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***Public sector innovation as practice: Social enterprise, community
gardening and sense of place in the context of embedded
social exclusion in rural Australia.***

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Abstract

Behind alluring images of Australian coastal lifestyle lies another reality. This paper is a critical account of a social enterprise community farm that was established to foster social inclusion and overcome barriers to employment for socially marginalized people on the Coffs Coast in Northern NSW, Australia. The farm and its staff gave a sense of place, social inclusivity and connectedness as well as providing therapeutic benefits of horticulture. However this proved temporary as the farm became yet another short-term policy intervention inadequately applied to long-term, systematic, and rarely articulated social suffering of, what one author refers to as, 'redundant populations'.

Key words

Social inclusion/exclusion, cultural silencing, therapeutic horticulture, sense of place, social capital.

Context of the evaluation of the Innovation Fund

From 2009-2012 the Australian Federal Government allocated AUD \$41 million to the Innovation Fund for projects in line with its Social Inclusion Agenda and policy. The Innovation Fund was established by the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), and administered through Job Services Australia, to support innovative strategies to help Highly Disadvantaged Jobseekers find employment. Specifically,

‘to fund *place-based* (my emphasis) solutions to address barriers to employment for groups of the most disadvantaged job seekers.

These groups include, but are not limited to, people in areas with entrenched disadvantage, the homeless and those at risk of homelessness, people with mental health conditions, Indigenous Australians, and job seekers in jobless families.’ (DEEWR Innovation Fund guidelines).

The fund enabled a range of organizations to envisage, plan, fund, and attempt to put into practice 83 social inclusion projects (DEEWR Innovation Fund project details 2011) across Australia. This projects included mental health programs, indigenous welfare initiatives, and training to socially marginalized people amongst other programs and activities.

According to a later DEEWR publication (2013),

‘Place-based (means) there is a focus on community, particularly those communities where there may be underserved markets’.

‘There is a need for investment in communities, which have chronically lacked investment or are undergoing significant change through, for example, economic restructuring’.

‘There is potential to develop new markets and areas of economic activity in a period where some traditional investment markets are harder to access and less predictable’.

The Innovation Fund, and this place-based, socially inclusive approach constituted significant governmental policy. This was perhaps more in terms of policy direction than magnitude but this policy response to the problem of long-term unemployment was of particular importance considering it was delivered at the time of greatest potential impact of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC).

In global terms Australia is generally seen to have weathered the GFC better than most economies (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010), however this is a simplification. The GFC that seriously impacted the world economy from 2007 is the greatest downturn in the global economy since the 1930’s. European nations, including Iceland, Ireland, Spain and Greece, as well as many developing economies, have since experienced significantly reduced economic growth and attendant problems of reduced taxation bases, and growth in public and sovereign debts. Despite escaping the full brunt of the GFC Australia’s GDP did contract from around 5% growth per annum before the GFC down to 0.5% per annum in 2009 (Morling & McDonald, 2011). Other economic indicators point to decline in housing equity by 10% as well unemployment and underemployment rates (The Australian 2010, ABS 2010) rising significantly during this period.

A range of factors is posited as being responsible for Australia's economic resilience in the face of the GFC. Firstly, stronger financial sector regulation than the US and the UK reduced the Australian economy's exposure to the risks, excesses and instabilities of housing-bubble related financial implosion. Secondly, when a range of already stressed institutions and economies began to melt down the policy response of the then Rudd Labour federal government was economic stimulation to the value of over \$50 billion, rather than the kinds of austerity measures that became policy norm in, for instance, the European Community. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Australia's surging resources mining sector acted as a profound economic stimulator in several areas of Australia. According to Perlich, 'the overall Australian economy avoided recession in part because strong export figures, reflecting the significant contribution from the resource states particularly WA (Western Australia)' (2010, p.84).

However behind these good 'overall' figures is a more complex reality. The combination of GFC and mining boom in particular geographic places has created a 'dual economy' (Perlich, 2010) in which the real-life impacts of the GFC are often hidden from official accounts. This is the case in many Australian non-metropolitan areas, some of which were already characterised by embedded social exclusion (Vinson, 1999, 2003, 2007), prior to the GFC, the extent of which few people would believe.

