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THE ART OF INFLUENCE: STRATEGIES OF CHANGE AGENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY. NOOSA 1960 TO THE LATE 1990s

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Changes in behaviour from sea change communities are needed to ensure the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of these communities and the natural resources upon which they depend (eg. to preserve the natural amenities that attracted sea-changers to the region in the first place). The physical form of the coastline is continually changing (despite engineering efforts) in response to natural cycles of renewal (deposition) and depletion (erosion) driven by the tides, currents, wave action, and more dramatically during storm events. Historically, such changes may have been welcomed in terms of sustaining ecological systems or perhaps largely unnoticed as the undeveloped dunes and estuaries and river banks moved and were moulded by these cycles. However, with the reconceptualisation and redevelopment of these areas as highly desirable areas to live and invest in, changes to the biophysical environment are not so welcome. Yet, rapid change in coastal communities is inherent and will only increase as these natural cycles are exaggerated through culturally-enhanced phenomena including climate change and population growth. Therefore, in this context sustainability is not a static state to be achieved and maintained, but rather an adaptive way of life that 'combines the long-term survival of communities with a qualitative improvement in the quality of life'.¹

Understanding Individual And Societal Change

Societal change can be viewed as an interplay between three sets of opposing factors: biography (individual) and history (social), theory and praxis, and between local and global levels.² Understanding how to achieve behavioural change towards sustainability requires consideration of all these factors and numerous theoretical models have been developed to explain these relationships. Such models have developed from those of the early 1970s based upon a linear progression from knowledge through attitude to behaviour, to contemporary models able to incorporate a higher degree of complexity and a range of internal and external influences as well as demographic variables.³ In part, this increase in complexity reflects an increase our technical ability to model theoretical concepts using computers capable of handling a greater range and number of inputs than was previously possible. It also represents a change in understanding and a departure from the more narrowly focused, dualistic environmental movements towards the more holistic sustainability approaches occurring over the last decade.⁴ Such a transition has prompted recognition that humans are part of larger social and natural systems and that as a starting point we should consider environmental, social and economic conditions for present and future generations.

However, the tendency and ability of contemporary models of individual and societal change to incorporate such a diversity of influences upon behaviour produces such complex models that recent theorists question whether such an approach is feasible or useful beyond categorizing and illustrating factors.⁵ In addition, there is minimal literature on how to link models that attempt to explain individual behaviour with those that explain societal behaviour in order to translate individual changes into social change for sustainability.

Understanding agents of change

Given the complexity and seemingly futile nature of attempting to explain the diversity of pathways towards sustainability, it appears that a pragmatic approach is to seek individual and localised understandings of these factors in an effort to educe meaning from such complexity and to focus upon those successful in translating individual knowledge and attitude into societal changes. As Kapoor notes:

we seem to have forgotten the power of the individual visionary...involving the everyday activities of real human beings, which are creatively, positively and often very quietly transforming the lives and futures of millions...⁶

I propose that these agents of change may be seen as catalysts for local sustainability by providing an important link between the individual and community. By influencing others, these individuals are able to achieve sustainable outcomes on a broader community scale. Indeed, it is one thing to *change* and quite another thing to be a *change agent*. In the following section, I describe a framework in order to learn from historically influential and local-based sustainability champions focusing upon how these people influenced change.

Developing a typology of change agent strategies

To transition society in a synchronised fashion with changing environmental contexts will require a diversity of approaches from a range of societal actors, as Lambin notes:

Transitions are broad societal structural changes that require system innovations by a variety of actors and in multiple sectors of society.⁷

Dahle contends that the goal in transitioning to a sustainable society is not consensus on one strategy, but rather to 'have as many people as possible marching together in the same direction under different banners'.⁸ Indeed, such diversity is the cornerstone of resilience.⁹ To this end, several typologies of individual strategies for social change have been proposed including Moyer¹⁰ and, more recently, Dahle.¹¹ These typologies describe a range of strategic profiles (e.g. reformer, rebel, revolutionary etc) for achieving social change that emanate from the worldview and personality of those involved. The analysis presented here supports and expands upon the strategies for social change described by Dahle where he identified five different pathways in which individuals could seek societal transition to a sustainable society: reformist, impatient revolutionary, patient revolutionary, grassroots fighter and multifaceted radical pathways (Table 1). Dahle distinguished these categories based upon whether the change agent thought that solutions were possible within the existing order; whether

strategies should be top-down or bottom-up; and whether such transition is possible now or if total environmental or social collapse is required before people are receptive to change. It is important to note that only the reformists in this description believe that solutions are possible within the existing political and economic contexts.

