative processes of governance, the transition toward sustainability will require a depth of exchange or a transactional space in which participants can better understand the differing backgrounds and perspectives that affect their deliberations. At the heart of this space is engagement with personal experience and critical and reflective dialogue, as this allows people to review and expand their knowledge and perspectives, and create more comprehensive and holistic understanding of issues. I have therefore argued that fostering a depth of dialogue and learning in participatory, deliberative and collaborative processes can develop their potential for transformative exchange. This level of exchange can enable people to apprehend the specifics of what sustainability means in practice and develop shared approaches to addressing common problems.

Much of this thesis has been focussed on the significance of the notion of transactional space to progressing sustainability. A study of various participatory processes in terms of their potential for reflective and transformative exchange provided insight into the challenges involved in developing transactional space, but of particular importance was the research with the WA Collaboration. The WA Collaboration experience provided insight into how complicated policy issues can be when approached from the perspective of progressing sustainability. At the same time, the experience confirmed a tendency for people to be orientated towards action and concrete outcomes, rather than dialogue and learning. That is, it revealed the conundrum of a lack of time but the necessity for a depth of exchange in collaborative practice. The overall lesson from my research with the WA Collaboration is therefore that despite constraints, collaborative contexts and other participatory situations must involve processes that actively foster reflection and learning within regular practice if they are to realise their potential as spaces for transformative exchange around sustainability.
The insights from the WA Collaboration experience contributed significantly to the principles and strategies offered in this thesis as a guide for practitioners interested in creating transactional space in their activities. The notion of transactional space has been used to draw together the elements needed to make dialogue and deliberation more transformative, such as goodwill, openness and exploration of backgrounds and perspectives. While necessarily limited, the exploration of transactional space in this thesis provides a much needed analysis of how participation for sustainability might be more far reaching, and can inform many different contexts in which diverse participants are involved in working together towards mutually beneficial outcomes.

**Challenges for the future**

Initiatives like the WA Collaboration may be impermanent but they provide significant windows of opportunity for discussion of issues related to sustainability and joint work towards sustainability. As partnerships across differing sectors of activity, organizations like the WA Collaboration provide forums for the involvement of diverse groups and individuals and have the potential to engage a wider constituency in sustainability than can be done by government alone. Such initiatives provide a focal point for various interests and open forums for exchange and learning.

However, much has been expected from the community sector in terms of fostering public engagement with policy- and decision-making processes, and action towards sustainability. Groups like the WA Collaboration can only do so much with limited staff and resources, and their effectiveness is greatly dependent on funding systems conducive to their ongoing development. Furthermore, their contributions and impacts are greatly reliant on the engagement and support of partner organizations, and connections with organizations in other sectors.

As Edwards (2004) argues, “[m]uch deeper action is required in politics, economics and social life if civil society is to be an effective vehicle for change” (ix). Civil society organizations, and in particular multi-interest sites like the WA Collaboration, represent significant spaces for ‘on the ground’ learning and action, and as such, have considerable potential to encourage deep engagement with public policy problems. However, the many partnership and collaborative initiatives emerging within the changing processes of governance require a policy environment that allows space for in-
depth discussion and dialogue, that is, an environment that supports the development of robust participatory processes. The value of reflective process and integrative work must be broadly recognized, not only by collaborative initiatives and partner organizations, but also by funding sources and governments.

The complexities and interconnectedness of public policy issues can only be addressed by communication across the different knowledge and perspectives surrounding them. Deliberative and collaborative spaces offer important vehicles for such exchange, and their potential for deep engagement with sustainability requires further and closer examination. The academic community has a significant role to play in ensuring this analysis takes place by undertaking participatory research with practitioners, preparing case studies of practice, and generally promoting the integration of reflection and practice. There is a need for collaborative inquiry into the specific forms of dialogue and deliberation that can help bridge difference and expand perspectives. The research with the WA Collaboration demonstrated one way in which this can be done, together with the limitations of the particular circumstances. Other instances of participatory research into the development of dialogical and reflective deliberative processes can provide further perspective on what tends to work and what presents barriers.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Examples of collaborative initiatives

A network is by definition nonhierarchical. It is a web of connections among equals. What holds it together is not force, obligation, material incentive, or social contract, but rather shared values and the understanding that some tasks can be accomplished together that could never be accomplished separately (Meadows et al., 1992, 227).

There are countless examples of the innovative networks and collaborative organizations that have arisen around the world within and across many sectors of activity. These work at different levels, in varying ways and for a range of purposes. They are known by a variety of names such as partnerships, collaboratives, networks, coalitions and alliances, and according to Gadja (2004), “collaboration” is often a used as a “catchall phrase” (3) even though these organizations may develop vastly differing capacities for integration.

The following discussion highlights a few selected examples of initiatives involving collaboration and partnership approaches that are working explicitly towards sustainability or that are highly relevant to progressing sustainability. They are initiatives that encompass multiple interests and areas of work (such as bringing certain social and environmental objectives together). I am also focussed here on independent or community driven initiatives rather than community-government or community-business partnerships, because although the WA Collaboration takes a cooperative approach to its interaction with government, it is not a partnership with government but an independent community sector initiative. I also focus largely on community initiatives because I am more concerned with the WA Collaboration’s work fostering engagement with sustainability within the community than with its relations with government. There has been an explosion of sustainability-related and community-driven initiatives in many countries in recent times, and there is only scope to illustrate a few types of initiatives here.

In various ways and to differing degrees, the initiatives described below provide collaborative space by promoting exchange among groups and individuals. Some

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92 Some useful websites that provide compilations of links to organizations working at the local level include the WA Collaboration’s website, http://www.wacollaboration.org.au/, and a community planning website supported by the UK government, http://www.communityplanning.net/contacts/contacts.htm.
particularly offer spaces in which a diversity of people can connect around a common purpose, and share and expand their knowledge and perspectives on implementing sustainability. Many of the initiatives described below have the potential to engender fuller understanding of sustainability and more robust approaches to putting sustainability into practice.

**Large scale or national level initiatives**

In the US, the Sustainable Communities Network (SCN) (www.sustainable.org) operates as a network of networks “for those who want to help make their communities more liveable” (website). The SCN was founded by CONCERN and the Community Sustainability Resource Institute in 1993 and works with a large number of similar non-profit organizations throughout America to identify resources on sustainability and raise awareness of them in the public. These organizations launched the SCN website in 1996 and are listed on its pages. The website provides a gateway to the network. It provides a hub of resources, examples of successful practice in communities, and promotes exchange of information regarding a broad range of issues to foster community sustainability in both urban and rural areas. It helps people connect to other initiatives, tools, people and organizations and promotes “learning about the many dimensions and integrative nature of building sustainable communities” (website).

Communities By Choice (www.communitiesbychoice.org) is another US national level initiative that seeks to bring together communities, organizations and individuals committed to learning about and practising sustainable development. In particular, it provides resources about sustainable community development as a process for making choices about the future.

Forum for the Future (www.forumforthefuture.org.uk), founded in 1996, is recognized as the UK’s leading sustainable development charity. The objective of the forum is to promote sustainable development and educate different groups about it “in order to accelerate the building of a sustainable way of life” (website). It takes a positive solutions-oriented approach and grew out of the belief that many of the solutions needed to defuse the environmental crisis and build a more sustainable society are already to hand. The Forum produces a magazine called Green Futures as a source of debate on solutions and works with more than 150 companies, local authorities, regional bodies
and universities to build capacity to overcome the many barriers to more sustainable practice. It tackles issues as diverse as renewable resources and climate change, farming, finance, environmental accounting and the digital divide.

_Cynnal Cymru_ (cynnalcymru.org) and the associated _Sustain Wales_ web portal (www.sustainwales.com) are quite different initiatives but are important to mention here. While _Cynnal Cymru_ is “an independent not-for-Profit company led by a Board of Directors” (website), with membership open to all in Welsh society, it “owes its formation to the duty placed upon the National Assembly for Wales to promote sustainable development” (website). According to the website, this duty is specified in section 121 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 (c.38) and includes the Assembly making a “scheme setting out how it proposes, in the exercise of its functions, to promote sustainable development.” One of the actions of the first scheme ‘Learning to Live Differently,’ November 2000, was the “establishment of a body to work alongside government but independent of it to usher sustainable development along in Wales.” In December 2002, this body took the form of Cynnal Cymru - The Sustainable Development Forum for Wales. The Welsh word ‘cynnal’ means to sustain, support, nurture and lead.

As specified on the website, “the objectives of Cynnal Cymru are to:

- Promote sustainable development;
- Be a catalyst for change towards sustainable development in all sectors of Welsh society;
- Act as a forum within Wales for the development, canvassing, exchange and dissemination of views, information and policies on sustainable development.”

The organization aims to “enable civil society to:

- Raise its level of awareness of sustainable development;
- Improve the level of public debate about sustainable development;
- Develop its own policies and initiatives as a counterpoint to the work of the Assembly and the Welsh Assembly Government.”

The _Sustain Wales_ website is linked to Cynnal Cymru and provides “a one-stop-shop for people in Wales to go to whenever they’d like information on products or services to
help them live, work, shop or enjoy themselves ethically, sustainably and reassuringly ‘green’.”

As mentioned at the outset of this thesis, a major inspiration for the formation of the WA Collaboration was the establishment of the Australian Collaboration (www.australiancollaboration.com.au) in 2001, a similar grouping of peak organizations at the national level, and their publication of *A Just and Sustainable Australia* (Yencken and Porter 2001). As a national level organization, the Australian Collaboration’s work is clearly very different from that of the more locally-focussed WA Collaboration, and this is discussed further in chapter 5. The Australian Collaboration and WA Collaboration have inspired people in other states of Australia, such as South Australia and Queensland, to begin the process of forming their own state-based collaborations. However, without funding and a catalyst such as the development of a state sustainability strategy, these collaborations have faltered and at the time of writing were yet to become active.

Another Australian development is the fledgling Australian National Sustainability Initiative (www.sustainability.org.au). According to its website, “[t]he initiative is the result of a three-year nation-wide collaborative and consultative process that identified a need for a cross-sectoral network of individuals, groups and organizations working for sustainability, and the establishment of a national centre to support such a network.” The network’s online community has 500 groups and individuals involved in sustainability-related activities registered. It is intended that this “network of networks ... will mature into an interactive, well-resourced knowledge sharing and communication system,” and “will provide a central reference point and educational resource on sustainability issues, stimulate collaboration, facilitate dissemination of sustainability innovations and practical applications, and provide research support for the community, business and government” (website). The centre is proposed to be a model eco-development located in Canberra that will demonstrate new and emerging sustainable technologies.
Smaller scale or more locally based initiatives

In Australia and elsewhere, many local government authorities are working towards developing, sustainability indicators through local community participation. There are also many community-led indicators projects emerging around the world, particularly in North America, such as Sustainable Seattle (www.sustainableseattle.org) and Sustainable Calgary (www.sustainablecalgary.ca).

These collaborative initiatives have had broad ranging impacts in their communities. Sustainable Calgary, for example, has over 240 members and has “engaged thousands of Calgarians in workshops and projects about [the] city and sustainability” (website). The organization has published three State of Our City reports since 1999 “providing facts about the city's sustainability against key indicators.” Its mission is to “promote, encourage and support community level actions and initiatives that move Calgary towards a sustainable future.” It was inspired by the similar work of Sustainable Seattle.

Indicators projects are important ways of involving communities in collaborative work towards sustainability and translating sustainability approaches to specific and grounded examples of sustainability in practice. The WA Collaboration recognizes this and has begun preliminary work to help facilitate the development of a few pilot community-based sustainability indicators projects in Western Australia.

Based in Colorado, the Sustainable Futures Society (www.sustainablecolorado.org) has also done work in the area of sustainability indicators and in general “promotes an understanding and adoption of the principles, policies, and practices of sustainable development” (website). It does this through applied research, education, publications, videos, community capacity-building and the creation of strategic partnerships. It encourages collaboration between individuals, business, schools, universities, non-profit organizations, coalitions, communities and governments.

The London Sustainability Exchange (www.lsx.org.uk), like the other organizations described above, brings together individuals and organizations from different sectors, and fosters exchange and learning across social, environmental and economic
perspectives. It seeks to provide practical support in terms of sustainability literacy, influencing policy and practice in London towards sustainability, and sharing and learning from good practice. The UK Forum for the Future described above is one of its lead partners and it was founded in 2001.

Other notable community-based collaborative initiatives progressing sustainability in the UK include *Groundwork* (www.groundwork.org.uk)—“a federation of Trusts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, each working with their partners to improve the quality of the local environment, the lives of local people and the success of local businesses in areas in need of investment and support” (website)—and *Envolve* (www.envolve.co.uk)—a charity working in partnership with others in the South West of England to encourage more sustainable lifestyles (formerly the Bath Environment Centre).

There are many locally-based collaborative initiatives emerging in Australia as well. Based in the heart of Melbourne at Federation Square, the *Sustainable Living Foundation* (SLF) (www.slf.org.au) provides a hub of activity around sustainability. It facilitates many projects and initiatives and provides “a platform to support, engage and celebrate sustainable activity both locally and nationally” (website). It emerged from Australia’s first Sustainable Living fair in Daylesford, Victoria in 1998 and has since organized annual festivals to celebrate and raise awareness of sustainable living. SLF promotes and offers assistance for the development of sustainable living practices in a range of sectors. It works to create relationships between community, government, business, educational and media organizations. These partnerships with SLF provide opportunities for the promotion of leading sustainable practices.

The *Nature and Society Forum* (www.natso.org.au) based in Canberra is a non-profit community-based organization that aims to facilitate greater understanding throughout the community of “the processes of life, the human place in nature, and health and environmental issues facing us today,” and to encourage “informed discussion and debate about the practical meaning of such understanding” (website). It aims to communicate the outcomes of its activities as widely as possible through publications and the Internet. It fosters the development of a number of innovative projects, including a proposed National Biocentre as a focal point for exchange and
demonstration of best practice (this is connected to the proposed Australian National Sustainability Initiative).

*The Change Agency* (www.thechangeagency.org) based in Brisbane is a slightly different organization because it provides comprehensive resources and support specific to facilitating the process of creating change in communities. Since 1995 it has been developing and sharing resources to support effective community action “for a just, sustainable and peaceful world” (website). Its mission is “to strengthen community and workplace action for social, ecological and economic justice.” It has led workshops with thousands of people throughout Australia and the Pacific Region. The agency offers facilitation, workshops, training resources, research and other learning. The site includes access to resources and manuals on working with groups and strategising and community organising, as well as a range of case studies, articles and reports. In particular, it provides resources for developing experiential and empowered learning capacity, and materials on techniques for conflict resolution, communication and active listening.