The official unemployment rate for the Northern NSW is 6.8% in 2013 (DEEWR 2013), though this is clearly not a realistic reflection of what proportion of this

population is in training, part-time work, casual work, short-term contracting or receiving other Centrelink benefits. The participation rate for this region is the lowest in NSW at 54% in 2013 (DEEWR 2013).

Australia's national self-image creates difficulties and tensions in researching and bringing public attention to the existence and depth of social exclusion in this country (Peel, 2003). Dominant cultural stories and narratives strongly influence social research and this was the case in this evaluation.

According to Beeton,

'Australians' image of themselves and how others view them is embedded in the images presented by contemporary popular media, both domestic and international. Many of these images are rural; however, they are not based on a Romantic rural idyll but, rather, stem from notions of the Australian 'bush' (2004, p.125)

This insight is arguably on track but it doesn't go far enough. Australia's national self image is a collage of no-nonsense matiness through sporting prowess, rugged landscape, and proud histories of war and farming. Contemporarily, this is overlaid with emerging urban multiculturalism, good living through wine, food, world-class natural tourist destinations, and all backed by a globally respected business sector. This self-image says something like 'yes, we have succeeded/are succeeding despite the odds', 'we are new fresh emerging country', and 'we are as good as the western world' ('that we are in exile from', even...). It's hard to see through this almost triumphant self-image to heartbreaking lived lives of struggle, embedded social

disadvantage, social isolation, mental illness and placelessness that not-uncommonly lie behind it. This 'social suffering' (Bourdieu 1999), especially prevalent in regional and rural Australia, has undoubtedly escalated since the GFC.

Evaluation of the Innovation Farm

It is in this broad context that the researchers set about evaluating the Coffs Coast Community Farm or 'Innovation Farm'. It was set up as a Social Enterprise community farm for socially excluded people in the area. The active research questions that drove the evaluation were: How well had it assisted Highly Disadvantaged Jobseekers to overcome barriers to employment and training? Had it provided 'appropriate' and 'outdoor-based' work experience opportunities? To what extent was this state intervention successful in terms of the increasing social inclusivity of its participants?

Much of the evaluation process took place at the farm. We interviewed people overlooking the well-tended community gardens and surrounded by mature stands of eucalypt and endemic rainforest reaching 20 meters or more in height.

Uneconomic Macadamia nut and Kiwi fruit plantings from a previous era had been partially cleared to make way for long rows of certified organic crops now being grown for local markets and restaurants. The property's house and adjoining buildings and spaces had been leased as part of farm operations.

A mixed method approach was used to evaluate the key aims of the farm. It comprised:

- Workshops to introduce and outline the research to participants and staff
- Semi-structured interviews of participants, staff and Job network providers
- Participants keeping reflective 'place' journals about their experiences at the farm
- An overview of all significant reports and documents
- Feedback workshops to participants and staff and board members

Over the course of a year the researchers immersed themselves in as many aspects of the farm as they could. This was done, of course, with as much sensitivity as possible to the needs of the clients of the farm as well as the organizational requirements of the staff running the farm. We were fully aware of the social power imbalance inherent in the research process and consequently adopted a semi-structured, relaxed and consciously sympathetic approach to developing relations to the people involved in the farm. This was the approach used by Bourdieu (1999) in his social exclusion research carried out in France in the 1990's.

Highly Disadvantaged Jobseekers living on the Coffs Coast were often from the following social groups:

- Those suffering a mental health disability
- Youth
- The homeless (and those at risk of homelessness)
- Refugees (Coffs Coast is a designated refugee resettlement area and also has an growing Sudanese population)
- Aboriginal people (comprising 4% of the Coffs Coast population compared to the Australian average of 2.3%).

Interviews were scheduled (and rescheduled..); they were recorded and transcribed and slowly the researchers gained insights into the farm and its people, operations, and activities.