Category	Description of change agent strategy
<i>Reformists</i>	Involves the present order and power elite making top-down political decisions.
<i>Impatient revolutionaries</i>	Revolt by new power elite (enlightened minority) to change the existing order to make rapid changes from above.
<i>Patient revolutionaries</i>	Patience and preparation for total environmental or social collapse in order to use education and social learning as transition strategies.
<i>Grassroots fighters</i>	Change through bottom-up activities and personal responsibility.
<i>Multifaceted radicals</i>	Change through a combination of diverse bottom-up and top-down strategies.

Table 1. *Alternative strategies for social change towards sustainability (summarised from¹²)*

As a sector of the Sunshine Coast, Australia, notable for its unique natural environment and active community, Noosa Shire has been chosen as the local context in which to explore Dahle's categories. From original ownership by the Gubbi Gubbi people^{13 14} through development as a port and tourist resort from the 1870s driven by Walter Hay¹⁵, to the efforts of pioneering conservationists from the 1960s¹⁶, community-minded town planning in the early 1980s¹⁷, and through to probable amalgamation with Maroochy and Caloundra shires today, Noosa has faced successive waves of development. Some have described such development as 'unplanned'¹⁸ as the rapid nature of such change due to substantial increases in the rate of growth 'overwhelmed good intentions of councillors and residents alike'.¹⁹ Indeed, with regard to the mining and tourism industries in Queensland, Fitzgerald notes that:

Each industry, with the support of the ruling coalition, has placed development, economic expansion and progress above the interests of ordinary people and the need to preserve the natural environment.²⁰

Nevertheless, there were substantial efforts by local residents and conservation groups to conserve natural areas and promote community-minded development. As Jarratt notes:

Noosa doesn't look much like a battleground, unless you look at it with an insider's knowledge.²¹

By analysing the strategies of change agents active in Noosa Shire during the period from 1960 until the late nineties, this study demonstrates that further categories must be added to capture the diversity of social change strategies and that some of the most successful strategists employ a range of pathways cognizant of local contexts and

relevant decision-makers to achieve sustainability (Table 2). The questions used to guide this analysis were:

- What were the change agents' goals?
- What did the change agent achieve? (outcomes)
- Which outcomes were enduring?
- What strategies did they use to achieve these outcomes? (processes)
- What barriers and opportunities were faced in achieving their goals?

Goals and achievements

The change agents in this study were all focused upon the conservation natural attractors of Noosa shire (particularly the area known as Noosa Heads) and how these could be sustainably developed towards maintenance of a vibrant local community. As Dr Harrold of the Noosa Parks Association noted in 1977:

Noosa Shire has three basic attributes which...attract people to the area. These are its beaches, its river, and its national park. These can be developed intelligently, or they can be ruined.²²

It can be seen that with community support, many of these local change agents achieved considerable and lasting success in terms of their conservation and community goals by achieving national park status for substantial areas of native vegetation and coastline and ensuring the uniqueness of the Noosa's built environment despite its tourist appeal (e.g. lack of high rise, village atmosphere) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Examples of change agent strategies in Noosa Shire²³ (summarised from^{24, 25, 26})

