

**‘A vision splendid’: The use and value of the concept of
sustainability in policy, reform and practice in human services.**

By

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A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

SOCIAL WORK

**School of Social Work
Australian Catholic University**

2011

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis develops a heuristic model of sustainability in order to conceptualise and organise knowledge, for use in policy, reform and practice in human services with particular relevance to the fields of social work and public administration. The scope and context of the research are human services which operate in Western, mostly Anglophone, countries under some form of democratic government.

Research activity to develop models and general theories of sustainability has remained the purview of other fields such as the environment, education, business and finance. Few studies have focused sustainability *specifically* on social problems and human services. One characteristic of sustainability studies is a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary perspective which aims to bridge gaps in order to achieve integration of knowledge, structure and process in policy making and practice. The pervasiveness and complexity of many social problems, such as poverty and child abuse, inevitably cross many domains and levels of social organisation and require a ‘whole of system’ perspective to deepen an understanding of their nature and possible solutions.

This thesis used a large purposive sample of research studies on sustainability in areas related to human services, as data to identify and explore sustainability concepts. The research data sample is analysed through thematic synthesis. Links between sustainability and public policy are explored and examples of policy instruments and processes within which human services function are examined to add context and meaning to the concept of sustainability. It is argued that the concept of sustainability is useful and valuable for policy development in human services. In this thesis its

usefulness is identified and set in the context of specific examples in human services. This research makes a contribution to the field of human services policy, reform and practice by filling a conceptual gap through a better understanding of the characteristics and the conditions that are influences for maintaining the gains made in human services policy and practice and ultimately for improving societal outcomes.

To my father,

Joseph Cefai

(1917-1996)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been a long journey and many people have inspired and supported me along the way. First, I wish to convey my deepest thanks and gratitude to my supervisors Professor Morag McArthur and Dr Joanna Zubrzycki. They have been my teachers and mentors who have supported me through my project with a strong commitment and insight.

The Australian Catholic University is a very supportive place to work and study. I am truly grateful for the unfailing assistance that I have received from research services, the librarians, campus staff and my own School of Social Work during my studies.

I wish to also thank my colleagues and friends who, in conversations (mostly over coffees and dinners), provided me with opportunities to listen to their ideas and to so generously listen to mine. In particular, my thanks to Dr Gail Winkworth, Dr Daniel Connell and Dr Christine Moulet. Their energy and ability have inspired me and helped me during some challenging times.

I am very fortunate indeed to have a beautiful, supportive family. My love and thanks to my wonderful sons, Benjamin, Nicholas and Timothy; to Gillian and Deepa, my lovely daughters-in-law and to my darling grandchildren. And my love and thanks to Simon, my husband, who has rarely complained about his often lonely existence during my candidature.

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CHAPTER 1: THE RESEARCH SUBJECT, RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

If we do not change our direction then we are very likely to end up exactly where we are headed (Chinese proverb).

Introduction

This theoretical thesis aims to build a policy model that incorporates the concept of sustainability for use in the human services. It is concerned with an exploration of, first, whether and then how the concept can be useful and valuable in policy, reform and practice in human services. The main purpose of this theoretical study is to better understand and make good decisions in human services for better outcomes.

The aim of this introductory chapter is to present the central problem, the purpose and nature of this research. The impetus for this research is conveyed followed by a discussion of the research questions and aims. A description of the structure, a brief overview of the content of each chapter and contributions of the research to the study of social problems and to sustainability research are also included.

Background to the research

The problem

There is widespread agreement that social science has done little to solve social problems. This is essentially a ‘Western’ problem whereby in human services work, the idea that some social problems are intractable is ubiquitous and accepted. This means that they are virtually unsolvable. Social problems such as poverty, chronic ill health, child abuse and homelessness have had many political imperatives for action to eradicate them such as

‘no child shall live in poverty by 1990’ statements¹ (Harding & Szukalska, 2000). Such policies are now viewed with some degree of cynicism. Social problems have been mainly the subject of inquiry as to their identification, construction and amelioration rather than in order to find permanent solutions. Short term political gain; sequestration of activity and effort in public administration; the separation of policy and practice and the lack of unity of knowledge and activity demonstrated across disciplines and domains are just some of the structural reasons for the difficulties faced by societies in finding permanent solutions. It is acknowledged that changing societal conditions usually has a better chance of producing lasting change (Siedman & Rappaport, 1986). The idea of linking solutions to social problems through a longer vision for societies’ well-being directed my attention to the concept of sustainability. This was its initial appeal as a research topic, that is, its practical orientation but more importantly, its inherent value and message of our ability to change society and indeed the world. The concept of sustainability demonstrated potential to influence public policy to solve social problems in its current momentum as a major policy area for governments. Sustainability might have the potential to change social conditions in relation to many domains such as health, education, housing and the environment (Furnass, et. al., 2005). In the next chapter, I explore the meaning of the concept and its potential to influence human services for the purpose of addressing social problems.

Public policies related to human services generally aim to prevent or ameliorate social problems. Policy development is central to human services activity and is a critical medium to meet its objectives for populations. Human services are seen as important sites in which social change occurs through continuous policy development.

¹ This was a famous pledge by the then Prime Minister of Australia, Bob Hawke in the 1987 Federal Election campaign that no child would live in poverty by 1990.

Additionally, the pervasiveness and potential accessibility of human services to large populations provides a significant and powerful institutional system which impacts on the lives of individuals, communities and societies. The study of human services, government and non-government organisations, public policy and social problems is vast and covers many fields of interest. However, there has been relatively little attention paid in research and practice to the problem of the lack of endurance and effectiveness of public policy and particularly to the study of sustainability to increase understanding about the intractability of some social problems. Although this thesis does not aim to establish any causal links between un-sustainability and social problems, it does seek to improve our understanding of this relationship. It aims to improve an understanding of why, despite significant resource allocation and continuous restructuring of organisations and administrative arrangements, generally complex social problems remain and frequently their impact on individuals, communities and societies has worsened over time. It is argued that the costs of not finding solutions to complex social problems have immense negative implications for present and future generations. Although policy processes may not be sufficient to achieve solutions to complex problems, this theoretical thesis considers that good processes are critical and necessary conditions for good outcomes. I argue that good processes are one way of conceptualising and achieving change. The thesis is therefore concerned with the improvement of policy processes as a way of enhancing the outcomes of human services systems.

