

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

**Kathryn Buselich**

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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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Kathryn Buselich

## ABSTRACT

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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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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PAPERS ARISING FROM THE RESEARCH

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Buselich, K. "Creating 'Transactional Space' for Sustainability in Western Australia: The Role of Narratives and Values in the WA Collaboration Process." Paper presented at the conference Does Discourse Matter? Discourse, Power and Institutions in the Sustainability Transition, Hamburg, Germany 2003, and at the postgraduate course, Political Theory, Political Judgement and Narrative, Tampere, Finland 2003.

Buselich, K. "Dialogue for Sustainability: Transactional Space and the WA Collaboration." In *Alchemies: Community Exchanges*, edited by G. Pass and D. Woods. Perth: Black Swan Press, 2004.

Buselich, K. "Transactional Space: A Transformative Process for Sustainability Deliberation Piloted with the Western Australian Collaboration." In *Handbook of Sustainability Research*, edited by W. Leal Filho, 297-325. Frankfurt: Peter Lang Scientific Publishing, 2005.

Buselich, K., and N. Hodgson. "Communicating Sustainability in a Civil Society Context: The WA Collaboration Experience in Western Australia." In *Innovation, Education and Communication for Sustainable Development*, edited by W. Leal Filho, 689-712. Frankfurt: Peter Lang Scientific Publishing, 2006.

Hodgson, N., K. Buselich, and D. Halpin. "The WA Collaboration: Facilitating Integration of Sustainability Issues in a Community and Civil Society Context." Paper presented at the Land and Water Australia Integration Symposium, Canberra, 2004, and published on CD.

Hodgson, N., K. Buselich, and D. Halpin. "The WA Collaboration: Facilitating Integration of Sustainability Issues in a Community and Civil Society Context." *Australasian Journal of Environmental Management* 12, no. supplementary issue (2005): 20-28.

Hodgson, N., and K. Buselich. "The WA Collaboration: Civil Society Partnerships for Sustainability." Paper presented at the Beyond Declarations - Working Partnerships for Sustainability National Conference, Manly, NSW 2005.

Hodgson, N., and K. Buselich. "The WA Collaboration: Integrating Diverse Perspectives on Sustainability." In *Community Voices: Creating Sustainable Spaces*, edited by S. Paulin, 43-56. Perth: UWA Press, 2006.

Hodgson, N., D. Halpin and K. Buselich "Governing for Sustainability: The WA Collaboration." Paper presented at the International Sustainability Conference Regional Governance for Sustainability, hosted by the Government of Western Australia, Fremantle, 2003.

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