Change agent	Strategies	Examples of achievements	Barriers/Opps	Categories
Arthur & Marjorie Harrold	Community education Lobbying State Government Botanical research Opportunistic conversations with decision-makers Formation of community-based conservation organisation (Noosa Parks Association)	Preservation and extension of Noosa National Park Creation and extension of Cooloola National Park Limitation of high rise to achieve treetop skyline Inspiration for future conservationists	Public ridicule prior to acceptance and later respected and admired. Denounced by more recent green groups as too conservative. Support from like-minded colleagues.	Opportunist Knowledge broker Reformist
Bill & Mavis Husley	Formation of a community-based conservation organisation (Cooloola Committee) based near key decision-makers Professional connections with decision-makers Worked in partnership with members that had both legal and scientific expertise	Creation and extension of Cooloola National Park	Denounced by more recent green groups as too conservative. Support from like-minded colleagues.	Opportunist Reformist

<i>Michael Gloster (in association with Glen Gloster allied councillors)</i>	Community-based conservation (President of Noosa Parks Association) Local political (elected Noosa Shire Councillor) Insider knowledge	Increased protection for the Noosa River and North Shore Reversal of planned high rise development Boardwalks linking cultural and natural features All council meetings accessible to public Ecologically based population cap incorporated into town planning law.	Smear campaign by the local development lobby Failure to be re-elected Support from like-minded colleagues	Reformist/revolutionary Opportunist
<i>Noel Playford</i>	Local political (elected Noosa Shire Councillor & Mayor)	As above (see Michael Gloster) Re-orientated debate from conservation vs development to focus on quality development in appropriate areas	Rumours and smear campaigns by development lobby and political opponents. Law suits from the development industry. Re-election.	Reformist/revolutionary
<i>Cecily Fearnley</i>	Weekly illustrated nature column for local newspaper (Nature Notes) Publication of an illustrated book on Noosa's environment (Noosa Nature)	Community awareness of Noosa's native flora and fauna	Unclear from literature	Artistic activist Knowledge broker
<i>Jim Fearnley</i>	Community-based conservation (President of Noosa Parks Association) Local political (elected Noosa Shire Councillor)	Inspiration for future pro-environmental councillors	Minority in council	Reformist
<i>Nancy Cato</i>	<i>Conservation and activist writing in letters to the newspaper and the publication of 'The Noosa Story' a story of the destruction of Noosa's natural environment Protests to save trees from development</i>	Community awareness of unplanned development in Noosa Shire. Protection of flora.	Public ridicule prior to acceptance and later respected and admired. Supportive network of colleagues.	Artistic activist Knowledge broker Multifaceted radical

Table 2. Examples of change agent strategies in Noosa Shire²³ (summarised from^{24, 25, 26})

Strategies for influencing others

By the 1980s, the social and environmental costs of state government's inadequate land use planning and uncritical encouragement of 'development' led Noosa residents and visitors to question high-rise developments and canal estates and to call for the preservation of natural waterways areas of bush.²⁷ Utilising this pro-environmental community context, most of the change agent strategies had elements consistent with Dahle's 'reformist' and Moyer's 'reformer' categories by either influencing the present power elite (e.g. the strategies of Arthur Harrold and Bill and Mavis Huxley) or by being elected to political positions where they themselves became the decision makers (e.g. the strategies of Michael Gloster and Noel Playford). In the first instance, use of the reformist strategy to influence State Government has ensured enduring success through the creation and extension of National Parks. In the second instance, the reformist strategy whereby change agents were elected to local government allowed substantial changes over a short time period. However, since these changes were largely based upon these individuals staying in political office, some (not all) successes were short-lived when the change agents' failed to be re-elected. Indeed, the later re-election of Noel Playford provided more opportunities to re-build upon earlier efforts.²⁸

None of Dahle's next three categories (impatient revolutionaries, patient revolutionaries and grassroots fighters) were evidenced directly in this study. Although the election of

Michael Gloster and Noel Playford as part of 'The Residents Team' a group of pro-environmental candidates to the 1982-85 local council does have elements of the 'impatient revolutionaries' category, their belief in, and use of, democratic processes means that their approach remains reformist. Similarly, some of the actions of Nancy Cato and colleagues have elements in common with the 'grassroots fighters' category, but her use of multiple strategies means that she is better described as a 'multifaceted radical'. Nonetheless, it is likely that during this period there were individuals that may be described as 'patient revolutionaries' or 'grassroots fighters' but the nature of their strategies (e.g. waiting for total collapse, individualistic, long-term awareness raising) means that they are unlikely to achieve success that is obvious from a historical perspective.