**Sustainability practitioners associations**

There are also several non-profit organizations supporting exchange between sustainability practitioners that are emerging in Australia and elsewhere. Based in Perth, Western Australia, the *Sustainability Practitioners Association* (SPA) (www.sustainabilitypractitionersassociation.com) was formally launched in 2005 and organizes regular events as forums for networking among people working in the emerging field of sustainability in government, the private sector, non-government organizations, communities and the education sector. SPA also seeks to mentor future sustainability practitioners, raise awareness of sustainability and encourage adoption of more sustainable practices. *The Baton Forum* (www.batonforum.org.au) based in New South Wales is another organization supporting sustainability practitioners and offers annual sustainability retreats. *The Association of Sustainability Practitioners* (www.asp-online.org) based in Bristol, UK, is a similar network for people involved in work towards sustainability.
Appendix 2: Participatory processes

**Citizen-oriented processes**

There are many processes that involve large numbers of people in deliberation. In particular, *citizens’ panels* have been used by several local councils in the UK and involve consulting a large database of participants to track shifts in views about strategic planning issues over an extended period of time, usually several years, sometimes with parallel and supporting deliberative procedures (Government of Western Australia 2003a; Carson and Gelber 2001). These have the potential to build shared community knowledge and understanding of policy processes. *Citizens’ assemblies* involve several informational and deliberative meetings over a long period of time leading to final recommendations (Government of WA 2005). An example is the citizens’ assembly about electoral reform in British Columbia in 2003-2004 (www.citizensassembly.bc.ca).

Another recent innovation involving large numbers is the *wisdom councils* process experimented with in various parts of the US, which instead of having large numbers of citizens participating at once, has a new ‘wisdom council’ of 8-24 people randomly selected every few months to continue the deliberations (Government of WA 2005). In this way the council does not become an elite group, more people get to participate, and a sense of continuity of the voice of ‘the people’ and ownership is established. Indeed, while the Councils may be convened by a government body, over time they tend to charter themselves. A trained ‘dynamic facilitator’ is used for the meetings that usually last several half-days. The aim is to generate unanimous statements about the important issue under discussion that are then presented to the wider community, which can also be kept involved through a website.

‘Dynamic facilitation’ is a relatively new technique that involves ‘choice-creating,’ that is, a non-linear, transformational dialogue in which participants approach the situation positively with others and the discussion follows the group energy. Participants are asked to listen with respect for diversity and put aside or suspend their particular interests in the aim of discovering win-win solutions. The technique is particularly suited to formidable issues.
While with strong facilitation the process has the potential to encourage an enthusiastic and conversational flow of ideas, and relatively collective and creative outcomes, this strength (and the general goal of delivering unanimous statements) may also be its weakness. This collective ‘energy’ may instead be a privileging of the most dominant underlying direction of the group, and may actually restrict the development of inclusive, critical and robust deliberation and thus more genuinely just and sustainable solutions.93

Citizens’ juries involve much smaller numbers of participants and have been used for several decades in the US and Germany and more recently throughout Europe and Australia (Rowe and Frewer 2000; Carson and Gelber 2001; Carson 2003; PlanningNSW 2003; Tamarack 2004). A citizens’ jury, or ‘planning cell’ as it is called in Germany, involves a panel of lay participants (a random representative sample of the public, usually 12-25 in number) who deliberate in an informed way for several days over a clearly defined but often challenging issue. The commissioning authority, ideally in collaboration with a stakeholder reference group, recruits ‘expert’ witnesses who deliver presentations and are questioned by the lay panel. This helps ensure important knowledge and experience is included in the process of deliberation (lay participants are also provided with written briefing information before they meet). Deliberations occur in both plenary and smaller groups. The lay panel produces a report and if the jury’s recommendations are not implemented public justification is given as to why they are unsuitable. The process requires independent and highly skilled facilitation, as well as considerable time and resources.

Instead of the ‘usual suspects’ or usual interest groups involved, citizens’ juries provide the opportunity for various community views to be included in decision-making (although these views may not necessarily be representative of the community), and are empowering for citizens in that they are able to call on experts and direct discussions. The process is also significant for its opportunities for in-depth and complex deliberation and development of a high level of informed citizen participation. Indeed,

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93 In 2005 I attended a conference in Perth at which this technique was demonstrated. The Innovation in Community Engagement conference website is at http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/cityplanning/1208.asp. Further information about wisdom councils and dynamic facilitation can be found at www.wisedemocracy.org and www.tobe.net.
Smith and Wales claim that the citizens’ juries held in the UK yielded much more
detailed and informed conclusions than many non-deliberative consultation processes,
and “on a number of occasions, appear to have affected the sponsors’ policies and
spending priorities” (2000, 60).

For examples of citizens’ juries see Smith and Wales’ (2000) discussion of citizens’
juries in the UK including one held on genetic testing by the Association of British
Insurers, Carson’s (2003) discussion of a similar process held in New South Wales in
2000 on the review of container deposit legislation, and Government of Western
Australia (2003a) for a description of the citizen’s jury held in WA in 2001 to address
the issue of traffic flow on and off the Reid Highway Extension. Hendriks (2004)
provides an interesting discussion of the dynamics of stakeholder involvement in
citizen-based processes such as citizens’ juries, consensus conferences and planning
cells. She argues for greater attention to how more effective involvement of interest
organizations might be facilitated in such processes. See also Hendriks (2005) for a
discussion of these processes.

According to Carson and Gelber (2001), consensus conferences are very similar to
citizens’ juries, but the main differences are that they are much longer, involving several
preparatory and deliberative meetings over a period of one to two years, and that they
are more interactive, since the citizens are involved in the actual definition of the issue
and key questions that they deliberate, and in the selection of witnesses. This greater
involvement of community members can make the process richer and more meaningful.
The same panel may be reconvened some years later to re-visit the issue as
circumstances change. Consensus conferences clearly require considerable
commitment and resources but are well suited to regional level planning and to
particularly complex problems that are yet to be defined. Australia’s first consensus
conference was held in Canberra, 1999, on genetically modified foods.

The Georgia Basin Futures Project collaborative workshops for stakeholders
The steps of the workshops were as follows:
1. reading of a short narrative describing the state of the sector;
2. brainstorming of sector specific objectives that participants were working
towards in their sector;
3. brainstorming of alternative practices for the sector capturing real possibilities;
4. brainstorming of continuums along which objectives and alternatives could be clustered;
5. arranging of continuums on an axis diagram of four quadrants;
6. description of the details, examples and possible future scenarios of each quadrant and construction of a ‘story’ or archetype for each quadrant.

Other stakeholder-oriented processes

There is a multiplicity of processes that involve stakeholders in deliberation about policy issues and the following provides only a brief sketch of some important processes. Some of these are more representative of a range of stakeholders and more collaborative and empowering than others. They may be initiated by government or other organizations.

Focus groups are a commonly used format for seeking the views of stakeholders. According to Carson and Gelber (2001), a focus group consists of up to 25 people already involved in an issue (the key ‘stakeholders’ often identified through a ‘snowballing’ or word-of-mouth process) and is used to assess opinions about a particular issue. These participants meet once, or several times, in a relatively free but guided small group discussion lasting a few hours, and provide informal feedback to the commissioning body. Multiple focus groups may sometimes be used as various working groups for a project.

Because the participants tend to have a particular interest and strong views, focus groups should be used in conjunction with other, more representative forms of consultation. Furthermore, the participants may not necessarily be very representative of their own interest group. Carson and Gelber claim that focus groups may not invoke as much deliberation as some other methods because they concentrate on “tapping into already-existing knowledge and skills” (2001, 44). However, they are beneficial in providing the particular information relevant to the issue at hand and for providing the opportunity for in-depth discussion among relatively well-informed participants, which often leads to innovative solutions (see Carson and Gelber’s example of a focus group process used by a non-government – private sector partnership to improve their food
service). Focus groups may alternatively involve a random representative sample of the public in groups of up to 12 (Rowe and Frewer 2000).

**Task forces and advisory, steering and reference committees** are processes over quite a long period of time but nevertheless tend to engage stakeholders only intermittently (Government of Western Australia 2002a; Aslin and Brown 2004). These processes assemble representative stakeholders and can be important for providing input into policy-making and planning. As Chapter 2 and Appendix 1 established, a vast array of relatively long-term partnerships, alliances and collaborative groups have arisen around environmentally and/or socially based areas of concern. Further to this, natural resource management groups and regional forums have been a popular development around Australia and in many countries for some time; these involve a range of stakeholders from community and community organizations as well as government agencies, and often have a fair degree of community ownership. **Roundtables** tend to be quite enduring advisory bodies and the Government of Western Australia established a Sustainability Roundtable (soon after the release of its State Sustainability Strategy in 2003) which involves a range of participants from private, government and community sectors and encourages integrative approaches to policy issues and the development of partnerships.94 With the diversity of views involved, the efficiency and effectiveness of the processes described above are highly dependent on the strength of direction from the chair, quality of facilitation and encouragement of reflective dialogue.

**Processes combining citizen and stakeholder involvement**

A ‘search’ or ‘future search’ conference95 is a deliberative mechanism involving diverse stakeholders. It is a highly structured and intensive conference-style process involving on average 30-50 participants in small group and plenary discussions that usually take place over two consecutive days, with overnight stays to encourage greater engagement and identification with the process (Carson and Gelber 2001; Oels 2004;

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95 The ‘future’ search conference developed out of the search conference design but is typically a longer event (up to 3 days) where diverse participants have even greater opportunity to reflect on an issue and new ways of approaching it (Oels 2004). While the two terms have been used interchangeably in the literature, as I do here, Oels argues that future search conferences tend to involve, among other things, greater use of evocative methods such as drama, posting of disagreements rather than immediate discussion of them, and slightly larger numbers of people from both inside and outside the ‘system’ in question.
Hunt et al. 2003; Tamarack 2004). Again participants with a range of involvement in the issue and important knowledge and experience are carefully selected through word of mouth and networks of relationships (‘snowballing’), but they must be willing to work collaboratively in a participatory planning process to create specific outcomes. It is a particularly creative, collaborative and action-oriented process in which stakeholders of a community or organization are encouraged to recognize their respective knowledge, experience, concerns, and moreover interdependence, and to produce concrete sets of action plans and goals based on collaborative action.

Participants undertake a ‘futures search’ or big picture visioning exercise involving consideration of questions about where they want to be in the long-term, and then work backwards to develop the long-, medium- and short-term plans for achieving that vision. The process is particularly useful at the early stages of a planning process for envisioning alternatives and should be supported by continuing and wider consultation using various methods.

Search conferences have been used in various countries, including in Waterloo, Canada, in 1999, to discuss reduction of poverty in the region (Tamarack 2004), and in Melbourne, Australia, in the mid 1990s, to explore the range of issues related to allocation of arterial road space and the different needs of user groups, the conference objectives including consideration of ways to implement the principles of ecologically sustainable development (Carson and Gelber 2001). Search conferences have been used for several decades in the US and UK for community and organizational development. Oels provides interesting case studies of future search conferences used for Local Agenda 21 processes in Rushmoor Borough Council, UK (an area mostly economically dependent on its military presence), and in Gemeinde Olching, Germany (a rapidly developing area in dire need of social integration).96

Tilbury et al. (2005) describe some interesting case studies of processes fostering the involvement of stakeholders and citizens in decision-making. They illustrate the development and implementation of the Northern Rivers Regional Strategy in NSW, Australia as a participatory and collaborative approach involving a range of stakeholders in decision-making and action. The process included envisioning

96There is a website dedicated to the future search method: www.futuresearch.net.
workshops in which 150 community participants from a variety of backgrounds and interest groups were involved. It was jointly managed by the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, the Northern Rivers Regional Economic Development Organization and the Northern Rivers Regional Organization of Councils, with additional input from other state government departments. Tilbury et al. state that the development of the strategy included wide consultation and involvement of the community within the three local government areas covered by the region. Tilbury et al. also highlight a deliberative process used to help improve water quality at Bronte Beach, Sydney, which they claim “resulted in a demonstrated shift in perspectives across community groups and precincts, from minority and special interest views, to a position of collective and general interests” (2005, 31).

Processes of open participation

A recent innovation in community engagement is the world café method. World cafés are dialogical processes involving large numbers of invited participants in simultaneous deliberation at small group, café-style tables (Government of WA 2005). They are unique in encouraging participants to drift from table to table to join or begin new discussions, with one participant often remaining at a table as a host. This movement is significant in allowing for cross-pollination of ideas. Insights and suggestions from tables are later fed back to the entire group. The process is useful for addressing important issues and creating strategies for organizations and communities, as well as for local level planning involving local residents, organizations and council officials.97

I experienced this process as a demonstration at a conference in Perth in 2005 called Innovation in Community Engagement.98 While the process seems particularly conducive to more reflective and potentially transformative exchange in its informal and relaxed atmosphere, I thought the transience of participation at tables somewhat restricted the development of in-depth discussion and deeper understanding. The Conversation Café format used by the WA Collaboration, in which small groups simultaneously discuss an issue over dinner or refreshments for the length of an evening, provides perhaps better opportunities for in-depth and deeper level exchange.

97 For further information about the procedure and facilitation of it see www.theworldcafe.com.
A charrette is an intensive planning process facilitated by a team of planning practitioners that aims to produce specific outcomes within a short time frame (Carson and Gelber 2001). Plenary and small group meetings involving planning practitioners, stakeholders groups and members of the community (open participation, not random selection) take place over several consecutive days or weekends. Charrettes require considerable preparation time and resources and are therefore used when there is significant public agreement that ‘something should be done’ in an area in a short period of time (2001, 46). They are beneficial for provoking interchange of ideas between the various participants and for allowing meaningful community involvement throughout the process. However, they are not representative of the community, may not sufficiently involve marginalised groups and may attract people with strong views. They may also fail to allow adequate time for greater understanding of issues and perspectives to be developed. Carson and Gelber (2001) provide an example of a charrette used in 1996 to plan the redevelopment of the Villawood commercial centre in New South Wales.

Visioning processes, community cultural development and other creative processes

Agencies involved with communities in planning and visioning processes and ‘community cultural development’ are increasingly recognising the role of the arts in engaging community members and in helping to develop more cohesive and vibrant communities (see Mills and Brown 2004 and Kasemir et al. 2003 for examples of where artistic processes have been used). Planning processes involve consideration of a range of issues such as multiculturalism, health, education, housing and environment, and the use of creative arts such as photography, painting, collage, mosaics, theatre and music can enhance community engagement in planning processes by bringing these issues to life and making discussions more expressive and meaningful. Creative processes can encourage greater freedom of expression and more active participation, and thus can help empower participants to contribute to the development of their communities. They can also help establish a depth of expression and dialogue in participatory processes.

Such processes help bring about “community cultural development,” that is, “support aimed at strengthening the capacities of communities to develop and express their own

cultures” (Mills and Brown 2004, 6). In their guide “Art and Wellbeing” (a publication of the Australia Council), Mills and Brown (2004) highlight that “[c]ommunity cultural development has come to be understood as a collective process, often involving creativity interpreted in the broadest sense. This contributes to changes in people’s lives and long-term developmental benefits for a community” (6).