Impetus for the research

The impetus for this research has its roots in my experience as a social work policy practitioner responsible for the management of a wide range of human services. My experience is situated in an Australian context in human services organisations. For example, I was responsible for the management of women's, youth and children's health

and support services and child protection services in the public sector in Canberra, ACT, an Australian territory of approximately 360,000 people. During a time of reform in community health and community services in the ACT, there was a firm belief that managerialism and strong executive leadership would lead to efficient and effective outcomes. The domination of managerialist principles in this context, which I will discuss further in Chapter 4, meant that managers were expected to reflect the principles and values of the organisation. These included business principles of marketing and new technologies to achieve efficiency goals. This was manifested also in political processes that rewarded efficiency and short-termism which included the ability of managers to achieve 'results' as measurable outputs as quickly as possible. The organisation was considered at the time to be ground breaking and 'cutting-edge' in its approach to changing how human services were managed.

As a social work practitioner in a management position and as a member of the executive of the organisation in which I worked, this presented an ethical dilemma. The dilemma was that the organisation with its strong leadership succeeded in many new initiatives to improve access to services, raise the profile of the organisation and improve accountability. However, the longer term future and continuity of services were not given the same priority. The dilemma was that of professional identity and the clash of values which ensued. Social work was regarded as a 'frontline' profession by the organisation with little to contribute to policy and decision making. My reflection upon the value conflicts that presented themselves in this context provided a strong impetus for this thesis. My belief in collaboration and the participation of clients and practitioners at all levels to develop good policy was in conflict with the view of the organisation that mostly considered decision making as unilateral, sufficing that people were merely kept

informed. As a social work policy practitioner, I considered that the strength and capacity of social work values, principles and skills underpinning policy practice could effectively shift the emphasis to a strengths-based, participatory process for good decision making.

I acknowledge that there was significant improvement in some aspects of service delivery such as in the accessibility of maternal and child health services to wider populations. However, many important factors that influence the quality and effectiveness of human services including high staff morale, collaborative practices and continuity of funding were not achieved. Within a period of five years and following two major public inquiries into the operations of disability and child protection services which were within the remit of the organisation, it was once again under review. The organisation was viewed as problematic and in need of major reform. Upon reflection, my motivation to seek knowledge about decision making processes for addressing social problems initially stemmed from these dilemmas, from the observed lack of concern about continuity of effort and maintaining gains and the separation of policy from practitioners and service delivery.

In summary, the interest and focus on sustainability as a general construct and in particular, on program, policy and social sustainability as a research subject, has its roots in my experience of the lack of attention that policy actors over time have given to this paradigm in developing effective policies in human services. In my experience, a common problem in human services policy development has been the constant attempts to address social problems through policy and reform processes which use similar strategies repeatedly and generally reinforce the *status quo*. Reforms in human services such as in child protection or community health often generate few lasting social

transformations and outcomes. Yet human services in most Western Anglophone countries are generally well resourced through the provision of preventive and interventionist services and well-motivated to find solutions to social problems.

Considerable resources are spent, both human and monetary, in addressing complex social problems through central and local policies but they are frequently developed within limited political timeframes and with the involvement of a limited group of stakeholders. For example, repeated attempts at reforming child protection in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand have used public inquiries as a preferred policy instrument with limited outcomes for children and young people (Manthorpe & Stanley, 2004). In Australia for example, there have been no less than forty-five public inquiries into the state of children and child abuse over the past three decades (Richmond, 2007a). Yet in Australia, the number of children subject to a notification for child abuse and neglect, the number of children under care and protection orders and the number of children in out-of-home-care are all rising. Over the past five years, the number of children in out-of-home-care, for example, has risen by 44% (AIHW, 2009).

In this thesis, I argue that the effort required to solve complex social problems such as child abuse is not fully understood, as there is poor connectivity between the objectives of human services, for example in the field of child protection, with the intended outcomes. Policy ‘solutions’ are often seen as solutions to systemic problems rather than finding answers for social change. That is, on changing society so that child maltreatment does not occur. The current systems of human services provision are based on a neo liberal, consumerist ideology where solutions to social problems often do not reflect the major impacts that social problems have on society at all levels. I will argue that what needs to

be taken into account is the holistic and pervasive nature of the concept of sustainability and its roots as an ecological concept, as a catalyst to better understand the consequences of policy decisions and to minimise future poor decisions. A socio-ecological perspective has not always framed policy and reform activity in human services. To refer again to the example of child abuse, the continual use of public inquiries as a popular policy instrument in the field of child protection over the past three decades in Australia and other Western countries has demonstrated that reform activity can occur in a vacuum of administrative and political imperatives, clearly not mindful of issues of sustainability of systems or long term effects of policy and reform processes (Manthorpe & Stanley, 2004). Similarly, in the area of community health, generally, the focus is on the efficiency in the delivery of services with a focus on outputs rather than outcomes, such as the number of people who access particular services. Services are not generally designed to be sustainable to achieve lasting outcomes (Sibthorpe, Glasgow and Wells, 2005a). In the area of early intervention, there have been many advances in research and practice over the past three decades in child health and development on the importance of timely and effective interventions to counteract biological and social effects of disadvantage for children for now and for their futures. Although there have been many advances on the introduction of early intervention policies; the timeliness, longevity and accessibility of services and programs remain greatly influenced by political imperatives. As a result, most programs have a life span of approximately 3-5 years with research suggesting that maintaining the gains of interventions requires a commitment of at least 15 years (Hayes, 2006).

As I mentioned earlier, my interest stemmed from observations of the seemingly easy acceptance of non-enduring policies as manifested in the struggles of constant reform.

This directed my attention, initially, to the study of policy sustainability. That is, to understand what it would take to make good policy more enduring. However, in order to develop an alternative policy model based on sustainability it was necessary to conceptually expand the idea of policy sustainability to a higher and more abstract understanding of sustainability. This expansion is explained later in this chapter in the context of the research questions and aims. The necessity for this expansion is also explained later in this thesis.