Given the limited ability of Dahle's typology to explain successful strategic profiles at the local level and in instances where the existing social and political order remains, it is instructive to describe additional strategies based upon the experiences and achievements of those change agents described in Table 2. From the analysis presented, it appears that at least three additional strategies must be added including: opportunist, knowledge broker and artistic activist (see Table 3).

Category	Description of change agent strategy
<i>Reformists</i>	Involves the present order and power elite making top-down political decisions.
<i>Impatient revolutionaries</i>	Revolt by new power elite (enlightened minority) to change the existing order to make rapid changes from above.
<i>Patient revolutionaries</i>	Patience and preparation for total environmental or social collapse in order to use education and social learning as transition strategies.
<i>Grassroots fighters</i>	Change through bottom-up activities and personal responsibility.
<i>Multifaceted radicals</i>	Change through a combination of diverse bottom-up and top-down strategies.
<i>Opportunists</i>	Change through socially aware and well-connected individuals that influence decision-makers.
<i>Knowledge brokers</i>	Use of information (scientific, institutional, community) by the well-informed to influence a range of societal sectors.
<i>Artistic activists</i>	Use of emotional, spiritual, aesthetic appeal by artisans of various media to influence a range of societal sectors.

Table 3. Additional change agent strategies towards sustainability (adapted from²⁸)

The opportunist strategy involves influencing change through socially aware and well-connected individuals that are able to recognise and seize an opportunity to influence decision-makers. This strategy has been successfully utilised by at least three of the change agents studied. Examples of this strategy and strategists in action include: meeting with relevant ministers (present power elite) while on holiday (e.g. Arthur

Harrold), attending influential meetings uninvited (e.g. Michael Gloster) or establishing a base for action close to decision-makers and utilising professional connections (e.g. Bill Huxley) (see Table 2).

The knowledge broker strategy has been used by several change agents in this study to inform the community about the natural environment (e.g. Cecily Fearnley) the effects of development, and intended developments (e.g. Nancy Cato). Strategists in this category have also used scientific information to influence decision-makers (e.g. Arthur Harrold) (see Table 2).

The artistic activist strategy is notable in this analysis and it is likely to persist given the appeal of Noosa and its hinterland towns to artists of various media. This strategy has been used alongside the knowledge broker strategy to appeal to the emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic values of the community and decision-makers alike. The activist writing of nationally recognised author, Nancy Cato to gain publicity for the plight of Noosa's natural environment and local community is a good example of this approach.³⁰ While the indirect nature of this strategy makes it difficult to establish direct causal links with on-ground achievements, it is a distinctive and persistent strategy that appears to have increased the efficacy of the other strategies employed (see Table 2).

Indeed, the most successful strategists (as defined by their achievements) have utilised a range of tactics relevant to their goals rather than singular strategies. In addition, strategies focused upon influencing those in the higher positions of power, based upon careful research (social, environmental, political) and enacted by those willing to take risks and seize opportunities are more likely to achieve significant and lasting results. For example, the preservation and extension of Noosa National Park by Arthur Harrold was achieved when he side-stepped local politics and instead opportunistically influenced State Government (The Minister for Lands while on holiday in Noosa) with sound botanical research.³¹ Thus, demonstrating an effective combination of reformist (influenced present power elite), opportunist (unconventional and timely use of social knowledge) and knowledge broker (use of scientific knowledge) strategies.