From the start, the researchers were struck by the plight of the participants – and it needs to be stressed that only the most confident are likely to have volunteered to be interviewed. Most were people who could be described as profoundly socially excluded. Some suffering mental health issues; some clearly scarred through the experiences of almost irreversible long-term unemployment; some attempting to recover from addictions and/or low self esteem: others such as some of the Aboriginal trainees we interviewed appearing to us to be distant and untrusting. We also interviewed farm staff and staff from (un)employment agencies. We encouraged people’s stories, and the stories that emerged were often stories of hope and hopelessness.

Pulling back from the sometimes confronting emotional aspects of the research, the researchers soon became aware of two key factors important to understanding the Innovation Farm. Firstly, that the Coffs Coast is a place characterized by a high level of embedded social disadvantage that includes high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Secondly, that employment in general, and (un)employment services in particular, have been progressively deregulated in Australia since the mid 1990’s. (Though it must be clarified that ‘deregulation’ has also been accompanied by increased regulation of unemployed people).

The Coffs Coast region is characterised and well known for its natural features: forest, rivers and estuaries, as well as coastline. Its generally well-preserved environment makes it popular for tourists and for migration from urban Australia. The region is known for its surfing, lifestyle opportunities, rich settler history, alternative culture, as a retirement idyll, as well as place of growing business opportunity and associated infrastructure. The relatively new Coffs Harbour Education Campus and Coffs Health Campus are testament to this.

The Coffs Coast Region and the Mid-North Coast of NSW in general, is however also one of the most socially disadvantaged areas in NSW and indeed in Australia (Vinson 2003, Brennan 2011). Professor Tony Vinson is well known in Australia for measuring, recording and bringing light to social disadvantage, social exclusion and poverty. According to Vinson's research 'Dropping off the Edge' (2007), such disadvantage is consistently found to be inter-generational disadvantage embedded in particular places and communities. Such social disadvantage is characterised by (and measured through) a range of indicators including:

- Social distress: low family income, rental stress, home purchase stress, lone person households.
- Health: low birth-weight, childhood injuries, immunisation, disability / sickness support, life expectancy, psychiatric patients, hospital / community, suicide.
- Community safety: child maltreatment, criminal convictions, imprisonment, domestic violence.
- Education: non-attendance at preschool, incomplete education, early school leaving and low post-schooling qualifications.

- Economic: unskilled workers, unemployment, long-term unemployment, dependency ratio, low mean taxable income, limited computer use / internet access.

Vinson's studies carried out in 1999, 2005 & 2007 found that in NSW just 1.7% of all postcodes accounted for 12.5% of the top 40 rankings of indicators of disadvantage – a more than seven-fold over-representation. Some of the highest social disadvantage/poverty levels and associated unemployment rates were found in the Bowraville area, which is some 35 kilometres south of the Innovation Farm in the Nambucca Local Government Area and is part of the Coffs Coast Region. Other Coffs Coast Region places of social disadvantage included Urunga, Nambucca Heads and Sawtell (Vinson 2007).

Such embedded disadvantage constitutes a policy challenge for government. The dominant policy response in Australia has been the deregulation the workforce in an attempt to make it more competitive internationally. For long-term unemployed people this has meant a regime of job networks, reporting, training, 'dole-diaries', and 'work experience' as they are encouraged, persuaded, or harassed into being 'job ready'.

Job Services Australia (JSA), formerly Job Network, was launched in 1998 by the then Howard Federal Government. Arguably, this was in line with the trajectory of economic deregulation of the previous Hawke and Keating Labour governments of the 1990's. JSA is a competitive arrangement by which unemployment support is tendered out to competing organisations, then remunerated, reported upon and

ranked depending upon the success rate of placing clients (ranked by degree of difficulty of placement) in the workplace.

This devolution of the formerly public role of (un)employment services is a general trend in western world. Advantages to this model are seen to be the competitive efficiency and the ability to tap into local expertise, innovation and area-specific knowledge (Dockery 2001). Arguably, this approach has been taken furthest in Australia. However, doubts remain regarding this model and approach as to whether social disadvantage and exclusion are alleviated or compounded (Burgess 1998; Bodsworth 2010) through it.