Sustainability

Over the past four decades there has been much policy activity and general rhetoric about sustainability and its functional term sustainable development, as a major policy issue for governments and as a societal goal. Its pervasiveness in policy settings in Western Anglophone countries such as Australia, United States, New Zealand and United Kingdom has impacted particularly on policy content and processes, mainly in the environmental policy domain. However, its importance in social domains has remained tied to mostly environmental and economic objectives (Roseland, 2000). This thesis argues that sustainability as a theoretical construct cannot be ignored as a significant potential influence on policy and practice in social domains. A central focus of the thesis is on the potential the concept of sustainability has to improve policy processes in human services. It is necessary to place the study of sustainability in a policy context as previously mentioned. Sustainability is a major policy issue which is the focus of much government and agency activity. Furthermore, policy processes can be studied to identify and explore policy activity. Therefore, the central question of the thesis is on the potential usefulness and value of the concept in policy processes which aim to address social problems in the context of human services.

The concept of sustainability is about solving complex problems which confront nature and society in the present world. The essential *problem* of sustainability however, is that growth and development worldwide and particularly over the past half century has diminished the potential and well-being of the most disadvantaged and the most vulnerable people in the world (Christen & Schmidt, 2010). This essential problem which the concept encapsulates situates the general purpose of sustainability research as the amelioration of these conditions and for the general health and well-being of populations. As a worldwide major policy issue the concept is holistic and is viewed as a higher level goal which aims to address this complex problem. Sustainability considers individual, social and political domains and has become a transformative concept, particularly in policy discourses that can significantly influence decision making for the public good at all levels of social organisation. This thesis takes into account the myriad of meanings that have been given to the concept of sustainability over the past three decades, locally and globally, however its *essential* meaning for the purpose of this thesis is understood as a human goal to ensure that current and future generations have equity of access to resources and to a quality of life (Reitan, 2005).

Public policy

There has been a significant change in how policy is generally conceptualised from a technical / expert closed process, viewed mainly as content such as ‘health policy’, toward seeing policy as a more participatory and organising process through which decisions are made by a variety of stakeholders (Colebatch, 2006). This directs attention to the possibilities of policy processes in enhancing participatory processes in organisations and communities. My interest in this research is to view policy processes as requiring a sound theoretical basis for good decision making. Colebatch has argued that any pragmatic guide to action such as a policy model is based on a ‘conceptual map

of linked understandings about the underlying dynamic of the process: that is, a theory' (Colebatch, 2006, p. 6). Sustainability in theory, affirms equal status of socio, economic and environmental dimensions (Selman, 2000). The policy scope of sustainability has permeated many areas of social, economic and environmental activity. However, questions remain about the integration of these three dimensions and how it is currently viewed in the context of human services. A critical question that pertains to the value and use of the concept of sustainability in human services decision making is whether the solutions to complex problems are in proportion with the level of effort that is required to solve them. The perspective taken in this research assumes that sustainability involves the ability to make good decisions for the present and for the future. This in effect is about the connectivity of policy and action. This necessitates an exploration of current policy models and an analysis of the processes that might make them more complete. This interest is directed at how sustainability can be used to make good policy for the betterment of society. This objective requires an understanding of systems of governance and societal institutions. Decision making in the public sphere is mainly the remit of government institutions and organisations that implement major policies. The exploration of significant trends in societal organisation and institutional functions is important in understanding the idea and potential of sustainability as a societal goal. As a basis for analysis and application of the concept of sustainability, this thesis considers levels of policy and action related to Western systems of governance. These levels include government and public administration, organisational practice and management and practitioners as the 'frontline' in human services. In this thesis, significant issues which emerge related to sustainability are discussed in the context of these domains of policy and practice. These provide the framework within which to understand the concept of sustainability and its operationalisation.

The research questions and aims

The main purpose of this theoretical study is to better understand how to make good decisions in human services for better outcomes. It is assumed that ‘good’ decisions positively influence the action and effort that is required to achieve the desired objectives of human services. The central research problem that is addressed in this thesis is how a more robust policy response to complex social problems at all levels of social organisation could be realised where the nature of decisions is more aligned to the reality of the outcomes that are sought.

In order to address this problem a number of questions needed to be explored. The central question is presented below and a second question concerns the longevity and the effectiveness of public policy. Can policy and programs be made more enduring and effective? To answer this question, the elements required for policy development to sustain workable and effective human services that meet their objectives needed to be explored. However, three key factors directed the investigative lens towards exploring the concept of sustainability more abstractly and more broadly as a social construct, a social problem and as a societal goal. Firstly, that sustainability is a holistic, ecological and integrative concept. Therefore the scope of this research required conceptual expansion toward sustainability rather than ‘policy sustainability’ alone, which is essentially about process rather than process and values. Secondly, that policy development is now a responsibility and an activity that is spread across many social domains (Colebatch, 2006). Thirdly, the relationship between levels and domains of social organisation such as government, the market, organisations and communities require integration in policy development for better outcomes. Sustainability research mainly follows this perspective and is based on the assumption of the benefits of

integrating elements in society (ANZECC, 2000; Wild River, 2005). As this research is in the field of social work with particular relevance to public administration in human services, it was necessary to identify key principles and elements such as integration that would be directed towards an emancipatory purpose to enable the realisation of societal goals such as equity and justice.

An emancipatory purpose requires attention to societal goals rather than societal processes alone. The United Nations, in their expanding array of international and national agreements for sustainable development goals, considers justice, good governance and participatory democracy as the pillars of society (UN, 1992). However, often the identification of societal goals such as in the above example, become too individualistic and anthropocentric and do not properly reflect the intrinsic values of these social goals. Intrinsic to these goals is an emphasis on the place of people and their responsibilities in their wider environments. The emphasis of this thesis is not to add to the rhetoric of sustainability goals but to acknowledge the history and philosophy of sustainability generally as a basis for the development of a useful practice model for the benefit of individuals, communities and societies. The central research question needs to be seen in this context and asks whether a broad conceptual model of sustainability would be useful and valuable for addressing social problems in human services and ultimately for reaching these higher societal goals.