Barriers and opportunities for agents of change

In addition to the substantial amounts of time, energy and resources devoted to achieving sustainability, the experiences outlined in Table 2 indicate a range of personal (e.g. subject of ridicule or smear campaign), professional (e.g. being in the minority), financial (e.g. law suits and court costs) and institutional (e.g. local council and laws) barriers that may be faced by individual agents of change. Despite these barriers, the change agents studied continued creating opportunities for change using the strategies outlined and drawing upon a supportive network of colleagues and, at times, communities of place. During this time, one such network of colleagues could be found in the Noosa Parks Association, Queensland's oldest community-based conservation group established in 1962.³² Certainly, most of the change agents in this study were members of, or had strong connections with this group.³³

CONCLUSIONS

Achieving sustainability is a social process that can draw upon the knowledge of science, the tools of technology, the power of political processes, and the efforts of informed citizens. However, achieving the behavioural changes necessary to utilise and benefit from these features of modern civilisation towards sustainability appears inherently complex and difficult to understand in general terms.³⁴ By utilising a locally-based and contextual analysis of historical strategies for change, this study has highlighted the importance of the 'reformist' strategy identified by Dahle and the analogous 'reformer' strategy identified by Moyer. It also reveals three additional strategies (opportunist, knowledge broker, and artistic activist) of importance to achieving change at the local level.

The most successful strategies utilised a combination of these strategies drawing upon social networks/capital (both within and between social groups), scientific research, and the willingness and ability of individuals to seize opportunities to influence those in the highest relevant positions of power. Thus, these strategists possessed high levels of what Kollmuss and Agyeman have termed 'pro-environmental consciousness' being cognizant of demographic factors as well as external (e.g. institutional, economic, social, and cultural), and internal factors (e.g. motivation, knowledge, awareness, values, attitudes, emotion) related to an issue.³⁵ However, it is the targeted use of this sustainability-oriented consciousness towards influencing those in the highest relevant positions of power (rather than through more generalised programs) that has enabled the change agents in this study to be successful in achieving societal change through individual effort.

The efficiency and preparedness of these approaches along with their daring opportunism and ability to be implemented within the existing societal order (rather than dismantling or overthrowing it) suggests that these historical tactics will remain influential. Nonetheless, further research is required to understand what impact recent scientific and technological advances, the rise of the global community, and the acceleration of climate change will have on the ability of agents of change to influence others to achieve sustainable outcomes.

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¹¹ K Dable, pp. 487-504.

¹² K Dable, pp. 490-501.

¹³ A comprehensive account of the original inhabitants of Noosa, the Gubbi Gubbi people and their relationship to the land and experiences with the first European settlers may be found in R.J.L. Adams, *Noosa and Gubbi Gubbi: The land, the people, the conflict*, Ultraya Publications, Tewantin, Queensland, 2000.

¹⁴ See also N Cato, *The Noosa story: a study in unplanned development*, 3rd edn, The Jacaranda Press, Milton Queensland, 1989.

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¹⁶ A comprehensive and personal account of key players in the conservation movement focused upon Noosa Heads at this time can be found in M Gloster, *The Shaping of Noosa*, The Blue Group, Noosa Heads, Queensland, 1997.

¹⁷ M Gloster, p. 36-47.

¹⁸ N Cato, 1989.

¹⁹ R Fitzgerald, *From 1915 to the early 1980s: a history of Queensland*, University of Queensland press, Queensland, 1984, p.481.

²⁰ R Fitzgerald, p.503.

²¹ P Jarrett, 'Foreward', in M Gloster, p. 7.

²² AG Harrold, quotation from an article in the *Noosa News*, 17 February, 1997 in N Cato, p.47.

²³ It is important to note that this table provides an example of the range of strategies used and a sample of the active change agents only. There were many more individuals and important change agents than was possible to include in this brief table.

²⁴ M Gloster, pp. 10-143.

²⁵ E Freeman, *Hastings Street: stories from Noosa's past*, Debut Publishing, Noosa Heads, Queensland.

²⁶ N Cato, 1989.

²⁷ R Fitzgerald, p. 618.

²⁸ M Gloster, pp. 78-83.

²⁹ K Dable, pp. 490-501.

³⁰ Nancy Cato's book, *The Noosa story: a study in unplanned development* is a good example of influential activist writing.

³¹ M Gloster, pp.26-35.

³² M Gloster, p.146.

³³ An account of the Noosa Parks Association and its founding and most influential members may be found in M Gloster, pp.10-147.

³⁴ A Kollmuss & J Agyeman, p.239.

³⁵ A Kollmuss & J Agyeman, p.256.