

FUTURE SCENARIOS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

Scenario facilitator, Susanne Haydon will present future scenarios for Local Government in the context of a changing strategic landscape and discuss the implications of different business models with specific reference to water, waste management and transport and social development. The presentation will include a discussion of future trends and issues relating to local government engagement with different community groups.

The objective of this presentation is to deepen our understandings of current issues and challenges. Susanne will explore a clear set of driving forces currently shaping local communities today and provide an analysis of how the changes taking place are impacting on Local Government planning.

Key Words: scenarios, strategy, future, trends, challenges, planning.

Introduction

In this presentation, I intend to start with the story of local government: where it's been and where it seems to be going. Using scenarios, I'll paint a big, philosophical canvas focusing on local government issues over, say, the next 10-20 years and test three business models against two possible future scenarios. Along this journey, we will pause to consider the implications of the scenarios with respect to future water use, waste management, sustainable transport systems and social development.¹

The unfolding story and perceived shifts in the strategic landscape

The context for the unfolding story of local government is the strategic landscape: the backdrop against which change takes place.

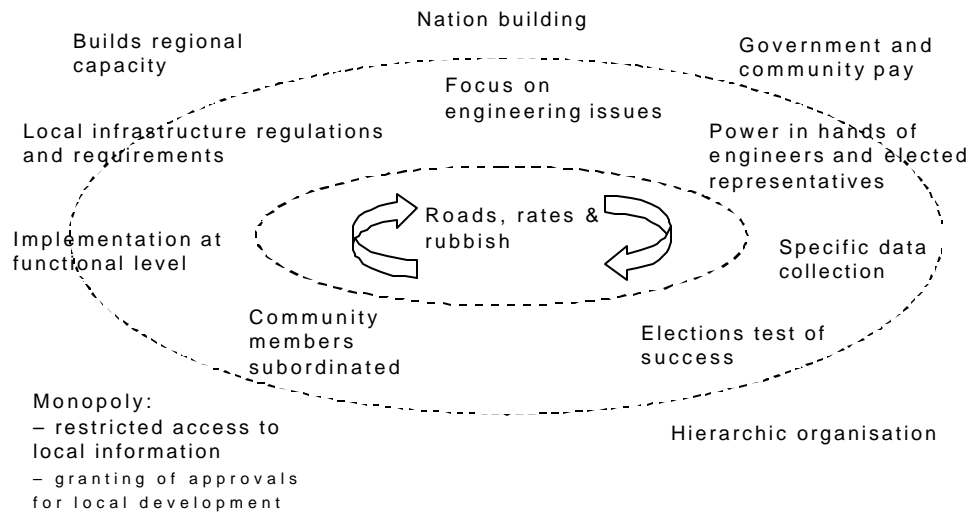


Figure 1: Traditional local government system The comfortable strategic landscape that supported the traditional local government system two or three decades ago gave way to a yawning chasm of change in the late 1990s.



Figure 2: The chasm

In the work that I have done with local government, there are many shifts in the strategic landscape that you may recognise. The list is not presented in any particular order.

- increasing cynicism with elected governments and bureaucracies
- increase in e-commerce
- increasing numbers of people working from home
- people living longer and an ageing population
- rising number of NGOs and lobby groups
- increasing gap between 'haves' and 'have nots'
- withdrawal of federal/state funding for social services: increasing responsibility for local government
- community more knowledgeable and with higher expectations
- increasing counter-culture searching for a meaning other than consumerism
- increasing liberalism, pluralism and diversity
- increase in drug use, petty crime and violence
- increasing concern about the environment and a continuing lack of awareness of individual responsibility.²

On the far side of the chasm a very different and challenging kind of landscape for local government is becoming visible.

