‘Making Sense of Place’

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This workshop

Acknowledgement of Elders & Country

Sense of Place as basic human need, body of inquiry & literature, design tool & means of social inclusion..

Why its of particular interest to me

‘Jaliigirr Developing Sense of Place’ project in Mid North Coast of NSW, Australia

Participatory cognitive mapping session

Making reporting interesting

Summing up
What is place!

Imagine moving to a new place. It’s the package of everything you relate to..

Language, spatial layout, climate, landscape, fashion, nature, birdsongs, jokes, narratives, feelings… about everything

How you relate to these – identity, belonging or not, purpose, feelings. These are core personal needs

My personal story of big moves many times in my life. I took with me:
1) inspiring ideas/ideals
& 2) working the land
Place becomes that big life thing of interest/passion/difficulty for me

Part of Social Ecology at UWS
Experience – I don’t feel anything…

As a way to further sustainability projects
The work of John Cameron going beyond social adversarialism

Gift of slowly, slowly coming into relation with Country
Place ideas from the literature:

Place & placelessness – Tuan, Relph
Finding sense of place – Snyder, Thomashow, Cameron
Phenomenology – Merleau-Ponty, Seamon
Ecopsychological place relationship – Hillman, Roszak
Place pedagogy – Somerville, Gruenwald
Place as agentic/Country – Rose
Spectral landscapes - Read
Displacement/In-between place – Entriken, Lippard
Non-place – Auge
Shadow place (power) – Plumwood
Place polyamory, place as land, place as body, narrative.
1960s & 70s ecological, social, economic inspirations

Counter-culture
My story...UK and Australia – farming, study, market gardening...

Landscape - design & construction
Landcare – community based ecological regeneration
Bush regeneration – technique for repairing native vegetation
Permaculture – designing sustainable (food) systems
Edible Streetscapes – publicly grown available food
Connectivity conservation – connecting habitat, communities, values & organisations.

Study - Social Ecology, Ph.D in 2011
Teaching /research – Ethics, place, social science conservation, research methodologies

Consulting - combining these above in a package Research, design project management
The problem with 1970’s ideas & ideals..

It was supposed to be pretty easy..’just get the information out there’, ‘get them to change their behaviour….’

Supposed to be easy in an alternative town/Transition Town. I, along with others set about putting it all into practice. What else is there to do?

It ends up being all about people in diverse, adversarial, often bitterly divided communities. They want to be inspired, included and acknowledged.
Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance/GER
& Sense of Place project

A biodiversity alliance of 20 organisation

Cross-sector connectivity conservation

Deepening Sense of place project

The principle role for me as coordinator was social inclusivity
"Sense of Place" describes the felt, experiential and narrative relationships between people and their places and is the subject of a substantive literature. This can also include displacement, non-place (Auge 1992) and shadow places (Plumwood 2008).
But what’s missing…?

Issues, weeds, storm events, pollution….

People, homes, farms & communities….

Organisations (various & differing)

People who care for/look after/ work the land (traditional custodians, ….

NPWS & council staff, bush regeneration contractors, Landcare volunteers, farmers, foresters, the public, etc)

Peoples’ differing practices, values, emotional connection with these places…

Social values, ecopychological connections, memories …
Jaliigirr Deepening Sense of Place (pilot) Project -

Funded through GER / NSW Environmental Trust

A team familiar with place methodology and set about applying the project methodology

A place-based approach acknowledges the ambiguity and complexity of identity and belonging

- Literature searches
- Dialogue within the biodiversity alliance
- Media & community engagement
- Sense of place /cognitive mapping 200 community members
- In depth interviews & transcriptions
sense of place

Questionnaire
Semi structured and to be recorded

This Place
1. What do you do in this place?
2. Where do you go in this place? Why is it special to you?
3. What is your sense of place here? How does this place feel to you? Describe any good or difficult feelings.

Early Experience
4. How does this place and what you do in it relate to past/childhood sense of place?
5. Do you have any photos/maps/imagined memories that would help convey this?
6. How do these relate to what you are doing now?

The Jaliigirr Area
7. How do you feel about the JBA area/landscape in this region?
8. This area has a complex history. How do you feel about this? Is it important?

Conservation and Environmental Issues
9. What is your perception of environmental/land issues in this area?
10. What should be done about these? What do you want to do about these?
11. How do we bring different groups together to achieve these outcomes?

