

Introduction to thesis chapters

Chapter 1: Research problem: fragmentation and polarization

The core problem I address here is social fragmentation that results in disconnection and loss of capacity for individual or collective agency. My specific concern is what I see as growing narratives of division and fear as they are become manifested in local place. I see this problem escalating in New Zealand, as elsewhere, as our lives becoming inextricably integrated into an increasingly interdependent world.

I make two main arguments in relation to the management of such disorientation and insecurity. One is about the site(s) for the production, testing and application of knowledge - including policy. Much of the testing and application of knowledge needs to be situated, or reflexively worked through and stabilised and framed in real life, particularly local, situations. This is because the simplistic and direct, widespread or global applications of knowledge, especially rapidly changing knowledge, are more apt to create and proliferate largely unforeseen problems. My second main argument is for inclusive participation in such social contextualization or framing. This is not only for reasons to do with human autonomy or democratic ideals, but it is also pragmatic to create and work with a better understanding of the social terrain, and therefore to be in a position to see more relevant problems or obstacles as well as new possibilities.

Chapter 2: Social Movements recovering autonomy

I build my theoretical framework around the fact that knowledge is transgressive, not able to be contained in tidy academic disciplines or institutions. As stressed above, this has local implications. I illustrate this point with reference to New Zealand's nuclear-free campaign of the 1980s and 90s in which I was myself involved. The nuclear-free campaign came about ultimately, because a New Zealand-born and educated scientist Ernest Rutherford split the atom in a university laboratory in England in 1917. As all know, this technology did not stay confined in the theoretical realm of physics or the laboratory or the university.

I see the locally-based nuclear-free grass roots movement and subsequent policy developments, such as the emergence of New Zealand peace-brokering roles, as pointing to the value of processes for the inclusion of diverse, local 'knowledgeable actors' in helping to frame and develop issues. This discursive grass roots movement process can be seen as producing more comprehensible, shared and relevant or socially robust institutions and policy.

In this chapter I also introduce the concept of the transdisciplinary project and propose that, as in a 'game,' this entails the development of rules. Such rules are needed in new transdisciplinary projects to clarify the kinds of contributions various parties can make, and how such work will be contextualised in society, around people and their needs, including - increasingly - with regard for ecology. I stress that with the inclusion of 'knowledgeable actors' it will be found that there is, to use Heidegger's expression, already much knowledge and skill which is "present at hand" (Heidegger, 1962) but which will only be revealed and made "ready to hand" if its presence is recognised in the context of discursive, inclusive problem-solving.

However, as Kenneth Boulding among many others has pointed out, "nothing fails like success" and the question arises, what happens to inclusive social framing processes after much of a social movement's work is done? My argument is that social movements come and go, but locality, the ground where we live, always remains.

Chapter 3: Reflexive "Network Locality" a new site for autonomy

In chapter three, I introduce the concept of the 'Network Locality' or participatory locally grounded civic cosmopolitan place. I draw on a case study of a locality in Christchurch and its experiments with ICTs in which I was also involved and which have been written up in various publications (Ashton, 2002, 2003; Ashton & Thorns, 2004, 2007).

Castells refers to a "globalizing network society" that subsumes resources everywhere in its logic. It is in this context that this thesis seeks to counterpose a distinctive response to globalization, that of a Network Locality that can position itself as a

locally grounded, civic cosmopolitan community. This is seen here as a community that can network locally and globally to interact constructively, rather than react intransigently or become haplessly subsumed by top-down, globalist, information-age designs and trends. The Network Locality is thus one in which inhabitants within localities can interact both with one another and with the wider world and its mobilities on the basis of its own diverse and creatively blended narratives. From these narratives, local inhabitants can in turn produce their own sense or vision of themselves and their possibilities in their locality and negotiate these in relation to environments beyond it.

Chapter 4: Network Locality development narrative

In chapter four, I introduce and extend the concept of inclusive narrative creation, drawing attention to the possibilities that come with media and communications technologies for the co-construction of a local development filmed narrative. I introduce *The Silent Connectors*, a one-act play, which has been adapted for film for research purposes.

My first and major point here is the readily apparent and shareable similarities between real life and filmed drama, which, as I suggest, can seem quite directly to mimic everyday experience and engage us both individually and together. I show how, in a fictional narrative, otherwise heterogeneous elements or fragments, such as exist in New Zealand, can be brought to ‘communicate’ together, or be configured together into an unfolding plot or fictional narrative framing which can in turn invite further, ongoing participation in the construction of shared narratives of new possibilities for real everyday life.

In everyday life, in the media and literature, narratives are constructed about people and place all the time, but the questions I raise in this chapter are who is constructing the narratives, and is it possible to develop more inclusive narrative construction processes? Again drawing on a case I was involved with, I propose that fictional narrative can empower disadvantaged groups, while in fact also bringing them into collaboration with members of other groups, in ways that deliberative, validity-claim

based and other current formal processes of discursivity have not been able to achieve.

Chapter 5: Transdisciplinary, locally-grounded cosmopolitan methodology via locally created filmic texts and internet

In chapter five, I show how filmed narrative, which can be seen to mimic life in the locality, can assist sociology to relate to people in their localities in new and potentially very productive ways. I also outline a communication-based transdisciplinary approach for a new, locally grounded cosmopolitan methodology. The transdisciplinary process seeks to place people, living in their localities, with their needs and aspirations at the centre. The aim is to socially contextualise, test and stabilise knowledge in localities.

Chapter 6: Design for locally-based co-discovery

In chapter six, I describe the research design, which seeks to set up a 'safe' process where people from diverse backgrounds can participate in a developmental narrative, within the constraints of time and the need for rigorous social science processes.

A framework I wish to develop can be conceived of as a locality (local community)-academic-policy Tripod. While this Tripod is similar to some existing models linking, or connecting, non-government organizations, social science and social policy (Good & Rangiheuea, 2006), this particular Tripod has as its starting point, local community and its everyday life and relates from local community to academia and policy. Given, as Klaus Eder suggests, the tendency for local everyday, professional and theoretical knowledge/s to develop along separate or not very well connected trajectories or spheres (Eder, 1996), I see this communication model as one which seeks to support and develop an effective interplay of the various forms of knowledge.

Chapter 7: The research: unfolding narratives of local-global development

The focus in chapter seven is on the responses of participants. The main point here is that participants from very diverse socio-economic education and cultural/ethnic

backgrounds and ages 12-85 years participated, but because classifications are not recorded alongside the responses, it is not possible to tell from these responses the background of participants.

I argue that this non-classification of participants can result in important methodological advantages, particularly in providing a structure for freedom of perception and expression, in particular, authentic expression in the communicative co-construction of localities.

Drawing from participant responses, a second act is created. Those who seek a conventional analysis of the material provided for the second act at this point miss the very point of using narrative to function as the 'connector' amongst otherwise diverse concerns and disciplines.

Importantly narrative enables people in their localities to discover and explore what they might like to connect with, both locally and beyond, and to clarify what matters to them, what threatens and what can give meaning to their being in the world . It engages people in their everyday lives and their experience, their own knowledge and ways of expressing this and most importantly, their possibilities and their own sense of these. In an unfolding narrative, situations can be tested out and worked through, using the power of the imagination.

I conclude by pointing to how a new cosmopolitan-based transdisciplinary methodology, one that places locally-constructed agency at its heart, can help build new forms of connectedness and belonging and with these, the productive, local-local *and* local-through-to global agency necessary to creatively and much more effectively meet challenges of an interdependent world.