In summary, the main central research question is:

Could a broad conceptual model of sustainability be of use and value for addressing social problems in the development of public policy in human services?

The secondary question is:

Can policy and programs be made more enduring and effective through an understanding of sustainability?

The aims of this research which are linked to the above research questions are:

To develop a conceptual model of sustainability for use in human services policy contexts;

To assist policy practitioners in making good decisions for the survival, health and well-being of people and societies;

To explore the contribution that sustainability research can make to the study of social problems;

To direct action through changed policy processes towards equity, justice, peace and well-being that have already been identified as legitimate societal goals;

To add to the theoretical knowledge base of decision making in public policy processes in human services; and,

To contribute to general research on sustainability through a focus on the social domains.

Knowledge and data

I have situated my research in the context of social work for reasons as previously discussed and particularly as social work policy practice I argue, provide a sound basis for exploring public policy generally. My aim was to explore whether the concept of sustainability could generate new knowledge for developing social work further to effectively influence public policy processes and outcomes. In seeking answers to the research questions, this thesis draws on a number of key theoretical perspectives that include systems theory, social work theories and ecological theories in order to guide and inform the analysis of the literature and the research data sample. A broad range of literature was explored on sustainability, social problems, human services provision and public policy to identify and analyse central themes and concepts and to investigate conceptual gaps. The development of a model of sustainability was informed by the literature reviews and was further developed through a methodology of thematic synthesis

of the research data sample. The sample comprised of sixty-five studies on sustainability from diverse fields related to human services (Appendix A).

There are inevitably cyclical, political and environmental changes within any social system and therefore in order to answer the research questions, a central theme identified was how to maintain gains in policy and reform in systems that are constantly changing. Human services needed to be conceptualised as a critical system of sub-systems within a broader socio-ecological system. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the problem of sustainability is essentially about a world that is un-sustainable if the current *status quo* of growth and development continues. Therefore, the central research problem was conceptualised as a developmental dilemma for societies generally, and human services which exist and operate within a larger un-sustainable system. This research is particularly focused on the socio-ecological perspectives on sustainability rather than the purely economic or environmental issues, although as will be argued in this thesis, it is necessary to have a *general* understanding of all dimensions of sustainability if societal outcomes are to be achieved.

Overview of structure and content of thesis

In the following section, a brief overview of the organisation of the chapters is presented followed by a summary of each chapter's content and purpose as a guide to the central argument of the thesis. The thesis is organised in seven chapters with this introductory chapter offering an overview of the research approach and purpose. The subsequent **Chapters 2, 3 and 4** provide an analysis of the literature on sustainability, social problems and policy processes respectively. In these chapters, the current knowledge base, what is known, and the contested issues are discussed. The literature sections are followed by a presentation of the methodology used in this research, in **Chapter 5**. The key findings as four constructs of sustainability follow in **Chapter 6** and **Chapter 7**, the

final chapter, presents a discussion of the key findings, concluding thoughts and offers the model of sustainability as the central outcome of the research.

Chapter 1 sets the conceptual and analytical boundaries for this thesis and the rationale for investigating the concept of sustainability. It also presents the motivation and purpose for undertaking this theoretical study. As it is necessary to understand the idea of sustainability before it can be determined whether policy processes contribute to it or not, **Chapter 2** offers a comprehensive conceptual and historical account of sustainability and why this knowledge base is critical to the argument of the thesis. The central argument of **Chapter 2** is that the primary agenda for sustainability should be ‘social’ and that tackling social problems such as poverty and disadvantage will ultimately impact positively for societies on the other dimensions of sustainability, the environment and the economy. **Chapter 2** also argues that a change agenda for sustainability is embedded in societal institutions, necessitating an understanding of organisational and community settings for the development of public policy and decision making.

Further context is provided in **Chapter 3** by drawing on the literature on the sociology of social problems. The main purpose of **Chapter 3** is to offer some theoretical perspectives that inform our understanding of how social problems are identified and why they are complex and difficult to solve. This information therefore provides a critical knowledge base for this research toward the development of a model of sustainability for use in human services settings. This chapter also sets the rationale for an analysis of policy processes.

Chapter 4 begins with a discussion about the nature of human services and policy. It presents an overview of different perspectives on how policy is made and how its quality

is currently viewed, identifying the processes and the institutions which are used to develop and implement public policies. I draw on the general public policy literature with an emphasis on policy models and processes. The main purpose of **Chapter 4** is to provide a baseline for the development of a new model of sustainability. This ensures a basis for identifying the strengths and limitations of current practices in policy development and builds the rationale for developing a new model. The central argument of **Chapter 4** is that current models are useful but there are significant gaps in their theoretical bases. It argues the importance of a shift in focus to an emphasis on value based frameworks to be able to understand how good decisions are made over time.

In **Chapter 5**, the methodology and the broad theoretical framework chosen for this research is presented. This chapter situates this theoretical research in an epistemology and methodology which reflects its social and emancipatory purpose. The purpose of the chapter is to present the rationale for the research approach taken and how the approach informed the choice of methods. In order to answer the research questions as posited earlier in the present chapter, it was necessary to take a constructivist approach which necessitated a high reflexivity on the part of this researcher. The processes involved in the thematic synthesis of the research data sample and the methods and procedures undertaken are documented in **Chapter 5**. These methods and procedures explain the conceptual development for identifying the four constructs of sustainability which are the core foundations of the model of sustainability. These four constructs are the subject of **Chapter 6**. The main purpose of **Chapter 6** is to present the four constructs of sustainability as the outcomes of the analysis of the research data sample. The central argument of this chapter is that these four constructs are critical for progress to sustainability at all levels of social organisation. **Chapter 7** draws together the themes

and findings of the research and presents the model of sustainability and discusses its use and value in human services.

Chapter summary

This chapter has sought to introduce the research topic and context and the purpose of undertaking my research. It aimed to provide a background for choosing the concept of sustainability to generate new knowledge in social work policy practice and public policy generally. In order to provide a guide to the central logic and argument of the thesis, the structure and organisation of the content was presented and each chapter was briefly introduced in the context of the whole thesis.