Community-based processes utilising the arts can help access a depth of local knowledge and vision that can better inform an agency’s policies or strategies. They can also encourage participants to be more receptive of the views and nuances of perspective of other participants because they encourage all participants to reflect on their own creative expressions and those of others. As such, the use of artworks in dialogical and deliberative processes can help expose underlying commonalities and differences in beliefs, values and perspectives and thus help promote more transformative exchange.

Processes using *appreciative inquiry* can bring similar benefits to those involving the arts. Appreciative inquiry is a change methodology that fosters innovation in various types of organizations through gathering of positive stories and inquiry into what is possible. The technique was adapted by the Imagine Chicago non-profit partnership to engage people in a conversation about the future of their city and engender greater community cohesion, and has been used in other places of the world, including in Kwinana, Western Australia, for cultural mapping. Between 1993 and 1994, an appreciative inquiry process involving intergenerational interviews was used in Chicago to gather stories and commitments (Browne, undated). Young adults, with the help of an adult mentor, were given the responsibility of interviewing various leaders in the community for their backgrounds and views about the future. This meant dialogue between people who might not normally have crossed paths. The process is beneficial for helping people gain an appreciation of the significance of other people’s life experiences and perspectives, and participants often learn that they have more in common with others than they thought, and care about the same things. These types of

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99 “Community cultural planning” is a variation of the term.
100 The Western Australian Community Arts Network (CAN) is an example of organization promoting such practices: see www.canwa.com.au.
techniques have been used in various settings and can also be effective in creating foundations for deliberation: inquiry processes could be used in workshops and forums to set the tone for reflective dialogue and deliberation.

**Appendix 3: Topics and questions for interviews conducted with four key participants in 2004**

Since the interviews were semi-structured, the following questions were used as a guide only.

**Background and approach**

- Could you briefly describe what you did before working in the Sustainability Policy Unit (SPU)?
- Why did you choose to work in the SPU?
- How do you see the role of the SPU?

- How has your view of sustainability developed over time?
- Currently, how do you conceptualize (understand) sustainability? (personal not government)
- What values relating to sustainability do you carry to your work?
- How well does your own view of sustainability meet that of government?
- Has your work and engagement with various stakeholders and the public over policy-making caused any shifts in your view of sustainability?
- What kinds of changes are needed for sustainability?
- What is the role of government in progressing sustainability?
- What is the role of civil society?
- What is the role of partnership between sectors?
- How important is public participation and community engagement for sustainability? *Why* is it important?
  - How do you see the relationship between good governance and sustainability? Is good governance a means or process for achieving sustainability or is it itself a fundamental element or principle of sustainability, an end in itself?

**Sustainability policy-making processes**

- What has your experience of sustainability policy-making been like? Reception/success?
- To what extent has sustainability policy-making been a ‘whole of government’ effort/approach, and cross-sectoral?
- How could it have been done differently?
- How would you describe the stakeholder and public consultation and engagement that occurred in the processes you experienced? – how substantial and effective?

101 Focus groups were later part of this process. The Imagine Chicago process was generally effective in inspiring hope and a sense of responsibility and commitment within the greater Chicago community. For further information see www.imaginechicago.org.
• What consultation and engagement would you have liked to have seen?
• What are the strengths and weaknesses of the SSS?
  - from government perspective?
  - response from other agencies and the public?
• What response have you had to the principles of sustainability as outlined in the SSS and Code of Practice? Which has had more debate over it: the principles or the actions? Why do you think that is?
• What needs to be done in terms of progressing the SSS? Implementation? Ongoing deliberation?
• What is the role of the Sustainability Roundtable in furthering partnerships and collaboration and what other initiatives might be needed for this?

**Role of WA Collaboration in policy-making and governance, & WAC-government relationship**

• What do you see as the role of the WAC? (your perspective)
• From a government perspective, why would partnership with the WAC be important?
• Why do you think the WAC would seek partnership with govt?
• What do you think have been the achievements and failings/inadequacies of the WAC? What expectations might people (sectors and wider community) have had and to what extent have these been met?
• How useful do you think the Collaboration has been for government policy-making processes?
• What did you find to be the strengths and weaknesses of the CSA? How useful was it as input?
• What has been the relationship between WAC and state govt?
• How do you feel about the current relationship?
• What are your hopes/aspirations for the relationship?

**Democratic governance and role of public engagement in sustainability policy-making**

_Earlier I asked you about the relationship between good governance and sustainability. I’d like to explore that a bit further now._

• What are the respective roles of the sectors (government, civil society and business) in encouraging deliberative policy-making?
• What should be the role of public engagement in sustainability policy-making processes?
• What difficulties are faced when trying to ensure quality public participation in policy?

**Creating transactional space**

_We’ve talked about the various roles of the sectors and the potential spaces and opportunities in developing partnerships, but now I’d like to ask you about this in terms of ‘transactional space’ which I consider is important for partnerships. In my thesis I develop the notion of ‘transactional space’ as an overarching term for deliberative and dialogical interaction that is inclusive of diversity and allows for real exchange - and therefore cultural change. This can take place through people engaging in the everyday experiences or stories of others, and in turn expressing their perspectives and values. Basically, I see transactional space as an opportunity space for communication that helps break down barriers, and because policy discussions around sustainability issues necessarily bring in so many perspectives, I think this kind of space is essential to sustainability._

• What is your response to this? (Do you agree/disagree? Why?) What kinds of forums or spaces are needed for sustainability and what kind of techniques can engage people’s
experiences, perspectives and values? How important are these processes to sustainability?

- What is your experience of this? Where has such deeper dialogue been effective or problematic/difficult?
- How can this kind of space be encouraged or created?
- What should such space involve?
- What have you observed in sustainability discussions?
- What strategies, techniques and methods are needed to facilitate the opening up of value difference in public participation?
- To what extent has government been a facilitator for interaction between sectors at the level of negotiating value difference?
- How could government foster more of this interaction, create more opportunities for this? What kinds of spaces do you think it could help develop?
- To relate this back to the WA Collaboration-state government relationship, to what extent has state govt entered into a dialogical process with the WAC? What formal arrangements could be made to ensure such dialogue?

Appendix 4: Topics and questions for interviews conducted with the Steering Committee in 2003

Since the interviews were semi-structured, the following questions were used as a guide only.

**Background of organization**

*Could you please tell me about the background of your organization?*

- History: How started? People involved? Its culture? Recent activities and important issues?
- Changed over time? (How has it responded to changes/external pressures such as shifts in government policy?)
- How did you become involved in it?
- How/why did your organization get involved in the WA Collaboration? What does it hope to achieve by being involved in the Collaboration?

**Approach to sustainability**

*I’d like to ask you about your organization’s approach to sustainability*

- How would you describe your organization’s approach to sustainability?
- General philosophy in this regard? How it relates to sustainability?
- Has its approach to sustainability changed over time? In what way(s)?
- What would you say are its key values relating to sustainability? (i.e. the values relating to sustainability that underpin the outlook and activities of your organization)
- How have these values evolved?
- How do these values affect your organization’s approach to sustainability?
- What are your organization’s priorities in terms of sustainability?
- Some people refer to three dimensions of sustainability or a triple bottom line, i.e. social, environmental and economic, and some to a quadruple bottom line, i.e. social,
cultural, ecological and economic dimensions. What does your organization prefer to use and why?

- What do you think about trying to integrate the dimensions in interpretations of sustainability? What are the challenges/tensions this integration presents?
- Does your organization use a particular model for sustainability? For example, interlocking circles model or concentric circles/nested systems model (economy sitting inside society which in turn sits within environment) – Participants were shown illustrations of the two models.
- What interpretation/conception of sustainability do you bring as a representative of your organization to participation in the Steering Committee? i.e. how would you sum up your organization’s approach to sustainability? i.e. what does sustainability mean for your organization?
- What change is required for sustainability?

The collaboration process

I’d like to ask you about the collaboration process itself:

- How have you found the Steering Committee process?
- What have been its strong points? What have been its frustrations?
- How do you think the groups have worked together?
- Have any links formed between organizations around issues?
- Have you been aware of differing orientations among members of the Steering Committee?
- Earlier I asked you about your organization’s key values in relation to sustainability. How do these values affect your participation in the Steering Committee?
- “It’s often easier to agree over the (core) principles of sustainability than over the specific actions we should take.” Would you agree with this statement? Why/why not? Have you experienced difficulty in this regard? What issue was involved? Could you tell me more about this experience?
- What do you see as important for development of the process of collaboration? (in terms of both the Steering Committee and wider network of participants)
- The WA Collaboration has made considerable progress in involving the community but still has some way to go. How can the WAC better involve the community in the future? What do you see as key strategies, techniques for community engagement?

The CSA

I’d like to ask you about the Community Sustainability Agenda (CSA).

- How does your organization see the CSA in terms of its own key values?
- What do you see as the key priorities of the CSA?
- How does your organization view the CSA in relationship to the State Sustainability Strategy?
- Do you have any thoughts on the CSA in terms of …
  - Process, opportunities, possible outcomes?
  - Strengths, weaknesses?

Expectations of WAC

I’d like to ask you about your expectations of the WA Collaboration

- What do you see as the role of the WA Collaboration?
- What are your expectations regarding the WA Collaboration’s contribution? In what ways can it most contribute?
• Where to from here do you think for the WA Collaboration?

Future of the organization

Finally, looking at the future of your organization, where do you think it will head in terms of sustainability?

• How has its involvement in the WA Collaboration shaped this?

Appendix 5: Summaries of the backgrounds and perspectives of the Steering Committee organizations

These are presented here in the same format as they were to the Steering Committee organizations.

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMISSION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Background of organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>History</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Change over time</td>
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<td><strong>People &amp; culture</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Recent important issues</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Why involved in WAC</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Change over time; Challenges / tensions between dimensions

- Kathryn asked about sustainability from an Indigenous perspective. Response:
  - Conception of sust varies from place to place; particular places sacred/significant for Indig people but others open for economic devt or mining; some Aboriginal communities use solar power & look at things less destructive to envir & cheaper to run – depends where tech solutions are appropriate & viable – knowledge of tech develops & is adopted over time as deal with other orgs/become aware of what’s out there & appropriate
  - Things have been happening for a while that haven’t been called sust e.g. Centre for Appropriate Technology in Alice Springs (funded by ATSIC)

### Values

- Care for country
- Sustainable economic independence
- Community governance; Strong & safe communities

### Summed up conception brought to SC

- Balance between social, envir, econ priorities
- Recognition of position, needs & rights of Indig people - voice for them

### Priorities

- Family violence Action Plan – addressing safety & security of children
- Community governance

### Change required

- Econ not to be sole indicator of progress (social & envir indicators); need an indicator for society i.e. ‘happiness’
- Education/empowerment of Abor People to participate in decisions at local & nat. level; if not Native Title at least right to be heard & respected (attitudinal change)

### 3. The collaboration process

#### Thoughts on SC process (strong points, frustrations etc)

- User-friendly
- Expected more exchange of views, addressing differences but been focused on workshops, tasks, CSA etc, so that stuff may still happen
- Weakness is couple of orgs not represented well (especially Unions) – need commitment; perhaps those orgs don’t see there is potential for their org to benefit

#### Groups providing strong links /contributions

- Links with Cons Council on protection of Abor Heritage & with Churches on others
- WACOSS – Cons C obvious connections in same corridor
- Cons C strong with Coordinator based there
- Cons C – WASIG on envir

#### Respecting difference while acting on areas of common interest

- Haven’t explored this enough; have said we will but opportunities not arisen; have more need for this now at implementation time
- Certainly willingness on SC to listen to other points of view & accommodate if possible, but haven’t reached points where say ‘can’t go there’ yet

#### How values of org affect its participation in SC

- Difficulty distinguishing between own views & values and those of ATSIC but conscious there to represent org & Indigenous point of view & bring it forward

#### “It’s often easier to agree over the core principles of sust than over the specific actions we should take”

- Agree
- Not many disagreements in SC but could be disputes over priorities when come to it
- E.g. restriction on age or cars for emission reasons would be a problem for Aboriginal people who can only afford older cars & govt rebates for water saving appliances only for people who can afford new – disadvantage

#### How to further develop collaboration (for SC)

- Important to actually say where org is coming from to qualify preconceptions/assumptions; collaborations tend to be limited by lack of time/energy
- Listen and respect other views
- Don’t ignore areas of disagreement/conflict – deal with & learn from them
- Explore opportunities for partnerships to support each other

#### How WAC can increase community involvement

- Need for Aboriginal involvement at local level (Abor presence weak at WAC reg workshops – may be not appropriate events for them – perhaps try sub-committees in areas where there’s interest)
- Involve at local level by forming similar partnerships to SC range of groups in local areas e.g. Fremantle WA Collaboration

### 4. The CSA

#### Org’s perspective: Strengths, weaknesses, potential etc

- Happy has strong Aboriginal focus
- ATSIC Regional Councils have copies and are encouraged to use it in relation to developing their plans
- Success of CSA depends on what the State and WAC does with it – can’t just sit on shelf
CSA and SSS; WAC-govt relationship
- Indigenous parts of CSA seem to have been taken up by those developing SSS
- WAC must sit down & ask “How do we make this work?” – work ourselves through community organizations but also lobby the State (community & State responsibility) – keep saying “These are the priorities for the community. This is what the community wants”

5. Expectations of WAC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General expectations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potential for partnerships within WAC e.g. ATSIC - Cons Council on submission to Aboriginal Fishing Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploit WAC’s as a collective – use it as very strong voice for all WAC groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More exchange of views</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lobby govt; voice for community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide information to community groups</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>How it could most contribute</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying govt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local action groups</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future directions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explore partnerships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop local mixes of groups so WAC more active on local level – if not seen as active then less effective as lobby group</td>
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</table>

6. Future of the org

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future in terms of sust and whether shaped by WAC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future unsure due to Minister’s review; shape of org may change dramatically</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential for ATSIC Regional Plans to incorporate stuff from CSA &amp; for ATSIC-govt collaborations on the plans to influence way govt agencies deliver their programs in regional areas (i.e. interstate regions as well) – impact in the sense of raising awareness of sust issues not actually shaping orgs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Possibilities for partnerships at reg level e.g. with WACOSS, Churches, envir groups</td>
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CONSERVATION COUNCIL WA

The Conservation Council was initially involved in the WA Collaboration under the banner of the wider group of the Environmental Alliance, but later participated as the Conservation Council.