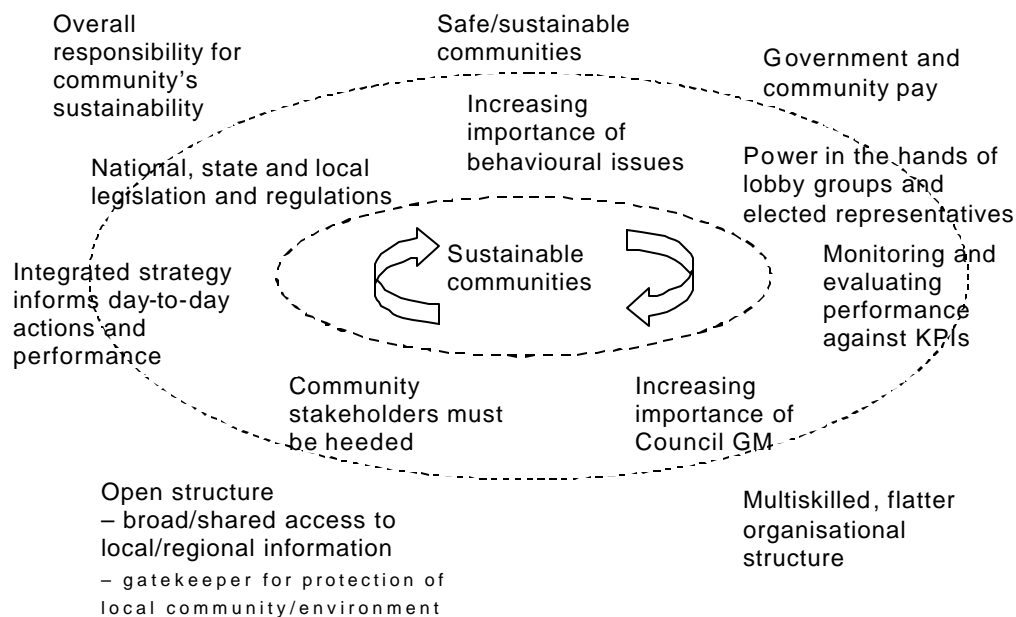


Figure 3: Transformed local government system

The major long-term trends for local government are urbanisation, localisation, globalisation and the evolution of local government organisations themselves. And even though these trends will increasingly have a direct impact on the capacity of local government to grow in the direction of

sustainable development, it is not clear that a bridge exists to enable all local governments to comfortably exist within the transformed future model.³

Emergent future business models

The depiction of the strategic landscape and the emerging story of local government provides a basis for sketching out three possible future business models for local government against which scenarios can be wind-tunnelled or tested.⁴

Proposed Business Model 1: 'Big Council'

- Repository of local information; virtual; networked
- Complex systems in place
- Large physical infrastructure
- Well staffed
- Variety of community services available
- Closely aligned with business and pro-development
- Representatives often politically active

Proposed Business Model 2: 'Council without a CBD'

- Greenfields precinct
- Lean business model; minimal services
- Rapid housing and facilities development
- Focus on 'lifestyle' and small business growth
- Lack of a developed CBD infrastructure
- Pro-development but conscious of sustainability issues
- Council leadership skills may reflect smaller town values

Proposed Business Model 3: 'Building Community.'

- Encourages stakeholder/ community engagements
- Councillors spend a lot of time dealing with community issues
- Responsive to development of public spaces and amenities
- Socially inclusive, recognizing inclusion and equity
- Local cultural centre
- Conflict between local business development and 'big business' interests
- Supports environmental sustainability
- Cooperative and collaborative networks

Sources of uncertainty

The power in developing scenarios rests in two domains:

- That the scenarios are specifically focused on long-term issues that are relevant to local government
- The scenarios explore critical uncertainties that take us out of our comfort zone into a world where anything is possible (think 11 September 2001; poisoned water in Sydney 1999, etc).

Although the sources of uncertainty may already be evident, our natural propensity for optimism bias prevents us from seriously thinking about them.

What follows is a list of some of the critical uncertainties that trouble us today.

1. Business viability and sustainability. There is now a real need for more people to be financially self-reliant.
2. Demographic change that reflects growth and is at the same time sustainable. ⁴*Seeable Futures*, Queensland's long-term transport planning scenarios suggest 2 possible areas of growth: either SEQ or central coastal Qld (much like Byron Bay has emerged as the pseudo 'capital' of northern NSW).
3. The decline in personal satisfaction. At its worst, we are dealing with an extremely high rate of youth suicide.
4. Building social cohesion & responding positively to the need for 'community'. Our rural towns are in decline; our sugar industry may not survive, etc.
5. Ecology emerging as a 'top of mind' public concern: there is now deep concern about soil salinity, health of river systems, and the survival of the Great Barrier Reef.⁵

A change is coming

There is a new worldview emerging to challenge the ascendancy of the values evident the traditional local government system.⁶ Many Australians enjoyed the high rating ABC television program *Sea Change* because so many of the desirability of a seaside, relaxed lifestyle. The popularity of this TV program, reflects a real life sea change evident in the solid growth of the coastal regions from northern NSW through the Gold and Sunshine Coasts, central Queensland around 1770 (muted to be the next Byron Bay) and even Cooktown.

Last year, I moved with my husband from busy Balmain in Sydney to relaxed Maleny in Queensland, pursuing a lifestyle that embodies community, cooperative social interactions and ecological sustainability. Since arriving in Maleny, we have met many others who have chosen this preferred life.