CHAPTER 2: SUSTAINABILITY

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the rationale for investigating the concept of sustainability in the context of human services was presented. This chapter provides a description of sustainability; the way that policy and research describe it and its context. This chapter also includes: an overview of the conceptual foundations of sustainability; its historical roots; how it has developed into a discourse that is contested yet generally recognised as a worthwhile evolving social construct. The literature on sustainability encompasses many perspectives which include economic, social, cultural and ecological/environmental domains of policy practice². Although this thesis seeks answers to the research questions of the potential usefulness of the concept in social domains of policy practice, I argue that it is necessary to have a general understanding of the economic and environmental dimensions and how they relate to the ‘social’. The purpose is to maintain the core conceptual and historical foundations of sustainability and to reinforce a holistic and integrative focus on policy practice across diverse social fields. An appreciation of the roots and evolution of the concept as a whole and the importance of their integration as a general principle, informs the study of the ‘social’.

The following section aims to provide a descriptive approach to sustainability in order to achieve the purpose of this thesis. The central objective of the thesis is to develop a model of sustainability that potentially would enhance the usefulness of the concept for policy practitioners and one which can steer meaningful action in human services. Some definitions will also be situated within a historical context.

² The term ‘policy practice’ is used mostly in this thesis to denote the work of policy making. It will be explained further in Chapter 4.

The semantic and conceptual foundations of sustainability

Semantic foundations

Clearly, the semantic meanings of sustainability have developed and changed focus over time. The word ‘sustain’ is embedded in the English language. It comes from the Latin *sustinere* meaning to hold up from below, that is, to support. An earlier edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (1962) defines ‘sustainable’ as ‘to uphold or allow validity, correctness, truth or justice’ and another later version ‘to keep a person, community etc. from failing or giving way; to keep in being, to maintain at the proper level; to support life in; nature etc. with needs’ (cited in Brown et. al., 1987). A 2009 version of the Oxford English Dictionary defines *sustainable* and its noun *sustainability* as:

...conserve(ing) an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources; includes the ability for something to survive or persist and a capacity for resilience.

The word ‘sustainability’ in contemporary society is used as a verb, a noun, an adjective and as an outcome. It is used as a verb, as the idea that something should be sustained or not. As a noun, sustainability as a relative position is possible and from most perspectives it is desirable. As an adjective and outcome, for example, that a sustainable society and a sustainable world should be the ultimate human goal. There are however, a range of core properties. The most important property of the concept is determining what is sustainable. The second is about change or adaptation, that is, its goal orientation to take account of changes in physical and social environments (Faber et. al., 2005). Thirdly, saying that something is sustainable means that there is a relationship of something (sometimes called an ‘artefact’) with a surrounding or supporting environment, that is, its interaction components (Faber et. al., 2005). Generally, its meaning includes a temporal dimension, that is, maintenance of something through time and therefore temporal and spatial properties need to be considered when using the term.

Conceptual foundations

The idea of long term sustainability of human societies is deeply embedded in history. Development, both material and socio-cultural, has been fundamental in the history of human societies and so has the need to take care of the earth (Yencken, 2002). However, the contemporary challenge and discourse of sustainability is relatively recent (Dovers, 2001). The term was introduced in the domains of public policy and law at an international level in the 1960s to describe a concern for the complex and deteriorating relationship between our global ecology and unstoppable economic growth (Faber et. al., 2005). Sustainability has been a strong global, pervasive interest for policy makers, governments and institutions since that time. For example, it was a major agenda in relation to social and economic issues at the 1968 UNESCO International Conference for Rational Use of the Biosphere. From this time, sustainability has received much attention from international bodies such as the above, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) and many other international and national organisations and institutions (Brown et. al., 1987). From the 1970s there have been many different meanings attributed to the concept (see for example, Pezzey & Tomen, 1992; Repetto, 1985; Meppem & Gill, 1998; McElroy, 2003). In the 1970s there were many commentaries and perceptions of sustainability in the context of a sustainable society and sustainable economic growth³ but early in the development of the concept, account was not taken of 'adaptive' changes in physical and social environments, mentioned earlier as a core property of the concept (Faber et. al., 2005). Faber and colleagues provided a chronological overview of sustainability definitions and analysed whether they were based in their evolution on static or dynamic

³ Sustainable growth has been considered an impossible concept as the idea of sustainability is about an equilibrium between humanity and nature and growth has no limitations in global terms (see for example, Ife & Tesoriero, 2006).

orientations. A dynamic and flexible orientation of the concept, that takes account of adaptive changes, has evolved currently which means that sustainability is viewed as dependent on the current situation at any level of social organisation as change is constant between the 'artefact' and the environment.

Therefore, its usefulness and meaning requires consideration of space and time. Sustainability has developed as a dynamic, more abstract concept, that is, developed from a static position of viewing concrete relationships such as between the effects of toxins on human health (Faber et. al., 2005). Notwithstanding the varying perceptions of the concept, the international bodies mentioned earlier, developed multi-national and multi-disciplinary research and monitoring programs with a strong focus on global environmental policy making, generally taking a top down approach to policy development (Faber et. al., 2005). This approach is further discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis in the context of policy models. Following a significant emphasis on environmental issues, a shift evolved to the sustainability of human societies. A sustainable society which focused on the relationship of a society with its environment was described as one that lives within the self-perpetuating limits of its environment (Coomer, 1979; Pezzey, 1992).

Other visions of sustainable societies included seeing a sustainable society as enduring, self-reliant and less vulnerable to external forces such as global financial crises (Brown et. al., 1987). Brown and colleagues viewed sustainable conditions for societies as those which ensure:

...the existence of the human race on the earth for as long as possible which would be promoted by zero population growth and a steady state economy in which consumption is reduced and with more equitable distribution of resources (1987, p. 715).

Although societies differ in their conceptualisations of sustainability, there is consensus that indefinite human survival on a global scale requires certain basic support systems which can be maintained only with a healthy environment and a stable human population (Brown et. al., 1987). Other interpretations include a value structure for a sustainable society in which humans are considered innately selfish and that for sustainability, this condition must be modified by empathy, compassion and a sense of justice. These values would replace un-sustainable value structures of aggression and competitiveness (Milbrath, 1984). These meanings involve the idea of persistence over an apparently indefinite future of certain desirable characteristics of both the eco-system and the human sub-system. It is therefore a normative concept that is, the choice and degree to which characteristics are to be sustained will depend on the operating set of values.