It needs to be stated that this deregulated complete approach to (un)employment services, aimed at improving social inclusivity and increasing access to the workforce for Highly Disadvantaged Jobseekers, has been consistently critiqued as being ideologically driven rather than having been proven to be practically effective. At the core of this approach is the Neoliberal belief that the responsibility for social exclusion, social disadvantage and long-term unemployment lies with the individual person (Harvey, 2007). Opponents of this approach would argue that the responsibility of this social suffering lies less with the individual and more with the policy of the state and the trajectory of socio-economic system as whole (ibid). Talking this further there is plenty of evidence that since the shift towards economic deregulation policies in the 1990's, the distribution of income and wealth in Australia has become significantly less equitable (Whiteford, 2011).

Social Capital

To better understand social exclusion, social inclusion and social disadvantage (and poverty) the research next turned to looking at the literature around 'social capital'.

In the late 1990s 'social capital' emerged as the buzzword for policy makers and planners around the world (Scanlon, 2003). According to Scanlon, social capital refers to the social networks that bind people together. Politicians including Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, Tony Abbot, David Cameron and public intellectuals such as Eva Cox have, at times, advocated the building of social capital to boost civil society, to bring different socio-economic sectors together and as strategy to encourage social inclusion.

However, the history of the term 'social capital' is more complicated than implied in this popular political discourse. How social capital is conceptualized varies from author to author and has changed over time.

Bourdieu in his seminal work, *The Forms of Capital* (1986) argues that social capital is:

- Imminent i.e. that it is a potential or stored form of social power.
- Inclusive and more available to members of social groups and exclusive and less available to others.
- Constantly maintained and invested into (and denied) through active social symbolic processes.
- Is at its core economic power.

According to Bourdieu (1985, p 248), social capital is 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or

less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition'. Similarly, Granovetter's (1974) sees social capital in terms of peoples' 'weak ties'. According to his conceptualisation these weak ties are relatively unknown acquaintances who are more often the source of important information and jobs than are strong or close acquaintances.

Where Bourdieu sees social capital as not being freely available to all members of society, Coleman (1988) and later Putnam (2000), see social capital in terms of participation in civil society through family groups, volunteering, community services, neighbourly goodwill and so on. The emphases are upon civic virtues and values such as democracy (Putnam 1995) trust, reciprocity, and the enforcement of social norms. This is the kind of social capital that David Cameron, the UK Prime Minister, is referring to when he talks of 'big society'. Putman in his famous article '*Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*' (1995), bemoans the decline of social capital, as he sees it, with many US towns and cities in decline (ibid). For him social capital is a form of goodwill (democratically) available to, and perhaps also required from, all.

Portes (1998) argues that, as with many terms exported from sociological study to broader society, the term's heuristic power and value can be lost (p.2). This is compounded by the fact that social capital, unlike other forms of capital, whilst being fungible, is intangible (p.7). Portes argues against some of the assumptions of American authors Coleman and Putman (p.150). Similarly, Alessandrini (2006) suggests that the 'democratic' and emancipatory (nationhood and citizenship and little government..) ethos found in US history is not a good basis for understanding

Australian history and Australian conceptualizations of social capital as Australia's history has been one of strong and multi-layered government.

In 1996 the newly elected Howard government, asked the ABS to come up with an operational definition of social capital and went on to accept the OECD definition, which is, '...networks together with shared norms values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups' (Alessandrini, 2006 p.5). Although Alessandrini initially found Australia relatively well endowed in social capital, on further investigation he decided the aggregated picture was misleading. Through a series of Red Cross surveys that took into account income and education levels, a different picture emerged. What emerged was disturbing evidence of social isolation at lower levels of education and income. Using Portes' term, this 'negative social capital' reflected sharply lower levels of social interaction, as well as lower levels of trust in social institutions and norms.