1. Background of organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History; Change over time (regarding both Cons. Council and Environmental Alliance)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Envir Alliance (EA) created during 2001 state election; most work is done by Cons Council (CC) - main driver; overlap of CC affiliates &amp; EA groups; loose alliance; started sust push in its submission to SSS ‘Sustainability Now’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EA currently not active, only come under banner of EA for special occasions; meeting of EA may be triggered again by final SSS, Gorgon, WA Greenhouse Strategy, may get more active towards election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC: started 1967, was voluntary, less professional &amp; focussed around local issues, now 11-12 paid staff (most ever) rounded in interests &amp; backgrounds (not pushing own barrow), 70 affiliated conservation groups, formal policies, also has concerns at national &amp; international level e.g. climate change; funding: federal &amp; state grants, donations for particular campaigns etc</td>
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<tr>
<td>CC higher level of engagement with govt in recent years but disappointment with govt commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC varies across issues &amp; time – choose highest priority issues; works through supporting member groups &amp; filling in gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspicion of development proposals, govt obsession with jobs &amp; profit; by necessity usually responding in negative to development proposals; but sometimes respond positively e.g. actively promoting Freo windfarm proposal, Biodiversity Act WA &amp; Federal renewable energy policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long established relationships between EA people; smoothly running partnerships of groups (informal, fluid communications)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-violent, cooperative, advocacy – always trying to improve policy</td>
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<td>Collaborative approach, buzz of working together</td>
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<td>Strong commitment to envir &amp; sust &amp; community pushing govt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scepticism of corporate behaviour &amp; govt motivations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong sense of urgency at extent of envir damage (stressful &amp; emotional)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Recent important issues
- Pursuing CSA with WAC
- Pursuing WAC agenda with all SC members together as whole

See issues under ‘priorities’ in next section

### Why/how started WAC
- EA aware of Aust Collab model & wanted similar effort on state level but to go further i.e. an active group
- Drove WAC application, public consultation important so grant for seminars
- Shame couldn’t get Youth Council & Aged Council in WAC

### 2. Approach to sustainability

#### General approach
- Sust approach gradually evolved since at least early 90s & especially last 4 yrs focus; approach becoming more sophisticated, breaking new ground & ahead of govt thinking, but still needs more sophistication
- Sust an overriding principle, vision is people behaving in sust manner; sust approach should override everything we do (overall philosophy)
- Greater & better community involvement big part of sust approach; govt to establish better governance framework
- Sust approach: 1. Effort to do scientific work on what envir can handle; 2. Then how to use resources sustainably; 3. Then what this means for economy & society
- Still nervousness with TBL, term used tokenistically
- Econ a tool to achieve social & envir (not value econ per se); need to redefine sust; debate of sust hijacked to mean econ goals or tradeoffs
- Prefer using ‘sust’ to ‘SD’
- All 3 bottom lines about same thing; social justice in long term (future generations) depends on using envir properly; envir theme in every aspect of TBL
- Potential to have conflict with Unions over development proposals that bring jobs but want same thing just CC wants ‘green jobs’ & people to be assisted in transition to ‘green jobs’
- Dimensions: can’t pull out strands, seen as thing across everything, not see boundaries but need to operationalise/visualise in 3; not like interlocking circles as too minimalist & writes off area not interlocked; prefer concentric circles to visualise sust (econ sitting in social & those sitting in large envir circle)
- Always been strong pro-science message; speedy progress to best practices & envir industries
- Concepts of sust expanded, especially doing CSA; WAC exposed CC to social equity issues that weren’t so aware of earlier – broadened understanding of what the challenges are for sust (the social & equity implications) e.g. water pricing: different perspectives but found common ground & closer to agreeing (price to reflect value of resource but not across board price increase – basic services to be means tested

#### Dimensions, preferred model etc; challenges tensions

#### Change over time
- envir integrity (intrinsic value of envir/right to exist)
- social justice & equity; basic provision of community services by govt
- democracy, community involvement
- sense of urgency for transition to sust human development
- envir underpins everything (logistically biggest limitation) but is not every issue

#### Values

#### Summed up conception brought to SC
- trying to meet objectives of 3 dimensions; trying to meet envir & social objectives using econ appropriately as means of getting there
- vision of whole of community approach as process for decision-making; new way of doing business
- envir as minimum condition (needs to be met in any debate before take on board social issues)

#### Priorities; Change required for sust
- climate change, greenhouse emissions & industry adapting; biodiversity & stability of ecology; natural resource management (including revegetation for salinity); water, forests, marine etc
- ‘green jobs’ for sust i.e. in land protection & rehabilitation
- institutional arrangements for such issues e.g. Sustainability Commission, better indicators, whole of govt approach, better legislation, redoing economics (GDP etc), social issues
- relationships, common insights where build trust (sust is also about process of making decisions)
### 3. The collaboration process

| Thoughts on SC process (strong points, frustrations etc) | Enjoyed working with committed people, surprised can establish common principles, worked together well, open dialogue, Summit & CSA successes  
Coordinator brings whole group along  
Not yet stuck into negative stuff  
Union presence needed, especially for detailed discussions, to understand their view  
WA SIG philosophical approach different as is a different type of org  
Fluctuating levels of commitment/attendance; busy people  
Trying to meet challenges with limited resources  
SC structure & process appropriate but could share/delegate workload among affiliates  
Humility of policy people – learning from process of dialogue  
Each org’s understanding of sust varies & different levels of understanding of it |
| --- | --- |
| Groups providing strong links/contributions | WACOSS & Churches have links and tend to have to speak on behalf of their affiliates  
CC strong contribution because host  
CC & WACOSS on Sust Housing Project: taken holistic approach, constant dialogue  
WAC opens doors to work with other orgs  
Effort of orgs depends on the issue, people contributing at their capacity |
| Respecting difference while acting on areas of common interest | Potential for conflict always there – proceed with caution  
Started accommodating differences, learning heaps  
WAC always aims to find common ground but at same time individual differences; room for further discussions of commonalities & difference  
Interrelated consequences for member orgs |
| How values of org affect its participation in SC | Put forward envir focus  
Usually can agree with other orgs  
Don’t feel like are reps – just people talking together (usually doesn’t have to descend into referring to rep org) |
| “It’s often easier to agree over the core principles of sust than over the specific actions we should take” | True, have been operating on high level of generalisation  
Have agreed on principles but specific actions will be more complicated |
| How to further develop collaboration (for SC) | Tease out differences  
Partnerships within SC e.g. WACOSS & CC to comment on each other’s policies  
Pass around policies of orgs asking “What jumps out at you?”  
Facilitating industries doing right thing e.g. CC policies supporting WA SIG  
How to prioritise areas of future action  
Look at similarities & differences  
Face to face meetings important to build trust & understanding of where each other are coming from  
Healthy robust dialogue important |
| How WAC can increase community involvement | Need to look at how to engage communities & how communities can make a difference  
Don’t consult to death  
Feed back to people who attended workshops & specific projects so they are consulted for a result  
Ask where communities really want to go & how WAC can help  
Need resources for behavioural change  
Sust often not seen as urgent enough – ways to make meetings more interesting e.g. good speakers  
Workshop on how to make sust more appealing (& how to attract Unions) |

### 4. The CSA

| Org’s perspective: Strengths, weaknesses, potential etc | Supportive  
Is oriented towards govt but much can be done outside govt  
Important changes within CSA: Sust Commission (body to advocate sust across govt); Sust Act (bring all legislation together in review); resources for SPU to implement sust; govt to provide tools for NGOs & community to do their work  
Good collection of recs & good for lobbying govt (reminder to be conscious of other recs)  
Have used it to lobby govt from CC perspective |
| --- | --- |
| CSA and SSS; WAC-govt relationship | Not direct response to SSS but SS a catalyst for CSA; 2 roles: submission & agenda  
Want CSA to be basis for partnership between community & govt on sust (at least govt to acknowledge CSA); institutional reform needs attention  
CSA more focussed, community oriented, a stand-alone doc  
Disappointed with SSS |
### 5. Expectations of WAC

| General expectations | • Hope long-term project, ongoing dialogue  
|                      | • Attracting genuine community engagement |
| Role                | • Forum between different NGO sectors for common ground for influencing & promoting sust agenda  
|                     | • Broad base to work with range of sectors & orgs, committed, focussed on sust  
|                     | • Inspires NGOs & community orgs as to what is possible in alliances |
| How it could most contribute | • Pro-active in pursuing CSA; Target priorities where can make a difference  
|                     | • Community leaders  
|                     | • Drive projects or hitch on to others  
|                     | • Getting groups to work together in their areas/region |
| Future directions   | • Local level WACs – message to go beyond normal operations; strength of establishing multiple goals & common ground  
|                     | • Sust indicators project  
|                     | • Focus on particular aspects of CSA for next election |
| New trend in public participation in policy? | • Yes in terms of working cross-sector/new way of doing business  
|                     | • Community having expertise |

### 6. Future of the org

| Future in terms of sust and whether shaped by WAC | • CC key envir focus but shaped; more collaborations with other orgs but keep advocacy role; sust focus has been through WAC but sometimes need separate submission  
|                                                     | • Now think of social consequences; friendly rapport with WACOSS so can get them to comment on CC policies |

### COUNCIL OF CHURCHES WA

#### 1. Background of organization

| History               | After WWII was part of movt to bring end to violence: World Council of Churches, United Nations, other secular and Christian internat. orgs, churches came together at internat. conferences about missions; student Christian movt; ecumenical movt founded on idea ‘We just have to learn to live together, talk and belong together’  
|                      | CCWA began as WA committee for Aust committee of World Council of Churches, evolved into other names as more churches joined and defined the org; aim to be forum for Christian churches to get tog. and talk about unity; overcome divisions; can do more tog i.e. some amazing institutions & initiatives started from discussions in this org |
| Change over time      | Funding issues affect staff numbers over time  
|                      | Issues/work changes all the time (except overseas aid) – whatever most pressing  
| People & culture     | Christian culture: high value on social justice, tolerance of difference, being a voice/advocate on behalf of others (raising money for overseas aid/devt., less privileged); ‘trying to do our bit to change the world’ |
| Recent important issues | Practical assistance to refugees, advocating for change in govt policy  
|                     | Peace initiatives (Perth a hotbed for this)  
|                     | Prison reform; setting up justice institution |
| Why involved in WAC  | Surprise invite, hadn’t done particular work on ‘justice, peace and the integrity of creation’ for about 20 yrs – involved in it before ‘sustainability’ existed as a word  
|                     | Interest in community development so saw WAC as worthwhile thing to do |

#### 2. Approach to sustainability

| General approach | CCWA working on sust all the time but focussed on global scene rather than local, but global sust issues like peace and overseas aid and devt are often not found on forefront; picture of world of how people in western culture damaging to creation & other people; but sometimes particular sust issues e.g. Social justice Sunday last year theme was envir, this year was racism – most of what CCWA does is related to sust, and so is harmony or community development  
| Dimensions, preferred model etc | Uses ‘social justice’ and ‘sust’ interchangeably  
|                     | Human side of sust/anthropocentric view but recognising welfare of people dependent on welfare of envir that supports them; not conservation of envir above all else but rather conservation that does not destroy human communities but enhances them; at same time recognising human communities have to change (can’t have consumerist lifestyle, can’t have divide between rich and poor)  
|                     | Wouldn’t like to see certain number of dimensions or envir as dominant – sust is ‘everything’ – can’t do it without cultural or spiritual values, politics, economics... – not
| Change over time | • Christian thought changes all the time; people approach foundational texts with modern understandings; been doing theology differently for 60 yrs now; informs and changes way we think about faith and then how we act in world; theology is bringing foundations to bear on whatever is current crisis, bringing faith and where you are together; sust just a different language for what churches have been doing, not really change what they are doing |
| Challenges / tensions between dimensions | • If talk to each other long enough will find are talking about same thing in end but in beginning is hard e.g. water crisis WA, price rise impact on people with low income – all want same thing/goal (appreciation of value of water resources in our community & good management) but must have fair way of getting there – churches’ role in educating about being thankful for resources and have responsibility doesn’t impact on others but harder to get same appreciation when go out into non-practising/non-faith community, can only persuade, can’t force goodness on people |
| Values | • Christian point of view but not at all exclusive of worldviews of others |
| Values | • Unity: better to work collaboratively rather than in isolation |
| Values | • Justice and fairness for all; all to have basics in life met |
| Values | • Reflect multi-cultural and multi-ethnic culture of the church |
| Summed up conception brought to SC | • Human responsibility for our interactions with each other in God’s creation |
| Summed up conception brought to SC | • Spirituality, ethics, morality |
| Priorities; Change required for sust | • Change ought to be made sooner than later but big change may not be sooner, so best can hope for is incremental change, which probably is not enough, but not impossible with faith in God in this process |

### 3. The collaboration process

| Thoughts on SC process (strong points, frustrations etc) | • For orgs who haven’t worked tog before done well to get things to happen, but all terribly busy and meetings not frequent so difficult to make things happen quickly |
| Thoughts on SC process (strong points, frustrations etc) | • Difficulty of CCWA being a peak of a peak of a peak so hard to get to grassroots level, but WAC as peaks coming tog. is its strength i.e. making public statements |
| Thoughts on SC process (strong points, frustrations etc) | • Wealth of experience/professionalism in community work/making things happen |
| Thoughts on SC process (strong points, frustrations etc) | • Pity ECCWA not always represented at meetings and Unions absence |
| Groups providing strong links / contributions | • Cons Council as initiator & sort of host of WAC |
| Groups providing strong links / contributions | • WACOSS and CCWA share similar advocacy re welfare issues |
| Respecting difference while acting on areas of common interest | • Will have to deal with issues of difference when get beyond organizational stuff |
| Respecting difference while acting on areas of common interest | • Have to talk more (can ‘agree to disagree’ but better if find common) |
| How values of org affect its participation in SC | • Things better done collaboratively; openness to others’ views: develop collaboratively a way forward all agree with but at same time expect respect for where CCWA coming from e.g. word “God” in CSA |
| How values of org affect its participation in SC | • Social justice and making world a fairer & better place |
| “It’s often easier to agree over the core principles of sust than over the specific actions we should take” | • Agree |
| “It’s often easier to agree over the core principles of sust than over the specific actions we should take” | • Principles foundational but practicalities difficult when competing priorities e.g. do you close a sawmill for sake of forest or keep open for sake of workers? E.g. when comes to paying more for clothes so third world workers have decent conditions & pay, then decisions become difficult E.g. population: needs of refugees vs carrying capacity |
| How to further develop collaboration (for SC) | • Decide where to go next – steps to talk about |
| How to further develop collaboration (for SC) | • Inquire of each other (need more opportunity for learning) i.e. “How do you get to this point? What’s the way you understand that?” (got stuck into organization of WAC & though learning happened along the way was not enough) |
| How to further develop collaboration (for SC) | • Process of consensus building important: may not totally agree but if have been heard and can live with the outcome then ok & will put energy into supporting it – WAC has been doing this informally but at times will need a formal consensus model and commitment to the process/to working on it |
| How WAC can increase community involvement | • More affiliates to grassroots level involvement |
| How WAC can increase community involvement | • ‘Train the trainer’ manual that each community org adapts; a kit that explains sust and org takes it away & translates it/contextualises it (kit could get wider coverage in big state & outlast WAC) |