Sustainability evolved with a value base which requires equilibrium between ‘artefacts’, for example; the economy, population, a local community or a society and its supporting environment, where they interact with each other without mutual detrimental effects. Sustainability is often used to explicitly refer to this equilibrium (Faber et. al., 2005).

The concept has shifted to mean not a static end state of sustainability but instead a process of ongoing improvement of these ‘artefacts’ undergoing constant change (Suggs, 2000; Faber et al., 2005). In summary, the concept firstly is about maintaining valued things or dynamics that already exist while other aspects of society are changing (Suggs, 2000). It therefore assumes that both an ideal state is desired and that valued things need to be identified. This meaning has directed attention to change processes such as institutional changes for sustainability. Some research for example, has focused mainly on the radical transformation of institutions as the solution to the problems of un-

sustainable systems (Dovers, 2001; Curran, 2003; Yencken & Wilkinson, 2000). In summary, the concept has developed its meaning to suggest that a holistic, dynamic and transformative perspective is taken in policy practice.

Sustainability as an ecological concept

Ecology is a discipline that attempts to understand and explain the interactions of living things and their environment. It draws from many disciplines in examining these interactions, integrating knowledge from disciplines such as sociology and biology which depend on the sub-disciplines studied, such as community ecology and human ecology (Dovers, 2001). Sustainability therefore, is essentially a socio-ecological concept and this theoretical base will be explored further in Chapter 3 when discussing the sociology of social problems and in Chapter 6 when describing the constructs of sustainability.

One of the socio-ecological roots of the concept of sustainability is the ecological concept of ‘carrying capacity’ (Kidd, 1992). This is the idea that the eco-system can only sustain a certain density that is, the ‘carrying capacity’ as each individual utilises resources in the system, and the overuse of resources results in collapse of the system. The foundations of sustainability as an ecological concept are from initially physical elements such as biosphere diversity which is part of carrying capacity (Kidd, 1992; Carson, 1962). For example, this includes eco-development, as it was originally named, or sustainable development which is a normative concept that incorporates values of equity, broad participation in governance and decentralised government (Kidd, 1992; Bell & Morse, 2008). Sustainable development will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Carson's publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962, based on ecological principles, started the discussion on sustainability⁴ (IISD, 2003). In this seminal work, Carson demonstrated the link between usage of agricultural pesticides and damage to animal species and human health without using the term sustainability (IISD, 2003). This insight has had enormous consequences for an understanding of human health and well-being. This is relevant and important to the study of sustainability as it presents ecology at the centre for human action. It suggests that it is not possible to reach a state of human health and well-being in the broadest sense, without an understanding of the interrelationships between government policy and action, science and evidence based knowledge and the well-being of humanity. Carson's concept of the ecology of the human body that was expounded in her book revolutionised popular thinking about the relationship between humans and the natural environment; that human beings were not in fact in control of nature but simply one of its parts, and that the survival of one part depended upon the health and well-being of all (Carson, 1962). Following this publication it became clear that technologically driven economic activity was responsible for increasing environmental degradation (Yencken, 2000). The critique of technology as another root of the concept of sustainability, originated during the 1960s and 1970s as a counter argument to the growth of technology and seeing this growth as a danger to the environment (Kidd, 1992).

Carson's work, generally considered as a critical point in the conceptual foundation of sustainability, was based on tangible components and relationships such as pesticides and pollution to ill health and degradation (Faber et al., 2005). As mentioned above, the concept evolved more abstract meanings. By the mid-1970s this perspective changed

⁴ However, an earlier work by Vogt in 1949 titled the 'Road to Survival', had a strong socio-ecological focus which is also seen as relevant to the evolution of the concept of sustainability (see for example Kidd, 1992; Bell & Morse, 2008). In this work, Vogt depicts humans as part of their total environment, what we are doing to it on a world scale and what it is doing to us (Vogt, 1949 cited in Kidd, 1992).

when sustainability was attributed to abstract constructs such as society and development that shifted the emphasis from an causal, efficiency focus to one where quality, innovation and knowledge creation became critical issues to progress to sustainability (Faber et al., 2005; Dovers, 2001; Jabareen, 2009).

The World Commission Report: Our Common Future

There is consensus in the literature that the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) report, *Our Common Future*, written twenty-five years after Carson's work, was the historical marker for the global sustainability agenda. Starting its work in 1983, the WCED presented its report about the ongoing exhaustion of our planet's resources caused by increasing economic growth and an unequal worldwide distribution of wealth (WCED 1987). This report, also known as the Brundtland Report, stated that the present pattern of development could not continue and needed to be changed. Society should pursue sustainable development as a solution to the problem of un-sustainability and defined sustainable development as:

...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED 1987, p.4).

The outcome of the WCED initiative culminated into an international movement which saw many world-wide government strategies developed for sustainable development inclusive of the principles and goals of the WCED's report. This was followed by the signing by 179 countries of the Rio Declaration at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 of Agenda 21⁵ which emphasised the importance of new scientific efforts and approaches for achieving sustainable development (UN, 1992).

⁵ Agenda 21 (UN, 1992) takes a relative approach to sustainability and enables a local and a national focus for sustainability policy and practice.

Sustainable development

Prior to the mid-20th Century, the concept of ‘development’ was barely known. The structures of imperialism and colonialism of the 19th and early 20th centuries dominated the world with little provision for economic and social advancement for what we now call the developing world. The economic and social improvements that became a pre-occupation of Western governments following World War II however, were regarded as a responsibility of governments for realisation by the majority of people. This priority of ensuring the benefits of development was extended to poorer countries and was defined as eco-development. This concept was essentially an economic one but with social and institutional correlates it became a high priority in policy practice and in theory (Harris, 2000). Harris quotes the historian Backhouse who puts it this way:

Development economics in its modern form did not exist before the 1940s. The concern of development economics as the term is now understood is with countries or regions which are seen to be under or are less developed relative to others and which is commonly believed, should if they are not to become poorer relative to the developed countries be developed in some way (1991, cited in Harris, 2000, p. 2).