Alessandrini, referring particularly to Putnam, concludes that politically attractive terms such as social capital have historical and philosophical contexts. A current search of Internet uses of the term also reveals that the term 'social capital' is being applied to corporate social responsibility (bringing business and charity together) and digital social networking.

Social Capital is a term that describes the intangible and potential social power that can be invested into, and drawn from, community networks. Depending upon history and place, these networks may include people, communities, clubs institutions, government departments and businesses. Popular references to social

capital tend to overlook or be unaware of Bourdieu's complex conceptualisations. This is unfortunate because many authors including Portes, and Alessandrini find that Putnam's and Coleman's idealised notions of social capital do not, in reality, apply to contemporary regional places such as Coffs Harbour on the mid-North coast of NSW. Such places (to write of 'communities' would be sometimes problematic) can be characterized by significant negative social capital, social exclusion and social isolation. This was particularly applicable to the majority of clients of the Innovation Farm.

Evaluation Findings

From the various sources of evaluation data, collected over a year, and after a thorough reflective process the researchers concluded that the Innovation Farm was highly successful in achieving many of its objectives in a relatively short time.

According to December 2011 data, 54% of farm participant clients were in ongoing employment or accredited training within three months of the completion of the program. In a regional area such as the Coffs Coast, characterised by such high levels of embedded social disadvantage, and given that the period that farm operated coincided with the aftershocks of the GFC, this was particularly remarkable.

The high level of placement of Innovation Farm clients in work and training was a result of successful relationship building with other competitor Job Network Agencies. This helped in promoting the farms' programs and clients' well-being through bringing attention to, and addressing some of, the individual and collective barriers to training and employment.

The farm helped its clients overcome barriers to job market participation, as well as wider social participation, through its socially supportive environment as well as a dedicated counselling service. In addition clients received support, training and experiences in horticulture, sales, safety, teamwork and learning skills in general. These combined with the therapeutic benefits of horticulture and the experiencing of sense of place and belonging led to positive changes in clients' lives.

As with any such social enterprise initiative the staff attracted to it generally worked above and beyond what would normally be expected. Staff worked for wages but also to implement the ideals of the farm and the researchers found a very high level of sympathy with the clients. This is also not so surprising considering most staff members were themselves on casual contracts and had personal experiential understandings of insecurity in the local labour market.

The evaluation did reveal some disagreements and misunderstanding between staff and between staff and management. Apart from any everyday tensions between people there seemed to be some degree of disagreement about horticultural practices, day-to-day protocols as well as, on occasions, the overall farm's aims and objectives. This was due perhaps to the speed with which the farm was established and then later stress levels building as the end of funding loomed.

Some staff feared that participants all-too-often fell back into their 'small lives' at end of program if there was insufficient training, employment or support arranged into the future. Associated with this staff also feared that some clients had

unrealistic expectations of employment after the program. This was rightly seen as potentially demoralising for clients.

Perhaps of greatest concern to the researchers was the level of integration of the farm with the board of management of the (un)employment organisation that received the initial Innovation Fund grant. Researchers remained unsure of the level of appreciation that the board had for the farm's successful outcomes achieved under challenging circumstances.

Participants found that embodied work was relaxing for many of them and that as a result 'time passed' in a pleasurable way. The participants' self-esteem was lifted by 'work' in a supportive and safe context, where staff encouraged rather than 'cajoled'. For many participants, the farm program offered a first real taste of meaningful and productive work (in their lives), and this invariably and inevitably led to a positive identity shift. Many participants said they would come to the farm more often if they could. Participants and staff remarked that that generic work-ready skills and attitudes - such as getting up and getting to the bus stop on time and listening to and acting on instructions - were crucial outcomes from the farm program. Farm staff often noticed improved articulation and enthusiasm from the participants.

For the researchers there remains a sense of having briefly confronted the tangible misery of experiences of embedded social exclusion – what might be referred to as a thinness of social capital ties, and relative inarticulation as a characteristic of exclusion, were fully apparent in the interviews. Participants generally talked of the

farm fondly; of being picked up by the bus; of the importance of having a place to go to; the reward given by gardening tasks, and the importance of something (anything) to do).

