

PROCEEDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY BIENNIAL CONFERENCE
Official publication of The Australian Rangeland Society

Copyright and Photocopying

© The Australian Rangeland Society 2014. All rights reserved.

For non-personal use, no part of this item may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the Australian Rangeland Society and of the author (or the organisation they work or have worked for). Permission of the Australian Rangeland Society for photocopying of articles for non-personal use may be obtained from the Secretary who can be contacted at the email address, rangelands.exec@gmail.com

For personal use, temporary copies necessary to browse this site on screen may be made and a single copy of an article may be downloaded or printed for research or personal use, but no changes are to be made to any of the material. This copyright notice is not to be removed from the front of the article.

All efforts have been made by the Australian Rangeland Society to contact the authors. If you believe your copyright has been breached please notify us immediately and we will remove the offending material from our website.

Form of Reference

The reference for this article should be in this general form;

Author family name, initials (year). Title. *In*: Proceedings of the nth Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference. Pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

For example:

Anderson, L., van Klinken, R. D., and Shepherd, D. (2008). Aerially surveying Mesquite (*Prosopis* spp.) in the Pilbara. *In*: 'A Climate of Change in the Rangelands. Proceedings of the 15th Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference'. (Ed. D. Orr) 4 pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

Disclaimer

The Australian Rangeland Society and Editors cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information obtained in this article or in the Proceedings of the Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conferences. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors, neither does the publication of advertisements constitute any endorsement by the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors of the products advertised.



The Australian Rangeland Society

A CREATIVITY PARADIGM IN RANGELANDS RESEARCH

Paul Makeham and Bill Dunstone

Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology Kelvin Grove, Qld, 4059
Division of Humanities, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box 1987, Perth WA 6845

In order for outback Australia to sustain itself, a balance has to be struck between seemingly incompatible demands: economic, social, ecological. These demands can act as barriers, polarising opinion, creating conflict, and impeding productive land management, economic development and social cohesion. History can be a barrier at times: binding people to habit; making them fear change; and blurring boundaries between conservation and conservatism. Conversely, these same demands can co-exist in creative tension. What is at stake is the capacity to manage change.

The capacity to cope with change is a creative skill, and the importance of creativity as a management tool is increasingly apparent in a range of contexts. Through creativity, for instance, we can manage barriers that traditionally separate sciences and humanities. Creativity and scientific method approach each other whenever the researcher takes the role of 'participant-conceptualiser' in an ecology of system, in which the researcher's perception of the system 'is critical to the system' itself (Ison *et al.* 2000). Creativity allows us to see relationships which haven't been apparent; and creative practice is a way of giving life and shape to these relationships in communities.

There is an increased understanding, at government policy making level and among researchers in fields as traditionally diverse as agriculture and community cultural development (CCD), of 'the interrelatedness of social, cultural, economic and environmental factors in [our] understanding of wellbeing within a community context' (Mills 2003). Researchers from Agriculture WA, the Centre for the Management of Arid Environments (CMAE), Kalgoorlie-Boulder WA, and the Live Events Research Network (LERN), based at the Flinders University of South Australia, are discussing a joint project to integrate CCD principles and practice into the conceptualisation, conduct and delivery of arid rangelands research. In effect, these researchers have set themselves the task of conceptualising, designing and managing a creativity paradigm in rangelands research.

The aim of this integrated approach is to enhance the sustainability of remote rural communities through 'natural resources management, economic revitalisation, community strengthening, active citizenship, diversity and inclusion, [and] health and wellbeing' (Mills 2003). The intention is to integrate methodological concepts and design from the two research fields, in order to triangulate a third, creative paradigm in arid environment research and development. This creative paradigm will entail a 'transformational' approach, a re-thinking of the ways in which urban oriented CCD theory and practice can relate to quantifiable economic, social and ecological outcomes in remote rural communities. The transformational approach equally entails enquiry into the ways in which scientific research can be more effective, ethical and epistemologically aware in its theorisation, conceptualisation, design, management and delivery processes.

The starting point of the joint project is pragmatic. There is a perceived need at CMAE and Agriculture WA to enhance the 'people' factor in agricultural research in Land Care Districts for which these bodies have responsibility. It is perceived that traditional models of 'knowledge transfer' from 'objective' researchers to recipient communities tend to be hierarchical and hegemonic in practice. Standard 'transfer of technology' (ToT) models generate conceptual and cultural 'blind spots' and power imbalances that inhibit the 'connectedness' between community and researchers that gives meaning to useful, efficient practice in the first place (Ison *et al.* 2000).

The practical objective is then to link creative and scientific methodologies that will 're-connect' researchers and community stakeholders in innovative 'learning networks' that generate social capital. Rural stakeholder communities will be engaged from the outset in research conceptualisation, design, management, assessment and evaluation. The desired short term outcome is to enhance the

application of rangelands agricultural research in the designated Land Care Districts. The long term aim is to enhance the social, cultural, economic and environmental viability (that is, the health and wellbeing) of the rural community within an ecology of systems.

It is envisaged that the creative methodologies implemented will incorporate strategies and perspectives which are performative in nature, even though they might not include conventional artistic or community performances as such. Performativity is a broad-ranging and inclusive paradigm, predicated on the notion that 'human culture is in large measure performative, that is, activity consciously carried out and presented to others in order to have some effect on them' (Carlson 2001). As such, we propose a type of praxis in which performative elements (exchange, display, dialogue, design, enactment) can provide new and creative ways of understanding and addressing some of the challenges confronting rural communities. As a starting point, we will apply performativity analysis to current power relations between rural stakeholders, Agriculture WA, CMAE and CCD researchers.

The theorised practical activity (praxis) that emerges from this research collaboration will be responsive to, and determined by, the lived experience of communities of interest. Joseph Dunne describes praxis as 'a type of human engagement that is embedded within a tradition of communally shared understandings and values, that remains vitally connected to people's life experience, that finds expression in their ordinary linguistic usage, and that, rather than being a means through which they achieve outcomes separate from themselves, is a kind of enactment through which they constitute themselves as persons in a historical community' (Dunne 1993). That said, the project partners are keen to avoid a naïve kind of populism in their approach. 'The community' here is engaged, in the first instance at least, through formal structures of representation, rather than through some form of unmediated appeal to 'the people'.

Rangeland communities can creatively manage the challenges confronting them. Transitions from isolation to cohesion, disenfranchisement to action, separateness to community, are enabled when people 'own' their stories, when they develop shared languages and symbols, and when they share risks and collaborate creatively on solutions. Through such processes, people can approach a shared understanding of how their community works. This understanding can ground their perception of community issues; and it can ground the formulation of research. Individuals can affirm their experience, while learning to value differences within their community. We suggest that benefits arising from community cultural development projects, in which 'ordinary people' are central players, are achievable by rangeland communities and researchers alike.

REFERENCES

- Carlson, M. (2001). Theatre and Performance at a Time of Shifting Disciplines. *Theatre Research International*, 26: 136-144.
- Dunne, J (1993). *Back to the Rough Ground: 'Phronesis' and 'Techne' in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*. Notre Dame, IN: U Notre Dame Press.
- Ison, R.L. and Russell, D.B, eds. (2000). *Agricultural Extension and Rural Development: Breaking out of Conventions. A Second-Order Systems Perspective*. Cambridge UK: CUP.
- Mills, D. (2003). Art and wellbeing. *Artwork Magazine*, 57: 18-21.