When the World Conservation Strategy was prepared and launched in 1980, sustainability and development were brought together in the new term ‘sustainable development’. The term was given further weight by the WCED in the Brundtland report in 1987. Since that time sustainable development has been adopted by the UN and other international bodies and by countries and societies worldwide (Yencken, 2002). The term development is both qualitative and quantitative and is meant to be differentiated from growth alone which applies to a quantitative increase in the physical dimensions of a subject (Hodge, 1997).

As the key strategy for achieving sustainability objectives, sustainable development is a widespread major policy and government area of activity at the local, state and global

level. The original objective of sustainable development was the conservation of physical capital and in particular, of natural resources and linked particularly to a solution to the inequity that was evident in non-industrialised countries (WCED, 1987). As local environmental sustainability requires a commitment to local care, the area of concern for sustainable development policy practice has encompassed social, political and economic development as well. This assumes that communities develop a level of awareness and empowerment that allows linkages to be made between environmental objectives and social, political and economic development (Selman, 2000).

This perspective helped to redirect attention about sustainability from the global view and recognised that local issues concerning the relationship of humans and environment required a bottom up approach to policy and practice which was seen as complementary to a top down global approach (Harris, 2000). Local issues and action as well as a global approach to the problem of the survival of the planet became critical to sustainability. For example, sustainability was meant to inform how economic development could be realised while taking environmental limits into consideration. Consequently if an economic system is deemed to be sustainable it means that it does not exhaust the surrounding environment (Faber et al., 2005).

Sustainable development became a key broad, socio-economic policy issue growing out of environmental concerns. The Rio Earth Summit of 1992 affirmed the equal status of socio-economic matters to environmental ones and subsequent developments have framed these within a 'quality of life' or 'live-ability' discourse. The local Agenda 21 initiatives vary among countries; however one common thread is the diversity of programs which are adapted locally aiming to integrate environmental, social and economic objectives (Selman, 2000). For example, Australia closely followed the global 'sustainable

development' debate and developed its Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) policies in 1992 incorporating the core goal of the World Commission (1987) which was:

Development that improves the quality of life both now and the future in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends and objectives which include to enhance individual and community well-being and welfare by following a path of economic development that safeguards the welfare of future generations (COAG, 1992, p. 1).

These policies, in addition to the values mentioned earlier in this chapter, included principles of diversity, longevity and the integration of social, economic and environmental goals (COAG, 1992). More recently, the United Nations Millennium Development goals proceeding from the Millennium Declaration, aimed at eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 (UNDP, 2002). Such initiatives reinforce the imperative of integrating social, economic and environmental objectives. For example, ecological threats such as climate change and natural disasters, directly affect the human condition with the most disadvantaged being the most vulnerable (McKinnon, 2008).

The United Nations example reflects an essentially systemic, holistic approach to policy and practice that has its roots in a conscious advance to address the needs of marginalised people through an environmental agenda (Selman, 2000). There is an acceptance of sustainability and sustainable development to incorporate a futurist, inter-generational perspective and emancipatory values and actions at all levels of social organisation (WCED, 1987; Hodge, 1997). More recent descriptions of sustainability reflect the above ecological principles as a basis for sustainable societies including *diversity* as a core component of sustainability. The following description leaves no room to doubt the importance of diversity in integrating the social, economic and environmental dimensions:

Over a long time societies could not systematically undermine the geo-ecological systems that support them... Successful sustainable human societies must therefore be as attuned as possible to their local and regional environments, their geo-ecological systems, lifestyles must be adapted to the ecosystems in which societies live and which support them with cultures, practices, economic systems and governing policies each adjusted to fit their area; not a single dominant culture or way of living spread across the globe. This would be a world of multiple diverse societies with their members also adjusted to what regional geo-ecological support systems can sustain (Reitan, 2005, p. 77).

This quote reflects the social agenda of sustainability that it was originally intended to address. However, mostly this agenda has been subsumed by environmentalists who have dominated the field of research in this area and in turn have reduced the focus on social reform. Later in this chapter, I return to this point and discuss the social dimension as a ‘gap’ in sustainability thinking and practice.

An eco-centric view of the world

Most of the meanings of sustainability such as the above examples reflect an anthropocentric perspective of the world. Porter explains that:

It is the anthropocentric perspective which assumes that all meaning is socially created by humans... The invisibility of nature in this kind of construct dismisses the manifold ways in which human identity is rooted in natural being (Porter, 2005, p. 7).

Nevertheless, Porter accepts that meanings and definitions of sustainability, such as the WCED definition stated above, have been important as among the first ‘voices’ to raise the issue of intergenerational equity in relation to economic development and the consumption of natural resources (2005). However, these earlier principles stopped short of challenging the limitlessness of capital and nature remained defined as a form of capital with no questioning of the anthropocentric view of the world (Porter, 2005).

Our Common Future opened the possibility for an expanded notion of sustainability beyond purely economic or environmental terms (WCED, 1987), embracing elements

of human, social and community (Schlossberg & Zimmerman, 2003). The WCED however, also stopped short of explicitly developing the concept of sustainability in terms of a radical system transformation and:

...sought to define it within more traditional economic parameters, allowing conventional perceptions of the desirability of growth to go unchallenged (Ife, 1995, p. 45).

The WCED's focus on intergenerational effects of unsustainable practices, however, continued to view sustainability as static insofar as it used the needs of future generations as its point of reference assuming that underlying social and environmental structures remain constant over time. Contemporary interpretations as discussed below use the point of reference for sustainability as the present situation, with dynamic, systems based approaches. This means a view of sustainability that is based on complex adaptive systems and a perception of living systems as self-organising and constantly adapting within their environments (McElroy, 2003).

Three dimensions of sustainability

Since the WCED initiative, the realm of sustainability has often been depicted as a way that social, economic and environmental / ecological interests and initiatives intersect (Gibson, 2006; Hodge, 1997). The three dimensions of sustainability, sometimes called the 'triple bottom line', are the social, which support individual and community well-being including cultural development⁶ and social equity. The economic dimension, to provide material needs and to further human well-being and the environmental domain,

⁶ Some researchers argue that the fourth pillar of sustainability should be the cultural dimension separating it from the social to give it more importance (see Hawkes, 2001).

for the protection of the environment and life support systems to protect present and future generations and other species⁷ (Yencken, 2002).