### 4. The CSA

| Org’s perspective: Strengths, weaknesses, potential etc | • Some of it’s closer to CCWA than others but fine to see actions for others to do – pretty much reflection of SC |
### 5. Expectations of WAC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General expectations</th>
<th>CSA much more accessible doc &amp; ground up process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SSS fairly bureaucratic &amp; narrow (lack of global perspective/our impact on rest of world)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Considering relationship with govt to date are best getting on &amp; working from community perspective</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Unique tool for making statements &amp; getting sust into public mind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model of unique formation of groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model that says sust is all of us working tog. not pushing own barrows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| How most contribute?: Future?: New trend in public participation? | Developing strategic partnerships/initiatives around particular areas; relationships built in WAC would enable CCWA to voice support for Indigenous community for example; E.g. involvement in issue of Federal Tax law & charities & impact on not-for-profit sector |

### 6. Future of the org

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future in terms of sust and whether shaped by WAC</th>
<th>Keep role of serving churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Every influence has its effect but sust stuff not great impact as believe churches already doing it anyway</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## ETHNIC COMMUNITIES COUNCIL OF WA

### 1. Background of organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History</th>
<th>25 yr history, original name International Communities Council then soon after Ethnic Communities Council of WA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Every state &amp; territory in Aust has council of this nature – national body Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Aust - &amp; regional councils, except WA unfortunately, WA largest state geographically &amp; needs them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political climate – culture of fear, persecution since Liberals in Fed e.g. Tampa</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1992-2002 funding stagnant</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crisis in leadership most levels most sectors – people not prepared to stand up &amp; be counted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Largely voluntary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diverse views but common sharing idea</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recent important issues</th>
<th>those who undermine hard won victories for multiculturalism, destroy public policy of multiculturalism e.g. One Nation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fighting for racism-free society, society allowing full potential, chances, lifestyle...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>making sure govt fulfils its promise to review state’s racial vilification legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>changing the Multiculturalism Charter – currently inadequate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>establishing a state-based translating &amp; interpreting service</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>infringements of human rights in relation to asylum seekers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>govt abandoning funding of migrant resource centres</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Major conference soon Health &amp; Wellbeing of Ethnic Women</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Absence of social security support for new migrants in first 2 yrs – most vulnerable time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plight of young – unemployment etc</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family migration &amp; refugees rather than just skilled – we are part of the world &amp; can’t ignore needs of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressing Aboriginal reconciliation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why involved in WAC</th>
<th>Issues too big for ECC to address properly – opportunity to advance values, goals through WAC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share views &amp; issues of orgs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pooling of resources &amp; energies for inextricably interlinked goals, issues – review the issues e.g. immigration &amp; population highly contentious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. Approach to sustainability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General approach</th>
<th>Inappropriate to look at its components separately – inextricably related</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human rights, social perspective needs sust as whole – results we want to achieve so tied up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not one size fits all approach to sust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lasting solutions for sust need give on all sides – openness mindset (CSA good e.g., combination of positions work together)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Challenges / tensions between Change over time

- At end of day are human beings first; human rights more important recently
- Some of WAC not share human rights as much as ECC
- WAC given ECC opportunity to explore sust in much broader context

### Values

- same sort as most Australians share, not just ethnic: equity, democracy, human rights (dignity of humans)
- concern for future generations
- Aboriginal reconciliation

### Summed up conception brought to SC

- Sust is about a fair deal in achieving objectives in 3 areas without jeopardising any of them

### Priorities; Change required for sust

- addressing way Aboriginal Australians been treated & failure of reconciliation
- development aid: migration ‘push’ factors cause more refugees, not ‘pull’; downward trend of funding for genuine aid; restructuring society to reduce rich/poor gap; impact of globalisation (shouldn’t tie aid to certain goods/services); look at envir factors (envir refugees)
- can’t ignore sust from econ perspective – employment opportunities for all, sharing work, all to realise full potential, otherwise social impacts e.g. drugs, crime, mental health (intertwined)
- inequities in housing market & future generations (look at social & econ together)
- ignore envir at our peril (impact socially & economically)
- sectoral divides make things difficult; should pool resources with minimal friction
- can’t ignore sust from econ perspective – employment opportunities for all, sharing work, all to realise full potential, otherwise social impacts e.g. drugs, crime, mental health (intertwined)
- inequities in housing market & future generations (look at social & econ together)
- ignore envir at our peril (impact socially & economically)
- sectoral divides make things difficult; should pool resources with minimal friction

### 3. The collaboration process

#### Thoughts on SC process (strong points, frustrations etc)

- fascinating
- Linkages established now enable constituents of all bodies to look beyond immediate objectives to have fuller idea of sust
- Strong: amazing arrived where have in short time & little resources – know of no other process with such competing interests, but not argy bargy, managed to pull together issues; larger agenda influence your own – all orgs have something to gain
- Frustrations: Not all priorities got a hearing at last strategic planning workshop

#### Respecting difference while acting on areas of common interest

- Issue one can never avoid – used to diversity context working in multiculturalism area
- Are some core values would never like to give up i.e. dignity of humans (concern about discrimination)
- The fact that have been able to come together on CSA indicates good level of commonality and preparedness to work together
- “It’s often easier to agree over the core principles of sust than over the specific actions we should take”
- Agree

#### How to further develop collaboration (for SC)

- See expectations section

#### How WAC can increase community involvement

- See expectations section

### 4. The CSA

#### Org’s perspective:

- Combination of positions work well, openness, but implementing harder i.e. different groups that use it
- Unsure how to implement in integrated way – not funding for it

#### CSA and SSS; WAC-govt relationship

- If don’t lobby, impress upon govt, then won’t succeed
- CSA more wider/comprehensive priorities than SSS – SSS not comprehensive from social & human rights perspective
- Need plan of action so CSA doesn’t fall off the rack – kid ourselves if political expediency not important

### 5. Expectations of WAC

#### General expectations

- Potential for partnerships around particular areas
### Role & How it could most contribute
- Forum bringing together sectors that have had little to do with each other for specific purpose of looking at sust from all perspectives (opportunities when come together, harnessing commitment); diverse grouping of interest on sust
- Gives oppor to look beyond own areas of work

### Future directions
- Too many chiefs not many Indians – implementing CSA – SC too busy to do this
- Look at staffing & funding – need infrastructure in place to achieve goals & objectives of CSA
- Get subcommittees/taskforces for sections of CSA i.e. affiliated members of WAC & experts to pursue plans of action (but keep distinction of SC for credibility & distinct identity of partners)

### New trend?
- Cross sector participation new
- Grassroots level participation has changed dramatically in recent times; only recently govt emphasis on citizenship & participation in public policy

### 6. Future of the org

#### Future in terms of sust and whether shaped by WAC
- ECC continue work in WAC but level of commitment dependent upon staffing & resources
- ECC’s values too close to WAC to abandon involvement

## UNIONS WA

### 1. Background of organization

#### History
- History of Unions WA dates back to early 60s; was previously affiliated to Labor party and called Trades and Labor Council (TLC); has since disaffiliated from Labor party and now stands alone
- Union movement in WA dates back to late 19th century, starting out of Kalgoorlie
- Unions WA an overarching body for the workers unions affiliated to it but the individual unions still have autonomy; majority of unions in WA are affiliated to Unions WA; role of unions is to protect people’s rights in the workplace; Unions WA represents broader workforce and unions expectations, strives for safety and more rewarding/satisfying jobs and accordingly develops and advocates positions
- Has been marked decline in union membership for a number of years although membership recently increasing; union membership now only 20% of workforce; deregulation of labour market has meant individual enterprises and workers now set contracts rather than through union involvement so power of unions has decreased; statistically pay and conditions better if union involvement
- Unions WA has also had to respond to changing face of workplace: huge increases in casual and part-time work and decreases in full-time permanent work; now over ¼ jobs are casual; during 90s 87% of new jobs earned less than $25,000/pa; this fluidity makes it harder for unions to organize, get members, have active role in workplace; response is employing new strategies for organising including ‘organising’ rather than ‘servicing’ model which means resolving issues through workplace participation instead of simply reacting to individual issues
- Moved to "employment security" rather than "job security"- up-skilling people for better and more rewarding jobs and better products and services
- Culture is to try to empower workforce to be able to deal with its own issues at the workplace level
- Great diversity among affiliated unions therefore different strategies important for different issues in workplaces and different work cultures

#### Change over time
- Decline in union membership
- Workers compensation legislation
- Changes to industrial relations legislation
- “Employment” rather than “job” security
- Unions WA reflects societal trends because workers are part of society e.g., trends towards environmental protection, more fairness, diversity in the workplace
- Jeff’s job is different to more traditional Unions WA role: his job is to maximise job opportunities for Western Australians and therefore to encourage utilisation of local workforce and resources rather than work going offshore

#### People & culture
- Society’s and union members’ expectations: want not only welfare, improved conditions, but also environmental responsibility
- Often surprises government the range of what unions are interested in and that unions not only driven by union membership and direct employment issues e.g., Unions WA was a leading voice supporting freedom for East Timorese, early days of Medicare, many social issues

#### Recent important issues
- Workers compensation legislation
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#### Why involved in WAC
- Society’s and union members’ expectations: want not only welfare, improved conditions, but also environmental responsibility
- Often surprises government the range of what unions are interested in and that unions not only driven by union membership and direct employment issues e.g., Unions WA was a leading voice supporting freedom for East Timorese, early days of Medicare, many social issues
policies put up by state or national union bodies and taken up by governments
- Members of unions would support principles of WAC
- Important for unions to participate in sorts of decisions WAC involved in; sustainable
development complex and requires input from multiple parties

2. Approach to sustainability

| General approach | • Realisation that sustainable development is probably only way to move forward: allows
opportunity for people to live the way they wish but also realisation of need to avoid harm
to environment in process; realisation can’t separate environment from development and
can’t separate sustainable development from jobs, are interlinked
• ‘Development for development’s sake’ is a dead issue
• Wouldn’t use either models because suggest boundaries and interlocking circles model
suggests areas where there isn’t overlaps when all are too interrelated, mixed e.g.. “Onion
soup” where you have layers to start with but if want fair society then need to mix them
up, rather than onion-type drawing of layers of concentric circles model |

| Dimensions, preferred model etc | Challenges /
tensions | • Question of whether sustainable development provides job opportunities
• Challenge in the comfortable assumption that the way it is is ok, that exploitation and
greed is ok; challenge to change mindset |

| Values | • Equity and equality: all are able to access wealth generation
• Choice for people to develop themselves as they wish
• Safety
• Having an environmental future |

| Summed up conception brought to SC | • Keeping employment continuing through quality job opportunities; understanding that
sustainable development and jobs fundamentally compatible and at same time recognition
that jobs will change e.g.. opportunity for jobs growth in industries that deal with
renewables and other forms of sustainable development; recognition that this change has
to be managed with the assistance of unions; Unions WA has always responded to
changes in the workforce and strive to make sure workers are involved in the change
process and job design and have fair access to skill development; striving to be pro-active
rather than reactive |

| Priorities; Change required for sustainability | • ‘Growth for sake of growth’ mentality has to be addressed; old concept and need to look
at cost of growth; can’t put off the debate that is needed
• Need to consider how to grow in the sense of everybody getting a fair share
• Types of jobs will change
• Understanding of what sustainability development is needs to be developed; still broad
and grey area in unions so need to debug negative ideas that SD doesn’t support jobs and
seek facts to identify what SD would mean for employment |

3. The collaboration process

| Thoughts on SC process (strong points, frustrations etc) | • Not much tension between different views because when go deeper you find you are in the
same place e.g.. Unions WA supports equity and diversity like other groups
• Don’t see how any objectives of SC groups would be contrary
• Terminology different to start but once through the words can see common ground
• Would like magic wand for more resources! |

| Respecting difference while acting on areas of common interest | • People in SC do respect difference; group usually ends up at same place once you start
discussing what it actually means; any misunderstandings are quickly realised |

| “It’s often easier to agree over the core principles of sustainability than over the specific
actions we should take” | • Yes to an extent because interesting and necessary debate will come when start
prioritising, which comes first, which leads naturally to the next; that’s where much work
and discussion will occur; attitude seems to be that people will work through that |

| How to further develop collaboration (for SC) | • Reminding ourselves of basics that are there for an equitable and sustainable future can
pull thoughts back into line
• Getting down to nuts and bolts of policy issues, actual tasks of policy positions, using
consensus-building processes; may need more resources or sub groups to progress to
additional tasks; need current high level discussion but also need to get down to level of
smaller detail, drilling down and picking up particular issues, developing a position and
maybe with a job attached to it doing it |

| How WAC can increase community involvement | • Need to increase awareness of existence of WAC: advertising or education process so
people start seeing usefulness and purpose of WAC then encouraging participation might
mean enlarging the group or having involvement in other areas |
4. The CSA

| Org’s perspective: Strengths, weaknesses, potential etc | • Good document but will need updating/developing to be kept relevant because SD such a changing concept and attitudes and issues change so quickly; updating will require participation and someone driving it |
| CSA and SSS; WAC-govt relationship | • CSA has had an impact and will be ongoing, may become more valued over time |

5. Expectations of WAC

| General expectations | • Would like to see it becoming more accepted and understood as the contemporary view on SD issues and so impacting on decision-makers |
| Role | • Outlet for communities’ expectations in those fields; reflection of a fairly broad current community view regarding SD; at same time has a role to look into the future for what expectations may be down the track |
| | • Group needs to decide what the mix of roles will be and where resources are put in the mix i.e. extent to which will do campaigning, education/awareness raising, research etc. |
| Future directions | • Like to see it grow with more resources put into it; needed to be debated how this might be done |
| | • Needs to be identified whether partnerships with other sectors are acceptable of not |

6. Future of the org

| Future in terms of sust and whether shaped by WAC | • Unions WA likely to become more involved in sustainability |
| | • Likely to gain a more focussed view of SD and understanding of additional issues from involvement in WAC |

WA SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRY GROUP

1. Background of organization

| History | • WA SIG & Centre for Excellence in Cleaner Production since 1999; World Business Council for Sustainable Development wanted to do something on eco-efficiency in WA; initial workshop success & interest & led to ‘learning by sharing’ in area of cleaner production |
| Change over time | • Core idea that business has to take key a role in SD: clean, competitive, innovative, eco-efficient |
| | • Has been navigating its role & road while going |
| | • Started with 40 people interested & now over 400 |
| | • Positive change in terms of best practice for sust; linkages with international orgs UNEP, WBCSD |
| | • From nuts & bolts of how to be efficient to strategic i.e. innovation, reporting & where want to be in 5 yrs in WA Cleaner Production Statement (voluntary signatories; policy initiative) |
| People & culture | • Is a multi-stakeholder collaboration (range of govt, non-govt & industry) – positive agenda for collab and exchange; participant base evolving & increasing community group involvement; changed Steering Committee of SIG to have equal representation, two reps per sector |
| | • Committed people; liberal views on what market can do for sust; learning by sharing approach; policy dialogue including submission to govt |
| | • Not a membership based collaboration (only org in SC like this; SIG like a mini WAC but with focus area); builds on expertise, professionalism but open, don’t have to commit to policy positions; is a forum andplatform rather than an org; different levels of involvement available |
| Recent imp. issues | • Innovation |
| | • Sust reporting |
| Why involved in WAC | • Already looking at business case for SD so interested in community agenda for SD |
| | • Business people are community members so shouldn’t be separations |
| | • Prior involvement with Envir Alliance on submission to SSS |
| | • Not such a big step as SIG similar org to WAC in not taking policy positions |

