



Margaret Gooch

Voices of the Volunteers

An Exploration of the Influences that
Volunteer Experiences Have on the
Resilience and Sustainability of Catchment
Groups in Coastal Queensland

Imprint

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THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO MY FOUR BOYS

Harry (standing on left); Rex (the dog); Dominic (being licked by Rex); & David (hiding)



ABSTRACT

Research was undertaken for this thesis to uncover characteristics of resilient volunteers and stewardship groups, both of which are a major element of the social mobilisation strategy used in Australia to manage natural resources. The ability of volunteers and groups to overcome problems, deal with new issues as they arise, and keep going under pressure is termed 'resilience'. A 'resilience management' approach to natural resource management uses the idea of 'adaptive change' or *panarchy* to understand the development of resilience and thus, sustainability in human communities. According to this theory, sustainable communities are both changeable and stable, adapting to new situations as they arise.

The research approach used in the study is called 'phenomenography'. It is an interpretive approach, based on the central assumption that there is variation in the ways in which people experience the same phenomenon. Phenomenography was used to see if lessons about resilience and sustainability could be learnt from catchment volunteers. All participants were 'catchment volunteers' working along the east coast of Queensland. They were drawn from a variety of organisations and programs including Landcare; Coastcare; Bushcare; Greening Australia; Waterwatch; tree-planting groups; and Integrated Catchment Management Committees. A total of 26 personal and group interviews involving 85 participants were conducted. Interviews comprised a series of semi-structured questions that were tape-recorded, then transcribed verbatim. Through a process of comparing and contrasting themes in the transcriptions, six conceptions emerged. These were: catchment volunteering was experienced as *seeking and maintaining balance; developing/ maintaining an identity; empowerment; learning; networking; and sustainable*.

Analysis of these themes was used to develop a model of catchment volunteer experiences depicting relationships between conceptions (termed the 'Outcome Space' in phenomenography). In this study the Outcome Space emerged as a set of scales, signifying the importance of keeping a balanced perspective on volunteering - a balance between things such as personal goals and organisational goals; between

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I am indebted to all of the people who were interviewed as part of the study, and those who helped to validate results. I also wish to acknowledge my fellow PhD students for their friendship and interest, particularly Ellen Appleby, Dana Thomsen, Angela Wardell-Johnson, Clayton White and Peter Oliver. Many other people offered moral support and practical help including Dana Kelly, Don Alcock, Kerry Rosenthal, Stewart Lockie, Susan Rockloff, Theresa Leijten, Peter Howard, Anna Carr, James Whelan, Tim Smith, Christina Dwyer, Nicola Wright, Christine Bruce, Richard Dunlop, Lynne Bradshaw, Gary Bradshaw and John Lidstone. Special thanks go to Marg McVey and Bill Carter who each took time from their busy lives to read my final draft.

Finally, and most sincerely, I would like to thank my family - Dave, Harry and Dominic who provided a happy home and lots of fun to build up my resilience! Regular 'get togethers' with family, friends and neighbours also helped. Lots of gossip, wine and good food were consumed on back decks while children buzzed around, and afternoons slipped into evenings. These 'get togethers' certainly helped to maintain my enthusiasm for the concept of 'social capital'.

dedication to an unpaid vocation and family life; and between social benefits and environmental benefits.

From the Outcome Space, several conceptual and practical outcomes were developed. These included: a typology of participation based on volunteer experiences; a table describing forms of empowerment in catchment volunteering; a table listing drivers for catchment volunteers; an illustration of Holling and Gunderson's adaptive cycle as it applies to stewardship groups; a table of factors that enhance the resilience and sustainability of stewardship groups; a model of the relationship between external pressures and resilient, sustainable stewardship groups; and guidelines for developing resilient sustainable stewardship groups. These outcomes contribute to an understanding of individual, group and community level responses to environmental issues; and how resilience can be developed in volunteers and stewardship groups and programs.

PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM DOCTORAL RESEARCH

Refereed journal papers

- Gooch, M. (2003) A sense of place: ecological identity as a driver for catchment volunteering, *Australian Journal on Volunteering* 8(2) pp.23-33
- Gooch, M. (accepted) Volunteering in catchment management groups: empowering the volunteer, *Australian Geographer*
- Gooch, M. (accepted) Voices of the volunteers: conceptions of catchment volunteers in coastal Queensland, Australia, *Local Environment*
- Gooch, M. (submitted) Building Resilience in Stewardship Groups in Coastal Queensland, Australia. *Ecology and Society*.

Other Publications/articles

- Gooch, M. 2002. *Finding common ground in catchment management*. Article in Flotsam and Jetsam: Coastal CRC News – May 2002. Flotsam and Jetsam is a monthly email newsletter of Australia's Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management.
- Gooch, M. 2003. *Coastal volunteerism study* Article in Flotsam and Jetsam: Coastal CRC News – October, 2003. Flotsam and Jetsam is a monthly email newsletter of Australia's Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management.

PRESENTATIONS AT CONFERENCES, GUEST LECTURES

In 2002, I attended two international conferences to present aspects of my research:

6th Invitational Research Development Seminar on Environmental and Health Education, Budapest, Hungary June 2002: – I co-led whole day discussion about current research into concepts of social capital and social learning as they apply to education and sustainable development. I also delivered a powerpoint presentation with Dr Debbie Heck (Griffith University) entitled: Social Learning, social capital and sustainability.

Australia and New Zealand Third Sector Research Conference at UNITEC, Auckland, NZ. November 2002 I attended a half day workshop on Social Auditing, and delivered a powerpoint presentation entitled: Reflections on place, identity, and community action: observations, thoughts and experiences of catchment volunteers

During the time I have been a PhD student (July 2000- December 2003) I have presented a number of guest lectures and public talks including:

'Why do some individuals remain active catchment volunteers?' Guest speaker for *Seminar Series 2004* hosted by the Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management (May 2004).

'Building resilience in catchment volunteers' Guest speaker at the Central Highlands Regional Resources Use Planning Co-operative (CHRRUP) forum and AGM in Emerald, Queensland (Thursday 13th November 2003).

'Empowerment - voices through volunteering' Discussion of thesis results for *Reflect, Respect, React 2003 Symposium Series* hosted by Coastal CRC, Griffith Uni, CRC for Catchment Hydrology, Friends of The Earth and QCC conducted in Brisbane, Melbourne, Canberra, Emerald from 27th September – 3rd October, 2003.

'Building resilience in stewardship groups' Guest lecture for *Environment and Community* (ENVM2503) a second year course offered by School of Natural and Rural Systems Management, University of Queensland, and coordinated by Mr Ken Keith, University of Queensland (August, 2003)

'Ecological identity and catchment management'. Guest speaker for *Reflect, Respect, React 2002 Symposium Series* hosted by Coastal CRC, Griffith Uni, CRC for Catchment Hydrology, Friends of The Earth and QCC held at GU EcoCentre (September 2002)

'Volunteering – linking social capital, learning, and environmental care' Discussion of thesis (to date) for *Student Seminar Series 2002* hosted by the Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management (May 2002).

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Volunteers in stewardship groups are a major element of the social mobilisation strategy used in Australia to manage natural resources. The ability of such groups to overcome problems, deal with new issues as they arise, and keep going under pressure may be thought of as managing for “resilience”. This approach uses the idea of adaptive change where resilient communities are simultaneously changeable and stable, adapting to new situations as they arise. Interviews were conducted along the east coast of Queensland, Australia, to better understand resilience in community-based stewardship groups. Participants were drawn from groups such as Landcare; Coastcare; Bushcare; Greening Australia; Waterwatch; and Integrated Catchment Management Committees. Analysis of 26 personal and group interviews involving 85 participants revealed six different conceptions, where catchment volunteering was experienced as seeking and maintaining balance; developing/ maintaining an identity; empowerment; learning; networking; and contributing to sustainability. Analysis of these conceptions enhanced an understanding of how resilience may be developed in community-based stewardship groups.



Margaret Gooch

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