In the early 1960's in the USA, less than 5% of the population who we will call Cultural Creatives⁷ were interested in making this type of shift. By the late 1990's, the number had grown to around 29% and is increasing. This level growth is also taking place in Europe and Australia.

Cultural Creatives are beginning to have a major influence on society. The disparity in the world view of the Cultural Creatives and other groups is immense. Consider if you will, the recent elections in Tasmania and the overwhelming success of the Greens and the debates that raged at this year's Johannesburg Summit on sustainability.

Are you a Cultural Creative?⁸

Take a few moments to consider, whether you are part of this new wave of Cultural Creatives. According to Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson, you are likely to be a Cultural Creative if you:

1. love nature and are deeply concerned about its destruction
2. are strongly aware of the problems of the whole planet and want to see more action on them, such as limiting economic growth
3. give a lot of importance to developing and maintaining your relationships
4. volunteer for one or more good causes
5. want equality for women at work, and more women leaders in business and politics
6. are concerned about violence and the abuse of women and children around the world
7. tend to be rather optimistic about our future and distrust the cynical and pessimistic view that is given by the media
8. want to be involved in creating a new and better way of life in our country
9. like people and places that are exotic and foreign, and like experiencing and learning about other ways of life
10. want our politics and government spending to put more emphasis on children's education and well-being, on rebuilding our neighbourhoods and communities, and on creating an ecologically sustainable future.

Synthesising the parts into a whole

Within the story, the strategic landscape and the proposed business models for local government, and bearing in mind that there are different worldview perspectives at work within our communities, I'd now like to propose two future scenarios (or proposed worlds) for local government.

Scenario 1 is a world where technology and environment are highly valued. Our central character in this world is 16 year old Nick. He's a student at the local high school. Nicks' mum & dad both work from home. Nick's mum, Sue designs web pages and his dad Roger is a local tourist operator. Much of Nick's studies are done on computer or when he has saved up enough frequent flyer miles, by teleporting with his 'buddies' in Hawaii and Vietnam.

Nick uses a personal hand-held computer: another subsidised service offered through his local Council. Nick's local community now includes 'virtual' citizens from other parts of Queensland who regularly participate in on-line community consultation on local issues.

Nick and his family live in Treetown: a 'centre of excellence' in environmentally sustainable housing based on the ecological principle of recycling waste and saving water (solar heated naturally!). Every householder has an agreement with Council to plant 10 trees around their house. House values in Treetown have increased by 12% a year over the last 3 years. As many of the residents in Treetown work from home, this liveable social environment is highly valued.

Roger's business is doing well right now. Tourists have been arriving in droves lately to visit this environmentally sustainable town. The river is a true eco-nature resort area that represents an

international model of 'lifestyle' for the over 50's. The Mayor has just returned from Germany where she collected the *Gold Eco Award* for the city's lake precinct – a place where families come to canoe and picnic.

With its wonderful weather and stable, conventional non-threatening social and physical environment, Treetown has become a place for both retirees and young families. There are now 17 retirement villages in the area and the retirement age at the local Council has been raised to 70 because ratepayers like to deal with someone who understands their needs.

Scenario 2 is a high-tech world where the issues of sustainability – equity, security and environment – have not been adequately addressed.

Senior Constable Jim Taylor looks again at his handheld scanner. He is able to see his coverage area in real time. And tonight, he sees that all is quiet. Jim's impressed with the technology that made his job safer and less taxing. Greytown is town is wired and there hasn't been a break-in reported today.

Jim lives in town with his wife Jennie and their 2 children who go to boarding school in Brisbane.

Mary and Jennie's mum lives in the Olive Grove retirement centre. Mum's frightened to go out since she had her handbag snatched in town. Mary asked Jim what he could do, but he said that Mum's experience was similar to that of many others.

Sadly, Mum has been fighting cancer and has been treated at the oncology rooms in the new medical centre. Although costly, the decision to embrace biotechnology has been important for this community because one in four people are now diagnosed cancer.

The high on-going use of energy including air conditioning and internet access has been expensive for the city. Recycling programs were established some years ago but were too expensive to continue to run. To keep costs down, incineration is now the preferred method of waste disposal.

Jennie and Mary have just been to visit their mum in hospital. Jennie stares out of the car window: she is clear now that she'd prefer to be a single mum and make ends meet the best way she can, rather than put up with any more of that violence at home.

Mary's been looking for work for some time now. With further shrinking of social services, she can't really afford to stay home to look after her other two children who spend most of their free time playing with the other children in the Green Meadows Estate (650 'affordable' houses). Unfortunately, juvenile crime is high and there have been incidents of youth suicide.

The lake precinct where Mary used to take her kids to play has been virtually abandoned since mine pollution fouled the rivers system. Blue green algae are evident on the lake and in the river.