2. Approach to sustainability

| General approach | • ‘SD’ the process/journey, ‘sust’ the goal; ‘sust’ like democracy, social justice & ‘SD’ the things we can do, has a context |
| | • ‘Sust’ not in line with term being used internationally i.e. WBCSD & UN uses ‘SD’ |
| | • Getting community convinced about benefits of SD; average person can’t see how can gain from it (see negatives e.g. petrol price rises); made business case for SD & now need to make community case |
### Dimensions, preferred model etc; Challenges / tensions between dimensions

- Too many groups surrounding sust that don’t work together
- Eco-eff & cleaner prod tools for business to reduce envir impacts for future generations – responsibility to community & awareness of community backlash if don’t protect, but challenge is getting businesses to be aware of impacts on envir
- Sust can’t be scattered approach/collection of ideas– not spirit of sust (see CSA section)
- Sust should be integrated approach not idea that sust a new framework for pursuing ideas from past in new context e.g. social agenda reeled in at last minute for CSA
- Rather see a 3D pyramid with governance at top
- TBL deadlock concept as raises expectation all three equal importance but for business the economic is important, for envir groups envir is etc – not fruitful conversation from this; should be intertwining threads
- TBL a lagging indicator as emphasizes reporting but key is to do before things have been done i.e. in decision-making stage
- Initially just cleaner prod & eco-eff ideas but now much broader

### Values

- Business contributing to SD
- Corporate social responsibility
- Cleaner production; eco-efficiency
- Innovation
- Provision of information to consumers
- Accountability, SD reporting
- Learning to change, ‘learning by sharing’

### Summed up conception brought to SC

- Integrated approach
- Working towards common vision of just & sust WA (needs understanding of each other’s thoughts and directions)

### Priorities; Change required for sust

- Clean & competitive WA – is where business can make greatest contribution i.e. social agenda more outside of scope of what business can do, but positive social impacts from cleaner prod e.g. lower health risk to consumers, occupational health & safety, reduction of emissions for people who live around
- People themselves have to make important decisions in own lifestyles, not ‘us’ & ‘them’
- Orgs driven by individuals (some are mums & dads) - have to look past divide
- Shareholder investing in companies should expect standards
- Already seeing changes in industry-community partnerships
- Need legislative changes e.g. allowing industrial waste exchange/industrial ecology, and planning changes so industries can locate near each other, e.g. energy regulations for all buildings, e.g. compulsory for students to be educated in sust in school

3. The collaboration process

#### Thoughts on SC process (strong points, frustrations etc)

- Reasonably collaborative, no major clashes, reflection of fact that CSA has room for all agendas
- Cooperative, good as guidance for Coordinator to do her work
- Difficult representing so many orgs of SIG – disclaimer put dampener on CSA
- Need to work on finding ‘common ground’ – identify some key areas to work on
- Strong: diversity; weak: attendance, same people always, lack views of those absent

#### Groups providing strong links /contributions

- Perhaps better relationship between WACOSS and Cons Council being in same building

#### Respecting difference while acting on areas of common interest

- SIG used to capitalising on this with variety of sorts of orgs & opinions within it and exchange of views – a valid approach

#### How values of org affect its participation in SC

- Carry similar values – want to reach same thing

“**It’s often easier to agree over the core principles of sust than over the specific actions we should take**”

- Agree but would phrase differently: easier to agree on core goals & objectives but more difficult on means to get there as needs change in lifestyle
- Agree, Brundtland SD ideas logical but actions and commitment difficult, but WAC SC members usually agree with each other
### How to further develop collaboration (for SC)

- Open communication process respecting different views important: agreeing to disagree sometimes necessary but in practice hard as if pass over/not address disagreement over important issues, orgs might pull out; if agree to disagree outcome might mean some priorities not shared by all or issues fundamental to certain orgs not being included in the priorities; at same time need to accept outcomes of the process
- Respecting different organizational set-ups; some people can speak for organizations, others can’t
- Orgs to present what each group is doing (more efficient time wise than scanning websites) – getting to know what they’re about, their values

### How WAC can increase community involvement

- Engage by positive examples for future – present positive agenda for change; work more on what’s in it for the community rather than just taking as given sust is something to achieve – what’s it going to bring to the layperson so he/she can get excited about sust
- More community workshops
- Sustainability indicators
- Preach to unconverted
- Use radio? debate? TV? - problem is info overload out there

### 4. The CSA

#### Org’s perspective: Strengths, weaknesses, potential etc

- Not clear how to make tangible steps forward; need to frame down to one principal action area with integrated recommendations/prioritisation of integrated steps
- Good collection of ideas but lacking integration – just reeled in established agendas – not spirit of sust – scattered approach to sust – need to look at what is critical for starting sust
- Reflective of community, good consultation process, good response from SIG Steering Committee and proactively using it at SIG meetings, raising awareness of it
- Hope can deliver on CSA – select a few areas for real action but need funding

#### CSA and SSS; WAC-govt relationship

- Look outside SSS to WAC’s own priorities – WAC has always had double agenda i.e. SSS response and forum for community
- CSA needed as SS missed a lot (SSS had short timeframe)
- Hope SSS will integrate CSA
- CSA heavy on social while SSS envir

### 5. Expectations of WAC

#### Role

- An org that anyone can come up to if they have any queries re SD – easy access- so need to let everyone know WAC is there

#### How it could most contribute

- By providing a positive agenda for change & changing perceptions with it e.g. making people see mobility, health & wellbeing benefits of good urban design/public transport – real examples of how average person can benefit from SD approach
- Finding true common ground & working with all sectors

#### Future directions

- Look outside SSS to WAC’s own priorities – WAC has always had double agenda i.e. SSS response and forum for community
- CSA needed as SS missed a lot (SSS had short timeframe)
- Should put requirements on attendance to SC meetings – send another rep if can’t

### 6. Future of the org

#### Future in terms of sust and whether shaped by WAC

- Genuine commitment to process of WAC but SIG had to have disclaimer
- Will be shaped in extending SIG with regard to community & social aspects but SIG generally not influenced that much as already has similar multi-stakeholder approach to its activities
- Already influence: e.g. invited WACOSS on SIG panel; e.g. always agenda item for SIG SC or newsletter re industry & community – is closing gap between them

### WA COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE

#### 1. Background of organization

##### History

- 1950s post war issues and needs led to ACOSS and then COSS’ in states
- WACOSS social service delivery spans many types of welfare orgs; two functions: (a) represent orgs and support with training etc, (b) advocate broad social policy issues (poverty, housing, employment etc)

##### Change over time

- De-funding 8 years ago under Court government so shift to generating own income through selling of training packages for the sector etc; move from policy-oriented to 50% policy 50% training and industry support; danger of losing sight of policy work because no dollars there, but at same time tender for projects to undertake research or tenders on policy issues
- Last 10 years of competitive tendering and mistrust: one pot of resources; fighting for
| People & culture | funding; finding different forms of funding; current govt partly addressing situation through range of funding sources but change in culture takes time  
• Sector and clientele struggling; resource crisis  
• Now more engaged with govt, more partnership model  
• Change in direction to business principles; more of money-making & outcome-driven culture now  
• Tension between traditional social policy advocacy role / dealing with poverty issues and necessary money making activities  
• Non-govt sector more efficient and caring than govt in dealing with disadvantage; could achieve so much more if better resourced; bottom up, resilient, wide view  
• Contribution to WAC reliant people in WACOSS, their personal philosophies |
|——|——|
| Recent important issues | • What is hot for WACOSS may not be what is for disadvantaged i.e. should be poverty, Indigenous, disadvantaged but new business needs/outcome-driven  
• Regional devt – building on state govt’s good foundation  
• Emergency relief: utilities, crisis poverty (punitive policies regarding unpaid bills & disconnection of services unacceptable – basic needs must be met)  
• Keeping true to role (poverty issues, disadvantage, Indigenous dispossession) and not buying in to fear argument/climate  
• Building bridges between Indigenous and non-Indig  
• Federal govt welfare reform agenda and bridging regime  
• Social sustainability project (mostly housing issues but interconnections and defining social sust)  
• Recent senate inquiry into poverty and hardship  
• Need for fundamental structural and cultural change in bigger picture i.e. distribution of wealth & taxation system – not WACOSS’ role but should be a concern |
|——|——|
| Why involved in WAC | • Envir issues attractive to people across the board (all appreciate beauty, issues tangible), social less easy to sell e.g. selling positive discrimination argument  
• Social sust needs development and WACOSS (at frontline of social issues) can add to the sust argument  
• Prior work with Cons Council on social sust – links on utility issues  
• Saw good model in Aust Collab and possibilities |
|——|——|
| 2. Approach to sustainability | General approach  
• Sust a reframing of WACOSS’ traditional policy agendas, stretching of them, but core areas still intact  
• Core focus is social sustainability  
• ‘Something that can be sustained’; need to look at more sustainable ways of alleviating poverty i.e. not just vouchers and emergency relief or retraining people just to get them off dole queue and not jobs they want; sust is about ongoing activities not bandaid approach; sust is preventing generational poverty not just welfare for people in crisis  
• Sceptical of CSR: TBL in large companies a contradiction while CEOs with mega bucks – WACOSS has strong place to fill in saying things about disadvantage and taxation  
• Social bottom line needs to develop; could go round in circles about what is ultimate bottom line, some say envir but economic tends to govern unfortunately; without strong voice for disadvantage could get lost altogether in sust; without an equal status for social issues & disadvantage that bottom line could be swallowed up; don’t agree ‘no envir then no social’, should be complementing each other’s viewpoints but not slave to any of them e.g. Manjimup: saving forests has led to social effects from loss of livelihood; find sustainable way of supporting those families; support envir push to stop some of these industries but at same time support social area and people involved in these industries  
• Visualise 3 dimensions of sust (democracy, governance, culture as part of social though some say should be outside); interlocking circles and concentric circles models have value - interlocking holistic view while concentric teasing out |
|——|——|
| Dimensions, preferred model etc | • Social sust familiar but ‘sust’ still new area of engagement, grappling with interconnectedness, way intersect not always clear but happening around water policy – did shift on pricing stuff a bit: recognize argument for user pays, true price/value of resource but if applied same principle to public education then cut whole lot of people out (philosophical struggle with user pays) – accept need for price increases but need to protect low income people from negative impacts – need incentives for low income, not just for those with disposable income  
• Sust permeating some areas but others continue on same path i.e. WACOSS’ role is voice for low income, disadvantaged and not many other groups there to do that so important WACOSS continues with it  
• Thinking changed in now seeing sust as overarching and housing affordability within that |
### Challenges / tensions between dimensions
- Tensions/conflict can be a good thing to make the concept richer – use tension to build our argument but only if respect each other’s viewpoints
- Need to restructure i.e. share common view regarding economic dominance; need to explore economic arguments as to why it would be better for everyone if have economic balance between disadvantaged and wealthier

### Values
- Equity underpins (intra and inter generational)
- Equity, diversity, quality of life, interconnectedness, democracy
- Access
- Happiness, well being & sense of place, community, belonging (personal values)

### Summed up conception brought to SC
- Commitment to social sust but with feeling of interconnectedness
- Equity foundation (social and envir justice)
- Ongoing, looking further ahead approach to social issues not bandaid

### Priorities; Change required for sust
- Addressing poverty – not to fall off policy agenda
- Employment strategies for sharing work around, quality of employment (balancing work and non-work responsibilities), real package of measures for employment and social issues after loss of livelihood when industries close
- Regional issues e.g. shortage of low cost private rental housing
- Community engagement processes, broad based community education strategies (govt should recognize strategic interface non-govt orgs provide & assist peaks to do educative work with their sectors so that crossover can happen)

### 3. The collaboration process

#### Thoughts on SC process (strong points, frustrations etc)
- Is democratic, like-minded, cohesive, collaborative
- Has been awareness of differences but haven’t dealt with any head on areas of disagreement – if we try to prioritise on the Agenda then might run into issues
- Need to acknowledge all viewpoints, acknowledge conflict
- Are differences but WAC good at keeping a focus on what want to achieve
- Information overload detracting from bigger outcome (lack of time for WAC mailing list emails– danger of missing crucial info)
- Input of Unions would be really valued; WACOSS and some unions have links but need for strong links with Unions WA for social sust side; industrial issues to go in social melting pot
- Motivation/energy levels down; burnout ‘all too much’; so many events that may lose touch with what to lobby govt – have reached common ground but flow interrupted by govt which has own agenda – shame has put stopper on how much WAC can contribute to govt policy
- All going through educative process
- Shame often came to smaller group of people putting in – waxed & waned, people picked up the work when they could

#### Groups providing strong links /contributions
- strong links: WACOSS, Envir Alliance, Churches; Coordinator the ‘glue’

#### Respecting difference while acting on areas of common interest
- recognize members have slightly different agenda (even group more concerned with the social have slightly different priorities) but looking for areas of commonality – that’s as close as it gets in WAC
- recognising people have different passions i.e. some for certain species, some for injustice towards people – personally can’t run on every issues (too many issues) but can see how they intersect and contribute to moving towards something in common

#### How values of org affect its participation in SC
- add value especially social equity & regional perspective (good networks and info); important to remember regions and regional disadvantage i.e. this focus can keep balance in the group
- collaborative approach, used to integrating a range of views around the table

#### “It’s often easier to agree over the core principles of sust than over the specific actions we should take”
- Agree
- E.g. everyone will agree to ‘equity’ and if take next step down & talk specifically in terms of Indigenous rights the people ok with it but if say next step is acknowledging Indigenous rights over land or governance then people might say ‘Hang on a second!’
- E.g. not many people would outwardly oppose a diverse community but when comes down to it the ‘Not in my backyard’ phenomenon