Other Questions
12. What will be happening here in the future 50 years, 5000 years...?
13. Finally, what would your ideal place be? i.e you can design it!

Optional Questions
Is there a message about this place you would like to express?
Do you do things to care for this place? If so what?
What do the following words mean to you: Belong, grief, threatened, corridor, connectivity.....
Please draw something that represents.....

1. A place that is special to you
2. A place of your childhood or early experience
3. The landscape in this region
4. Environmental or land issues in this area
5. Your ideal place

Is there a message about this place you would like to express?

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Sense of Place Cognitive Mapping questions

Please draw, write, represent… your response to the following questions..

1. A place that is special to you.

2. A place of your childhood or early life experience.

3. The Landscape in this (or your) region.

4. Environmental or land issues in this (your) region.

5. Your ideal place

(6. Is there a message about this place you would like to share?)
The environment enabled me to
my life, history, memories, love, happiness. I
study ‘Enviro Science’ because the Earth has
given so much to me
...it’s time to repay
the favour!

We are animals
too!

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Organic Design

Future place?
Future place?
Future place?

Childhood holidays

Family

Animals life

Yes! We are Animal

Malaysia
Environment

Landscape

Nature

Ocean

Waterways

Beaches

Protection
1. Relations of farms
   - Country lifestyle
   - Well managed natural environment in conjunction with productive agriculture
   - Balance

2. Great natural environment threatened by over-development
   - Poor Council/State control
   - Decision making when considering development
   - More weeds, less control

3. Keep in mind the area’s history - both natural & man-made.
   - Love Coffin’s the north coast/ranges, but do not over-develop it - we like it for what it is

4. Keep supporting groups which look after the environment
   - Support initiatives which look after the land, both natural environment & farms
Artistic process beyond ‘reporting’

- Narrative reporting alone did not do sufficient justice to rich information and impressions emerging from the project

- Artists Aviva & Bede

- Information, impressions and emerging themes were sent through to them throughout the 12-month project

- Their brief was left deliberately open

- Slowly, through a process of trial, error and dialogue, old maps, historical images, interview quotes, photographs and fine line drawings were brought together into multi-layered digital montages.

- Sympathetic portrayals of place relationship of ‘Gumbaynggirr’, ‘Land producers’ and ‘Environmentalists’
If every human left Australia, there would be 560,000 trees growing through the Pacific by within 50 yrs.

Nature always works to take over.
You believe in... Planting what

We want to establish a deep root in the face of climate change.

Keep extracting... Systems tend to fall over if you

There’s a feeling for, it’s past the feeling for... It’s such a special spot. I cycle in the morning past there, it’s really a pretty spot,
"Humans are our own worst enemy, because they have the power to survive on this planet and they have the power to destroy as human beings...."
The artworks

Sense of place is an approach to environmental matters, perspectives and feelings in a way that is intimate, personal and requires particular sensitivity.

The sense of place project was able to create trust and openness. The resulting artworks reflect this.

It is important to ensure that the artworks are used sensitively and appropriately in the spirit of the Sense of Place project.

Acknowledgement of the artists, project contributors, funders and the process that led to their creation.

The artworks were used (sparingly) after consultation with the artists.
Most conservationists are not confident about future

All passionately care about what they do for conservation, though how this is practiced varies widely

Sometimes clichéd and adversarial stories of people in relation to conservation are much more complex, rich and unpredictable when explored through a deep conversation about Sense of Place

Sense of Place Findings -

Provides a different lens

Is an invitation for nuanced/intimate stories of place connection & disconnection

Gives people & organisations the means to express how they care for Country, land, environment

Gives insight into peoples’ motivations

Importance of place connection in their childhood or youth & family
‘Sense of Place’ has the capability to take us out of our heads and into our often unconscious bodies, emotions, stories, narratives, memories and senses.

Processes of exploration and illumination of Sense of Place can more deeply connect us both with other humans and the other-than-human.
Place references:


I feel safe and I feel connected, I feel connected to the land.

Each and every one of us, throughout our lives, and through our ancestors, lived a great grand parents and great great grandparents lived. Through our ancestors, and we are so connected to the land, the miracle....

Humans are our own worst enemy because they have the power to survive on this planet and they have the power to destroy the humans, they destroy the environment...