Windtunnelling the scenarios

These scenarios represent two very different future worlds. They are hypothetical and yet aspects of each of them are absolutely possible. Scenarios depicting your community would focus on local issues and explore some the more important critical uncertainties.

The power of this work lies not in the scenarios themselves, but in the conversations they generate when the scenarios are windtunnelled against the proposed business models. If we were to take either scenario and test them in 'Big Council' or 'Council without a CBD' or 'Building Community' what might happen?

My point is that there are elements of both these scenarios in all our communities and we have the capacity to test our future strategic options well before events actually take place.

Let me propose some examples of community issues and strategic options for Maleny. In our town, the community is split over whether we should have a pipeline to deliver water to the town. It's also split over two recent development applications for two new supermarkets in town (we already have an excellent IGA).

The underlying concern within the local community is about development and whether we want to see Maleny changed by growth. Many people in the town are concerned that the community as we know it will not be sustainable if these changes take place. The views of the town's dairy and other farmers, small business owners, professionals, artists, craftspeople, organic farmers, and low income earners are different because they have different world views. We need to resolve these differences.

Conclusion

As I write this paper, today's *Australian* (5/9/02) carries the story "Planners warn of LA-style urban sprawl: Coast fears set in concrete" and it's claimed that "Brisbane is on the verge of merging with the Gold and Sunshine coasts into one vast, Los Angeles-type urban sprawl."⁹ Not everyone will view this as a bad thing. Many may welcome increased development in terms of growth opportunities.

And with these headlines in mind, I'd like to leave you with this summary. Times are changing rapidly. Let's recognise that the impacts of our behaviour today are uncertain. And as we think about the future, let's begin with 2023 rather than 2003.

How does this relate to roads, rates and rubbish? Ah, but that was the old model

Endnotes

¹ The methodology presented in this paper reflects the work of Hardin Tibbs and Susanne Haydon, and is referred to as the Synthesys Strategic Thinking methodology.

² This list has been taken from local government participants in our scenarios workshops.

³ The United Nations Economic and Social Council's Dialogue Paper by Local Authorities was used as a basic resource in the writing of this paper. The paper, which is available on the website: www.iclei.org/localstrategies.

⁴ These proposed business models are abstract constructs against which the scenarios can be tested or windtunnelled. They have been developed by the author to reflect different local government models.

⁵ These issues emerged from the work conducted by Hardin Tibbs and Susanne Haydon.

⁶ Refer to *Figure 1: The traditional local government system*.

⁷ The information on Cultural Creatives is taken from the work of Paul H Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson. Over 13 years, they conducted research on more than 100,000 Americans with hundreds of focus groups and about sixty in-depth interviews that reveal the emergence of an entirely new subculture.

⁸ This checklist appears in the Preface of Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson's book *The Cultural Creatives*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2000.

⁹ Article in *The Australian*, Thursday 5 September 2002, page 5. There is also an editorial on this article on page 11.



Author's biography

Susanne Haydon, is a strategy and public policy consultant with extensive experience in the development of scenarios for government and industry. She is CEO of Susanne Haydon Enterprises Pty Ltd (SHE), an Australian-based strategic management consulting firm which operates the division of Synthesys Strategic Thinking. Prior to establishing Susanne Haydon Enterprises in 1992, Susanne was Director of External Training for Advance Bank Australia.

Susanne's work with Synthesys' clients is directed towards:

- Providing strategic advice in policy and planning
- Conducting the scenarios process
- Developing an evidence based futures oriented approach to planning
- Facilitating stakeholder ownership of this approach
- Aligning strategic direction with government and commercial priorities
- Developing communication and marketing strategies to implement effective futures-oriented change management systems.

Susanne has conducted scenarios process research and presentations at the University of Sydney (1991-1998) and Curtin University (1999). She has led scenario/strategy process teams at the Australian Institute of Marine Science (Townsville), Central TAFE (Perth), Sydney Institute of Technology, Swinburne University of Technology (Melbourne). In May-June 2002, Susanne developed the Corporate Strategy for Western Australian Department of Training and Employment and she is currently involved in strategy development for Queensland Transport.

Susanne has a Bachelor of Arts degree (History), Graduate Diploma in Education, Graduate Diploma in Communications and Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. From 1992-1998, she was a faculty member in the School of Social and Policy Studies, Department of Education, University of Sydney. Her research focused on the future of work. In November 1998, Susanne was a Visiting Fellow and scenarios process specialist at the John Curtin International Institute, Curtin University, Perth. She is an Associate of the Australian Centre for Cooperative Research and Development (ACCORD) and an Associate Fellow of the Australian College of Road Safety.

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