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| How to further develop collaboration (for SC) | • look at driving forces, passions of people  
• look at how disagreements can be resolved (hasn’t been tested in practical way) i.e. everyone got chance to put their ideas into CSA but now how to push the whole?  
• Exploring what SC orgs mean by certain words used in dialogue e.g. ‘low income’ i.e. envir lifestyle chosen by some with low income but others with low income not able to choose it easily  
• Getting a pilot project happening (dynamics work best if engaging in an actual thing)  
• CSA could be intensively workedshopped i.e. workshop around one area as priority; CSA proposal of Thriving Communities program to draw together local groups  
• Teasing out differences to move towards a ‘greater good’ |
| How WAC can increase community involvement | • Community awareness raising campaign; not just involving people already into sust  
• WAC to prove its worth, earn trust through concrete pilot project  
• Show full picture of what sust about by getting Unions on board so can attract other people |
| 4. The CSA | • Right with values of CSA  
• Uplifting piece of work  
• Issue is getting WACOSS to take it up, fully engage with it; hope WACOSS uses it to frame pre-budget submission  
• Doc needs prioritisation – is good source doc to see range of things but strategic doc? |
| Org’s perspective: Strengths, weaknesses, potential etc | • CSA should be key element of any sust policy hereafter but probably will just be picked at for more expedient things; the doc should be seen as key across govt as is a unique ‘ground up’ doc but this may not happen  
• To get away from ‘thorn in side’ image may have to ‘join them to beat them’ – collective effort  
• Danger of WAC being seen as a token body by govt and potential conflict  
• Is ‘Us’ and ‘them’ at moment rather than ‘intra’ or ‘inter’ or cooperative  
• Need to build links with other key people, drivers & new ideas for message carriers e.g. people like Mary G in Broome & Janet Holmes a Court, music festivals |
| CSA and SSS; WAC-govt relationship | • Concerns are bigger and longer than just responding to SSS – looks at specific areas of work i.e. indicators project  
• Driver of non-govt across three bottom lines into govt policy  
• Leadership – not just every idea that comes up, must work within framework  
• Bridge between community and govt – gives community voice; articulates its issues from membership and feed through WAC  
• Channels up but also gets messages out to community (awareness)  
• WAC doesn’t make decisions – it feeds into decision-making |
| 5. Expectations of WAC | • How it could most contribute  
• Future directions  
• New trend in public participation in policy?  
• 6. Future of the org |
| General expectations | • first time social and envir sectors come closely together in this kind of collaboration  
• dialogues in SC can be replicated at local levels, get range of groups tog. To develop localised strategies  
• reliance on one-off money could put WAC on the line – need for sustainable funding  
• overcoming issue of relationship with govt  
• potential for other collaboration, partnerships  
• Yes, in past most groups represented/advocated separately; sust agenda needs kinds of collaborations WAC provides  
• Govt to citizens model (in past and other states) forgets peaks & all intermediate layers |
| Role | • How it could most contribute  
• Future directions  
• New trend in public participation in policy?  
• 6. Future of the org |
| How it could most contribute | • first time social and envir sectors come closely together in this kind of collaboration  
• dialogues in SC can be replicated at local levels, get range of groups tog. To develop localised strategies  
• reliance on one-off money could put WAC on the line – need for sustainable funding  
• overcoming issue of relationship with govt  
• potential for other collaboration, partnerships  
• Yes, in past most groups represented/advocated separately; sust agenda needs kinds of collaborations WAC provides  
• Govt to citizens model (in past and other states) forgets peaks & all intermediate layers |
| Future directions | • Not really as social agenda will always be there: funding reliant on govt in power and how conservative; envir and social may get lost in ‘fear’ climate  
• Dependant on people in WACOSS; sust not infused in org enough yet to be as core as should be |
Appendix 6: Discussion paper for the Steering Committee

Discussion Paper – October 2003
Prepared by Kathryn Buselich as follow-up to the September 23 workshop with the WA Collaboration Steering Committee

I appreciate your taking the time to read the following and welcome your feedback (email: K.Buselich@murdoch.edu.au).

Introduction

This paper is designed to provide the Steering Committee (SC) with
- key issues & outcomes that emerged from the interviews and workshop,
- my analysis and reflections and
- suggestions for future collaborations or thoughts on ‘where to from here’.

It invites feedback on the above content and I am especially looking for responses to the comments I make and the issues I raise throughout the paper which are highlighted in bold.

The semi-structured workshop took a dialogical and learning approach to the aim of furthering understanding within the SC as to where each organization is ‘coming from’ in order to build a more robust approach to sustainability for future collaborations. It did not attempt to resolve differences but rather to at least acknowledge differences and commonalities.

The following were the stated workshop objectives:
- to further understand of backgrounds, values and approaches to sustainability
- to identify commonalities and differences
- to consider how tensions and potentials underlying the above can inform collaboration

The following is an outline of the workshop proceedings:
- clarification and discussion of the summaries of each organization that I prepared from the interviews
- clarification and discussion of the matrix of commonalities and differences presented at the workshop
- identification of a policy issue for discussion of commonalities, differences, tensions and potentials; the group chose ‘consumption and production,’ broke into small groups to brainstorm the four areas and then had a plenary discussion of the areas
- a round of closing comments by participants about what they believed was significant in what emerged in the workshop
The workshop was fortuitous for the Collaboration in its timing between a phase characterised by early development, consultation and pooling of resources and the serious prioritisation and implementation the group is about to embark on, where differences may arise over policy issues. Therefore the workshop provided an opportunity for the Collaboration to take stock of where its founding organizations are ‘coming from’ and to begin looking at how to use this knowledge in future collaborations.

**Participant organizations**

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)*

ATSIC is “Australia’s principal democratically elected Indigenous organization” and its “vision is of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities freely exercising our legal, economic, social, cultural and political rights” (ATSIC, 2001). It advocates self-determination for such communities and monitors “the performance of government agencies in providing services to their Indigenous citizens” (ATSIC, 2001). ATSIC seeks empowerment for Indigenous people through social, community and economic development, maintenance of heritage and culture, and land and sea rights (ATSIC, 2001).

*Council of Churches WA (CCWA)*

CCWA is “an association of Christian Churches or related Christian bodies, which exists to promote a closer unity among Christians in WA” (CCWA, 2003). It is in particular committed to “respecting one another’s Church doctrines, disciplines and traditions” and “recognising the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of Christian communities in Australia” (CCWA, 2003).

*Conservation Council WA*

The Conservation Council is WA’s “foremost non-government, non-profit, voluntary conservation organization” and acts as “an umbrella organization for nearly 70 affiliated conservation groups throughout WA” (Conservation Council, 2003). It advocates for “conservation and a sustainable society in WA” (2003), in particular sustainable management of resources, ‘living cities’ and conservation of biodiversity (Conservation Council, 2000).

*Ethnic Communities Council WA (ECCWA)*

ECCWA is the “State’s peak body for ethnic organizations” and “takes an active interest in all aspects of multiculturalism and ethnic affairs” (ECCWA, 2002). It advocates on behalf of all ethnic communities in WA to ensure “equitable access to the resources which the governments manage on behalf of the community” (ECCWA, 2002). It seeks a “fair and just society” where all people have the opportunity to realise their full potential and be free from discrimination (ECCWA, 2002).

*WA Council of Social Service (WACOSS)*

WACOSS is “the peak council of community service organizations and individuals in Western Australia” and is part of a national network which assists “low income and disadvantaged people” throughout Australia (WACOSS, 2003). It seeks “a socially just and sustainable West Australia society where people care for each other and have access to the resources and opportunities necessary for their wellbeing” (WACOSS, 2003).
WA Sustainable Industry Group (WA SIG)
WA SIG is “a multi-stakeholder network of business, Public sector, environment, engineering and education professionals committed to application of Cleaner Production and Eco-Efficiency for a clean and competitive Western Australia” and “is a Member of the Regional Network of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development” (WA SIG, 2003). Its vision is for WA businesses to “lead by example in addressing local and global sustainable development challenges, by delivering innovative, competitively-priced goods and services that bring quality of life, while progressively reducing environmental impact and resource intensity” (WA SIG, 2003).

PART 1: Key issues and outcomes, and analysis and reflections

Summary of ‘stand-out’ issues emerging from the workshop

Internal processes of collaboration

- absence of shared model for approaching and representing sustainability
- potential for ‘peace’ to be explored as a fundamental part of sustainability and shared value
- most organizations act as a voice for ‘others’ but WA SIG has a slightly different mandate
- distinction between views of individuals and commitments of organizations

Substantive issues

- acknowledgement of population and immigration policy as one area where underlying value differences are likely to exist, but understanding and some commonalities became apparent around ‘World carrying capacity’ versus ‘Australian carrying capacity’, and ‘ecological footprint’ and ‘fair earth share’ (international versus national focus)
- the policy issue of ‘consumption and production’ (that the group chose to work with in the second part of the workshop) was a formidable issue to navigate, and the workshop only began to work through this issue, but consensus about importance of tackling it was expressed

Strategic / Political

- varying approaches to relationship with government need to be looked at further
- the need to articulate role of WA Collaboration to government
- near consensus on commitment to processes and ideas for collaborations but varying expectations and perspectives on the actual role of the WA Collaboration (this also has significance with regard to internal processes of collaboration)
Discussion of issues emerging from the workshop

The organizations and collaboration processes

- The summaries were found to be generally quite reflective of the organizations. Where multiple interviewees existed for particular organizations, some participants found there were differences between them (between the representatives of their own org).

- A related issue was the distinction between “individual commitment of members” and “organizational engagement” recorded on the white board in the workshop i.e. differences apparent between personal views and those of the organization represented. For example, some organizations were unable to endorse some values and priorities even though the representatives might have done so personally. I think this is useful for the Steering Committee as it can highlight shared values that are brought to collaborations (inspiring empathetic behaviour in the process) but might not necessarily be conveyed in conscious representation of the member organization. Furthermore, even though the Committee members are formally there to represent their organizations, it may be helpful in collaborative processes for members to know where other members sit personally and how far they can go with regard to speaking on behalf of their organization as this could contribute to more understanding of one another for collaborative working relationships.

- The matrix of commonalities and differences identified from the interview summaries and presented and amended in the workshop (the amended form is attached to this paper as an appendix), demonstrated that all organizations share the following with regard to background and culture:
  - ‘Committed / not just a job’
  - ‘Diverse views among member organizations’
  - ‘Lack of resources & funding tensions’

Furthermore, all organizations were said to act as a ‘voice for others’ except WA SIG which was discussed as having a slightly ‘different mandate’. However, upon reflection I suggest that WA SIG can be seen as having commonalities with the other organizations with regard to its mandate as it could be seen as a voice or advocate for pioneering businesses struggling within unsustainable systems for alternatives to current modes of production. In its survey results presented at its February 2003 biannual meeting, WA SIG noted that “the majority of respondents agreed that WA SIG is best characterised as an advocacy group for business and sustainable development, however, the ‘advocacy’ role needs to be determined.” Appreciation of the above traits of the Collaboration organizations can make collaborative relationships easier (the members of the organizations can empathise with each other about the common challenges faced).

- The matrix and discussion surrounding it indicated there was significant agreement on commitment to processes and ideas for collaborations but varying expectations and perspectives on the actual role of the WA Collaboration. Variations in expectations have the potential to become magnified when the Collaboration begins to prioritise and plan projects and are clearly significant in how the Collaboration presents itself to the community. At the same time the process of
planning projects and prioritising may serve to help clarify the role of the WA Collaboration. Understandably the Collaboration is still undertaking its self-identification work and this will be critical in clarifying what it can hope to achieve and its real significance and potential in the Western Australian community.

- The summaries and matrix proved useful to the group but discussion of them took up a substantial amount of time and the group would have benefited from more time on working through particular policy examples for awareness and negotiation of commonality and difference.

- Another limitation was the simplification of comments in the interview summaries and of perspectives in the matrix. However, the qualification process the documents initiated I thought was invaluable for the group as it is easy to form assumptions of each other but takes time to check them. The workshop demonstrated that the group encompasses a rich array of sustainability issues and at the same time involved many instances where organizations realised they had a closer position on things than thought previously.

**Approach to sustainability**

**Commonality**

- Organizations tended to find near consensus on the ‘human’ aspects side of sustainability; most organizations were affirmative for the following:
  - ‘Rights for Indigenous people’
  - ‘Equity, human rights and social justice’
  - ‘Community engagement processes a priority’ and ‘Democracy’
  - ‘Concern for future generations’

- All organizations endorsed ‘interconnectedness/integration & furthering of objectives of all dimensions’ in the matrix. The organizations share this fundamental holistic approach but seem to run into difficulty when they need to be more specific or need to articulate sustainability.

**Absence of unified expression of sustainability:**

- There was some concern that nuances in organizational views were not captured sufficiently in the matrix and concern about oversimplification with regard to approaches to sustainability and models. The matrix was designed to spark discussion rather than to be the final word and I believe the conversations that came out of it revealed a considerable amount of complexity. For example, complexity was aired in the conversations around ‘carrying capacity’ (discussed below) and Conservation Council’s statement that the social and environmental objectives “are intermingled if we look long term enough.” Building awareness of diversity and overlaps between organizations for future partnerships will be an ongoing process.
The group struggles with expressing the most appropriate model/s to represent sustainability in its total sense and several organizations noted anxiety about the triple bottom line concept. The group does not have a shared particular model for, or unified expression of, sustainability, even though it has in common many underlying values in approaching it. Does this need to be looked at more in terms of how the Collaboration communicates with the community about sustainability? There are positives and negatives to the varied approaches within the Collaboration. The diversity of approaches to sustainability means that organizations are working towards it from their own perspectives and giving it relevance and meaning in their organization; also they not trying to address sustainability in its entirety or on all fronts. As WACOSS pointed out, organizations working on particular issues towards a cumulative ‘whole’ can be seen as a strength. Both of the models offered did not allow enough room for full expressions of sustainability and most groups were averse to having to endorse a particular model. However, a negative might be present in terms of how the Collaboration presents itself to the community / expresses its understanding of sustainability and engages in discussion about sustainability. A concluding reflection here is that a single model or approach may not be productive but exploration and awareness of diversity in this regard, and the expression of sustainability that takes place in the process, is necessary both for collaborations and for engaging the community in sustainability.

‘Peace’ as potential common thread in approach to sustainability

There is the potential for ‘peace’ to have a more important role in the Collaboration’s approach to sustainability. ‘Peace’ as a core aspect of sustainability is often overlooked in its potential to build awareness of sustainability by putting it in meaningful and relevant terms. WACOSS noted that with ‘peace’ being a global issue, especially at the moment, it’s surprising ‘peace’ is not a higher priority for the Collaboration. Churches was the only group to bring peace initiatives to our attention in the interviews but Conservation Council endorsed it in the workshop and ECCWA did to some extent. Churches pointed out the long history of commitment among world councils of churches to working through alternatives to violence and peace building between countries. With regard to the Collaboration as a group, I suggest that peace as a fundamental conceptual part of sustainability would enable expressions of sustainability that are more meaningful to the community. Indeed, Churches did say that “sustainability and peace” are “very much connected.” If we approach the words ‘just and sustainable’ more widely we see they do suggest peace, as all three concepts suggest stability and quality of life (keeping the peace with our environment and subsequent stability for people).

Values, priorities and policy issues

Population & ‘Carrying capacity’:

Concern was expressed in the workshop about the ‘carrying capacity’ notion and its possible linkages with a ‘fortress Australia’ mentality, even after further exploration of the concept, but the suggested alternative of ‘world carrying capacity’ was well received as well as the ‘ecological footprint’ concept (and the Conservation Council
noted that views on such issues and the use of such concepts varied within the environmental movement. **Underlying value differences among the Steering Committee organizations became clearer around population and immigration policy but understanding developed and some overlaps in concerns became apparent.**

- **Jargon/terminology used by organizations can be prohibitive and a barrier to collaborations if not explored. Therefore there may be a need to clarify such terms** before people are put offside eg ECCWA & Churches endorsing ‘Biodiversity & ecological integrity and justice’ after it was clarified by Conservation Council.