However, the Innovation Fund has not continued funding the Innovation Farm. After just three years of operation it is being wound back, whilst staff search for other private and/or public sources of financial support. Research suggests that Social Enterprise initiatives such as the Innovation Farm need at least seven years to break even (Alter, 2007; Mulgan et al, 2007). The latest information that is that private market gardening contractors are being sought to utilize the farm and at present it is not being used.

Social inclusion and sense of place through community gardens and therapeutic horticulture

The most outstanding finding the evaluation, and the hopefully the most significant outcome from the farm's brief life were the enduring benefits of participants' experiences of gardening and farming. Many of the participants found that through attending the farm they were learning so much simply 'by doing'. They found that mulching, weeding, tending seedlings, and harvesting gave them the satisfaction of participating in life cycles whilst obtaining and deepening skills. Many of the participants had not gardened previously but then mentioned they had started making gardens at home.

Community Gardens, gardening and horticulture are widely thought of as therapeutic ways of fostering social inclusion. In their UK-based research, Sempik and Aldridge (2003) set about finding if this was verifiable and if so in what ways. Using an interview-based methodology, they established that such projects were often effective in being 'restorative' to marginal, disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Participants in the interviews talked very positively of the benefits of being 'out in the air', 'being in nature' and so on. Similarly, Townsend & Ebdon (2006, 5) in their Deakin University report into relationships between mental health and conservation volunteering in Victoria, Australia, found volunteers frequently responding that the nature connection was beneficial as well as offering a sense of belonging (place).

Sempik et al (2003) research respondents also showed positive shifts in identity and purpose. During interviews they often referred to themselves as 'gardeners' or 'workers' rather than being unemployed (Sempik et al, 2003, 3). Clearly the activities of the horticultural projects were being purposefully adopted. Following on from this, respondents unsurprisingly also often talked of positive feelings of sense of place developing whilst working at their horticultural projects.

Parr (2007), in a study of British community gardeners, found that embodying and enacting gardening work acts as a vehicle of social citizenship for people traditionally marginalised from mainstream society. To the importance of Parr's embodied work can be added an extra factor, namely the empowering effects of learning a craft; of learning skills with materials that require patience and dedication (Sennet 2008; Crawford 2009).

This evaluation, backed by a broad literature, found that community gardens can offer social inclusion and a sense of place and belonging to disadvantaged and marginalised members of society. The Innovation Farm's 'therapeutic horticulture' was seen to help alleviate social isolation, immobility, silencing and some mental health issues. There is a strong potential for marginalised people to find social inclusion and sense of place, as well as restorative therapy, through participation in community gardening and horticulture.

Most participants felt positively about going to the farm; it meant 'getting out' and 'fresh air'. Because of low levels of confidence and/or mental health issues, many participants tended to feel unsafe and uncomfortable away from their homes. This seemed to be associated with very interiorised and confined ways of living. The farm gave them a chance to feel safe outdoors away from home.

As part of the evaluation process participants were asked to volunteer to fill out a weekly 'place' diary. A small group volunteered and as requested wrote comments in response to the following questions:

- How does being at the Innovation Farm feel this week?
- Why? Please explain your feelings
- Did you learn anything or develop skills at the Innovation Farm this week?
- If so, would these skills help in finding work in the future? Please explain how.

Findings from these diaries reflected many of those that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. Participants thought that the Innovation Farm had a 'friendly'

atmosphere', that 'it was good to get out (side)', that the place was 'very up-lifting' and 'cheery'. Comments were also made about the activities being carried out and skills being learnt. When asked about how these activities and skills might be helpful for getting jobs, comments were less confident and usually the comment box was left blank.

What can be drawn from these Journals, was the degree of 'inarticulation' that is characteristic of many of the participants of the farm. The semi-structured interviews with participants highlighted the fact that inherent in the experience of social exclusion/poverty are varying degrees of cultural silencing. However, participants consistently expressed a deep enjoyment of being out in nature, fresh air, working with their bodies, or hands. This embodied relationship to place, it must be stressed, is the development of highly positive place relationship – something that is not necessarily common in people experiencing extreme social exclusion.