- Although the issues of population, immigration and carrying capacity were not discussed in detail, they were brought to the fore, rather than, as ATSIC pointed out, being swept under the carpet, and *enough was said about these issues to make them more approachable in the future.*

**Poverty:**
- **WACOSS stressed the need to address poverty** – “unless people are not poor in this economic system, nothing much is sustainable” – and other organizations shared this concern. **Therefore measures to reduce poverty may be something the Collaboration will want to discuss.**

**Consumption and production example:**
In the workshop the group identified some ‘policy hot potatoes’ (issues that haven’t been dealt with for certain reasons) such as population policies, consumption and production, equity of innovation for sustainability, looking at what is a sustainable economy and choosing a country town example. The group decided to concentrate on ‘consumption and production’ for the purposes of the exercise in exploration of commonalities and differences. It split into small groups to look at the issue in terms of the following four areas, which are *taken from the notes recorded on butcher’s paper* and the brief discussion afterwards as a whole group:

*Commonalities* (WACOSS, WA Collaboration Coordinator and new WA SIG representative)

- Fundamental agreement on need for sustainability (when defined very broadly ie global)
- Acknowledge global problem but need to make it meaningful at WA level
- Specific agreements:
  - change is possible in both reducing consumption and increasing sustainability of production but fundamental change is a challenge
  - current distribution of consumption is inequitable in micro/macro (would mean some groups consuming less and others more)
- Would require agreement on what are basic needs (where do we stop)
- Priority focus on more scarce resources like water (linked to right to clean water)
Differences (Churches and WA SIG)

- Industries/businesses need sales (sustainable production with less impact on environment – but should some products be produced at all?)
- Churches: many things produced are not necessary e.g. retail therapy; individual vs. collective i.e. root of the word ‘private’ means “robbery”; robbery of resources; beyond basic needs is robbing those without basic needs
- Can have small business without huge profit – “can have enough for a good life”
- Cheap production (e.g. $2 shops - consumption of disposable goods, child labour etc) vs. life cycle of products and durability of products
- What do we mean by basic needs?

Potentials (ATSIC and Conservation Council)

- Ecological footprint concept – decreasing over-consumers and increasing the resources used by the disempowered (moving to an average sustainable level of consumption)
- Promoting Indigenous businesses, especially eco-tourism
- Developing policies on reducing consumption – not covered in State Sustainability Strategy
- Educating people about sustainably produced products? (question mark because it opens up issues such as those products being more expensive and less accessible than cheap products)

Tensions (Conservation Council and ECCWA)

- Reducing consumption desirable from environmental perspective but may not be from an economic industry perspective (it undermines current total focus on economic growth as a goal) - similar situation for production
- Many equity implications - which are different depending on the geographic scale we look at i.e. globally (fair share), nationally or locally
- Production and consumption levels and whether they are adequate and/or sustainable (including equity implications) depends on population levels and associated lifestyles
- Consider which aspects of consumption need to be reduced and which promoted e.g. environmental impacts of non-renewable energy use vs. renewable
- Redistribution of wealth will be necessary for reduction of consumption and sustainability but will not be popular and there will be equity complications e.g. poor in Australia vs. global aid
- Equity of employment opportunities could be affected by changes in consumption and production - different priorities regarding this among Collaboration organizations

Although the group did not get to work through the issue of population, which was the second choice, the coordinator of the Collaboration noted that consumption and production was tied in with population. Furthermore, ATSIC, Churches and WACOSS commented that for some people increasing consumption might be more relevant than decreasing it and I suggest that this would have implications for discussions about population.
The question brought up by Conservation Council, “What’s a sustainable consumption level, what’s a fair share of consumption?,” wasn’t able to be addressed in the time available but did heighten discussion of commonalities, differences, tensions and potentials surrounding consumption and production. **Progress was made on finding general common ground around recognition of the need to address levels of consumption and the need for equity of consumption, but clear tensions and differences existed around who would be advantaged or disadvantaged by changes in consumption and production, distribution of wealth, the value placed on growth in current systems and the associated economic and market barriers to change.** In addition, it was noted that the ‘Potentials’ list was quite short because it was possibly the most difficult one.

**Links/partnerships between the organizations**

The following are examples of links on particular policy issues (organizations may have overlapping interests and even similar approaches to the issue in question). They are parallels I have observed but I especially welcome any feedback here in elucidating them and adding any more examples.

Conservation council – WACOSS – Churches
   Pricing of goods and services

ATSIC – Churches – Conservation Council – WACOSS – WA SIG
   Sustainable Housing Project

ATSIC – Conservation Council
   Aboriginal Fishing Strategy
   Rehabilitation of land
   Indigenous businesses e.g. Eco-tourism
   Protecting Aboriginal heritage sites

ATSIC – Conservation Council – WA SIG
   Technological solutions (energy) for Indigenous communities in remote areas

Churches – ECCWA
   Treatment of refugees
   Respecting multiculturalism

ATSIC – ECCWA
   Plight of young unemployed
   Consumption

ATSIC – Churches – WACOSS
   Welfare and equity for disadvantaged

**Relationship with government**

**What will be the Collaboration’s relationship with government? What role will it articulate to government?**
• The workshop identified **varying approaches** to the Collaboration’s relationship with government as well as the **need to articulate the role** of the Collaboration to government. **Furthermore, the coordinator of the Collaboration noted the need to be mindful of time and resource constraints when articulating the future role and work of the Collaboration.**

• Furthermore, it was noted that for Churches and ECCWA ‘**Change in responsiveness of government**’ would be more applicable than ‘more engaged with government recently’ as both groups have struggled to awaken government interest in their concerns.

• Organizations wanting to ‘**Further relationship with government**’ were in the **majority** and those preferring to ‘Work mostly independently of government’ were in the minority. However, Conservation Council noted that it was hard to choose from binary oppositions and that their view was more complex than represented on the matrix. **Furthermore, the coordinator of the WA Collaboration highlighted that most groups had a more nuanced perspective on it than represented by the matrix.**

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**PART 2: Some suggestions for the WA Collaboration process**

**INTERNAL: Continuing this foundational work & strategies for collaboration**

The need for further consideration of how backgrounds, values and approaches affect collaboration

The Collaboration has been to date largely task-oriented and inclusive of the agendas of member organizations, but now that the **time has come for prioritisation, differences** are likely to become more apparent as more specific actions are negotiated. It would seem that the group found agreement on its vision, principles and goals relatively easily, but prioritising on issues and areas outlined in the Community Sustainability Agenda will involve making hard decisions about pilot projects or key areas to lobby and work on. Such decisions involve negotiation of differences in value frames. Therefore **ways to overcome differences are required. Furthermore, although I understand the Community Sustainability Agenda to be a reference document for both a community agenda and a response to the Draft State Sustainability Strategy, differing perspectives on the role of the CSA and how the Collaboration will make use of it emerged in the interviews. Perhaps these differences in expectations will be addressed in the prioritisation process.**

The process encouraged by this research of building understanding of where others are ‘coming from’ and their concerns and priorities, and the consequent identification of overlaps among the organizations, **provides a strong communicative and collaborative foundation** for the future work of the WA Collaboration. It came at a time when there was a **window of opportunity** for the Collaboration to take stock of its
diversity and expand on the common purpose and understanding it had already generated. However, the **Collaboration must now integrate these kinds of processes into its ‘everyday’ activities if it is to realise its full potential.**

How can the WAC continue this sort of work within its time and resource constraints?

How the Collaboration can maintain attention to collaborative processes, considering its limited time and resources, is an issue I identify for the Collaboration. A way to continue the ‘building of understanding of diversity’ process might be to **integrate it into the SC’s everyday activities/usual meetings thereby incrementally continuing to build a foundation for collaboration.**

The **following simple and practical ideas and measures** were suggested in the interviews and workshop as a means of aiding the Collaboration in continuing to develop a solid collaborative base:

**Strategic ideas**

- Getting a pilot project happening, identifying a campaign to work on and/or choosing and initiating priority areas of action from the CSA: it was suggested that this would strengthen resolve and boost morale and would also further reveal commonalities and differences.

- Bringing policy documents that are under review by organizations to a Steering Committee meeting for comment by other organizations i.e. passing around policies asking “What jumps out at you?” Such a measure would improve understanding and consistency of approaches to sustainability and feed the benefits of collaboration (such as informed approaches to policy issues and understanding of competing priorities, interrelated consequences and mutually beneficial objectives and outcomes) back to the founding organization. Rather than the founding organizations just feeding in to the Collaboration, these kinds of measures would encourage a two-way collaborative process and dispel latent conflict by bringing diversity on policy upfront.

- Regular briefings of what founding organizations are doing to further sustainability (enabling development of common purpose, building of bridges).

- Exploring untapped potential partnerships within the SC around certain areas (enabling practical, on the ground pooling of resources and getting noticed). For example, certain organizations may form joint submissions on particular policy issues or come together to comment on related work. Encouraging the making of linkages would enable constituents of all organizations to look beyond immediate objectives and gain a fuller idea of sustainability.

- ‘Desktopting’ exercises: activities that allow a group to put things into a practical context; e.g. a ‘hot potato of the day’; e.g. focussing on a different country town in each meeting to help the group envisage the social, environmental and economic issues associated with such towns [see Council of Churches experience with ‘desktopping’ in a recent disaster response group].

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Process ideas

- ‘Talking more’ and time for inquiry and learning was suggested by several interviewees as a way to build collaborative relationships. One interviewee noted that this kind of exchange can actually check any preconceptions/assumptions i.e. actually ‘saying it’ rather than just presuming people share or don’t share a particular view. Simple measures like kicking off meetings with a 5 minute inquiry session facilitated by the Collaboration’s coordinator e.g. “I’m concerned about x issue . . . and haven’t decided on our approach yet . . . I was wondering if A and B organizations have anything to say about the issue . . . if so could we have a chat after the meeting/email about it?”

- Ensuring all priorities of organizations are heard, especially during strategic planning.

- Identifying and making explicit, during both strategic planning and regular meetings, which core value of organizations are non-negotiable and how some values might be enriched and built upon through collaboration. For example, ECCWA has identified as a core indelible value ‘dignity for humans’ and ‘human rights’ (as opposed to discrimination), WACOSS has declared there can be no sustainability if there is poverty, Churches has declared ‘no sustainability with violence’ and Conservation Council has identified biological integrity as a core unassailable value. One interviewee implied that exploring the driving forces and passions of member organizations might re-energise commitment and awaken sense of common purpose.

- ‘Off the wall’ thoughts about how to do things/brainstorming for key strategic issues such as how to get about genuinely engaging community

- Acknowledging the layers of representation Steering Committee members carry and consider

- Identifying language/jargon meanings and inconsistencies e.g. varying use of the term ‘low income’

The preceding ideas could take any form in future WA Collaboration Steering Committee interactions (perhaps simply being incidental in meetings) and I welcome any feedback on how such measures could facilitate the collaboration process.

EXTERNAL: Addressing relationship with government & strengthening community involvement

Addressing relationship with government

As discussed earlier, the Collaboration as a group has doubts and demonstrates complexity around how closely it should or could be working with government (i.e. differing views on the nature of this potential relationship/partnership), but the majority of the organizations do want to further the relationship with government in some way and there seemed to be consensus on the need to address the issue. There are certainly challenges the Collaboration faces in terms of being recognized as a
voice for community organizations concerned about sustainability and being engaged as a stakeholder in policy-making. Being seen by government as a legitimate partner in sustainability and in the decision-making processes supporting it may be a relationship that will take time to develop. In the short-term, perhaps there is potential for the Collaboration to review its approach to certain government relationships or else ‘spread its wings’ and seek support and partnerships in alternative places in government / throughout government.

How can WAC reach more in community/ build participation?

Ideas from the “Collaboration Process” section in the interview summaries may prove useful such as the following ideas from SC members:

- **‘Train the Trainer’ packages – a kit to explain sustainability** to groups that can be taken away by them and adapted to suit their org i.e. they can translate it into their everyday activities whether it be a landcare group, church group, daycare centre, youth drop in centre...
- **The Collaboration needs to present real examples of how the average person can benefit from a SD approach** - Can’t just assume sustainability as a given or that people just accept sustainability is good – e.g. NIMBYISM
- Some interviewees noted the need for **WAC to delegate: smaller Collaborations in local areas** with a similar mix of groups and most workshop participants had agreement on the need to get to this level (where the action is and where groups could engage those who might not normally get involved)

Ideas for collaboration discussed in the preceding “INTERNAL” section could be used to generate more strategies for furthering community involvement in the WA Collaboration.

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**Thank you for taking the time to read this. I look forward to your feedback.**

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The matrix of commonalities and differences from the workshop (as provided in Table 2 of Chapter 6) was attached to the discussion paper.
Appendix 7: Handout for discussion paper feedback session

This handout was simply used to jog memories and stimulate discussion.

Notes for feedback session on discussion paper, February 2004:

Key issues in paper to refresh your memory

- Approaching and representing sustainability  
  Various perspectives from and within orgs  
- “Peace” as shared value?  
- Distinction between views of individual and commitment of org  
- Differences existing around population and immigration policy but some understanding – ongoing work?  
- Ongoing work on “consumption and production” policy issue?  
- Varying approaches to relationship with government  
- Articulating role of WA Collaboration (especially to Govt)  
- Commitment to processes of collaboration but varying expectations of WA Collaboration

Opportunity to comment

Anything missing/incorrect?

Agree/disagree?
- Ongoing work needed in negotiating “difficult” policy areas  
- Clarifying expectations/role is important for prioritisation, how WA Collaboration presents itself to community and involvement in policy-making process  
- Would benefit from more time working through policy hot potatoes  
- Workshop demonstrated the SC holds a rich array of sustainability perspectives but at same time showed groups closer on some issues than thought previously  
- Groups especially shared values for human aspects side of sustainability  
- Absence of specific articulation/unified expression of sustainability  
  (interconnectedness/integration of dimensions agreed) – significance for communicating about sustainability with community  
- Explore “Peace” as central, shared value in sustainability in order to create more meaningful expression of sustainability to community  
- Agreement on need to address levels and equity of consumption  
- More foundational work and reflective dialogue needed to support future work (esp. prioritisation, strategy)  
- The foundational work was timely  
- WA Collab. must now integrate this type of work into its ‘everyday’ activities (see examples of ideas in discussion paper)

Feedback on examples of links and overlaps between organizations?
What do you take away from the process?
How can this be applied? (in approaching future work)
In particular, how is it applicable to SC’s decision-making on approaching:
- Particular policy and project areas  
- Partnership processes with State Govt  
- Holding of future workshops/events - can similar work be part of the networking and sharing of knowledge that goes on in wider group meetings?

Note: WA Collaboration’s Strategic direction four is:  
“Strengthening the WA Collaboration”
Enhance collaboration: Provide greater opportunities for examining connections/differences between social, environmental, cultural and economic sustainability.
References


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Stewart, J. "Further Innovation in Democratic Practice." The School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, 1996.