Social powerlessness can also be seen as placelessness. An extensive literature of sense of place, place pedagogy and place theory exists revolving around different notions and conceptualizations of 'place'. Place studies in general bring attention to felt experiential place relationship(s) (Cameron 2003).

Place literature was traditionally the domain of phenomenological studies (i.e. Tuan 1974, Relph 1976, Borthoft 2004), of exploration of relationship to nature and ecosystems (Thomashow 1996) as well as to early childhood development of relationship to place (Sobel 1990). This important body of work, which illuminated felt experience of place relationship, came in for critique from a social justice

perspective. Place studies seemed to some to largely featured apolitical reveries by landed or formally landed male writers.

Plumwood (1993), Massey (1994), Harvey (1996) and Creswell (2003) amongst others pointed out that for many other people 'place' meant exclusion rather than inclusion. (To be fair Tuan 1974 also argued this), For others, a given place relationship might be oppressive or about poverty or displacement for instance. For others again, place is never still. Finally, place theory widely sees sense of place as closely linked to sense of belonging, identity and purpose.

Summary and conclusions

In summary, the Coffs Coast Innovation farm was funded for three years to establish a social enterprise community farm. During that time staff and managers put into practice transportation arrangements, horticultural skills, counselling support; they created a brand, found markets, as well as creating a physical infrastructure of built garden beds, good soil health as well as establishing what grew best on the farm that could be marketed and so on. Staff and participants learnt various roles, gained expertise and created relationships to people, the place, and economic and job markets and worked towards meeting their personal needs and the needs of participants.

What the farm offered was a place – a sense of belonging, identity, purpose - in which to practice moments of life lived in ways that in some way start to approach what most people expect. It indicated to farm participants what social capital 'weak

ties' (Granovetter, 1974) and 'imminent social power' (Bourdieu, 1986) might start to feel like.

Short-term interventions are the rule for funding in almost all sectors, be they social, economic or environmental. Clearly not everything that is worthy or deserving of funding can be funded but the degree of inadequacy of short-term funding (in almost all spheres of life) arrangements goes further than this. Either policy makers and politicians are either terribly politically cynical – i.e. they generate good policy statements for the media particularly in the lead up to elections, or, and this more likely the case, there is a profound misunderstanding of the degree of resourcing required to sustain real change in the day to day lived world of embedded social disadvantage. Clearly, this is yet another case of short-term policy inadequately applied to long-term systematic social suffering.

Social commentators such as Harvey (2007) are deeply critical of Neoliberal deregulation economic policies. Doubts must remain regarding the deregulated (or regulated) and highly competitive job creation policies of successive Australian Federal Governments. Since deregulation, income, wealth and capital (including social capital) in countries such as Australia have become more concentrated and less equitable. The casualization of the workforce (Innovation Farm participants, staff as well as university evaluators!) is a movement towards the creation of negative social capital (Portes, 1998). There seems little point in attributing the responsibility for this to the least privileged in society. Ultimately, the researchers are divided as to whether short-term funded projects such the Innovation Farm ultimately alleviate or compound embedded social exclusion. Meanwhile what

Kempf (2008) refers to as 'redundant populations' remain unacceptably socially isolated, placeless and powerless.

Finally, the mythological rural self-imagery (yes, it is idyllic) as identified by Beetson (2004), and (faux?) triumphant subtexts that underpin Australian self-image are in need of an update. The experiences of social exclusion, social isolation and placelessness of some people need to be expressed and heard. This also applies to the silencing of peoples' real-life often-difficult relationships with the land in Australia (Brennan 2010). People are more than units of production, and the needs of the most socially disadvantaged in society will not be met by 'place-based' investment and talk in terms of 'underserviced markets' (DEEWR, 2013). The humanity required to think differently about this problem is the same humanity required to go past the collective amnesia (Burnside, 2011) that stops Australia's self image being/becoming more real.

(5,501 words)

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