A sustainable world and society is simply visualised as the ‘triple bottom line’ of overlapping social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. These dimensions, however, are more often than not treated separately and dominated by either the economic or the environmental. In policy practice there is a struggle to try to integrate them. The emphasis is on balancing the dimensions and making trade-offs⁸ (Sheate, 2001) in order to achieve an ‘economy of human well-being’ and economy of eco-systems on which human society depends. Both approaches move away undifferentiated economic growth (Douglas, 2005).

However, sustainability is conceptualised in economics mostly as economic development ‘constrained by considerations of environmental sustainability’ (O’Hara, 1998, p. 175). The Western Australian Government, for example, in their State Sustainability Strategy defines sustainability as:

Meeting the needs of future generations through an integration of environmental protection, social advancement and economic prosperity (WA Government, 2003).

This definition is an example of how the ‘triple bottom line’ has been used to augment and enhance an exclusively and overwhelmingly economic view of the world. This suggests that the meaning of the concept depends on the discipline defining it. In reality, this view is reflected in the outcomes of policy strategies worldwide. To continue with

⁷ Although some writers, Yencken for example, have indicated that there is mostly agreement about the protection of other species it is surprising that this has not been explicitly identified as a core principle of sustainable development and sustainability.

⁸ In this context trade-offs imply the management of conflicting environmental, social or economic goals (Yencken, 2002).

the Australian example mentioned earlier, Australia's responses to the WCED initiative were the Ecologically Sustainable Development policies of 1992. The National Strategy incorporated goals and principles of WCED which explicitly referred to goals of individual and community well-being and the recognised relationship between environmental and social justice (Curran, 2003; Yencken, 2002). There has been limited take-up of responsibility by government institutions of integrated sustainability strategies (Curran, 2003). As Curran concluded when explaining the ESD National Strategy in Australia there has been:

...a limited institutional engagement with ESD outcomes and the frequent 'lip service' reference to ESD principles... There was considerable disinclination to engage substantively with the social and equity aspects of sustainability even by some of the environment related departments whose policy work interfaced - either directly or indirectly - with the social and equity concerns (Curran, 2003, p. 19).

Nevertheless, the idea and goals of sustainability appear to have challenged the traditional separation of social, economic and environmental policy and its effects on separate systems which belies the reality of their interconnectedness. Although still developing (through more rigorous sustainability planning and assessment processes for public policy), the three dimensions (the triple bottom line) provide a framework as well as a philosophy of integration to view society as linked at all levels of social organisation and across all systems. Although the implementation of integrative strategies in Australia is far from ideal, it has been recognised that economic development is an insufficient basis upon which to maintain and / or develop a healthy society (Hawkes, 2001).

The current discourse of sustainability

A discursive approach to sustainability assumes that the term has no inherent meaning, that is, no 'truth' and that actions and social units are made 'real' through discourse (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Discourse as language and other communicative action

represent particular ways of seeing the world and is a useful way of analysing societal change and changing views about society and the environment (Fairclough, 1993; Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

The next section aims to provide an overview of the current discourse of sustainability in order to explore the relationship between the discursive elements and social reality. A thematic analysis of the literature identified the key themes that the concept of sustainability has evolved and expanded into. This analysis has also assisted to identify relevant literature on sustainability for the research data sample for this thesis (see Chapter 5).

Sustainability is generally considered as a discourse of modernity (Maloutas, 2003). There are different understandings of modernity, however in simple terms modernity is mostly viewed as a societal period demonstrated by the development of institutions such as democracy, capitalism and science. Modernity is also identified by cultural values such as progress, consumption, human rights and individual freedom (Cheney et al., 2004). It has also been explained as an ‘unfinished’ project of the Enlightenment with ‘reason’ as its core concept. The project of modernity is about the progress of morality, justice in social institutions and human well-being (Passerin d’Entreve & Benhabib, 1997). Another view of modernity challenges the singularity of ‘taken for granted’ values and conditions such as competition and progress. This perspective identifies the potential to be different, that is, modernity’s liberating potential. This optimistic view of modernity is particularly interesting in the discourse of sustainability as it proposes the potential for change and transformation that is inherent in our everyday lives (Lefebvre & Gans, 2005). Sustainability has been seen as essentially a social construct, that although

people's relationship with their environment is critical, it is essentially social and dependent on power relations and identity (Porter, 2005) and on power relations in local regional and global contexts (Cheney et al., 2004). Sustainability implies diversity both of physical and normative properties; many ways that societies and communities can form an equilibrium with their environment for quality of life and therefore for sustainability. Although sustainability has its roots in modernity, later iterations of the concept allow for uncertainty directing the discourse to post-modern approaches of multiple realities (Cheney et al., 2004). Post-modern approaches to policy practice and reform seek to describe:

...a world which is characterised by uncertainty, doubt, relativism, change and a constant redefinition of 'reality' (Ife, 2004, p. 211).

Post-modernist social work values, for example, of uncertainty and reflexivity and the construction of multiple realities, challenge traditional dichotomies and understandings of power and are therefore important in the discourse of sustainability (Pease & Fook, 1999; Ife, 2004; Chenoweth & McAuliffe, 2005; Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). It can be argued therefore, that sustainability as a subjective process can provide opportunities for:

...meaningful dialogue about how communities, government and society might plan and act for the present and for the future (Cheney et al., 2004, p. 226).

While it is not my intention to elaborate on the modern and post-modern strands of the discourse of sustainability, the idea that sustainability has evolved ideas of uncertainty and complexity is important for policy practice as it allows for a critical approach. This point will be referred to again in ensuing chapters.

The theme of integration

As seen in the depiction of the three domains of sustainability and its roots, a major theme of the discourse is that sustainability considers that the ecological / environmental outcomes can only be realised through a focus on the social and economic conditions of

society. Evolutionary principles were the basis of an integrative agenda that, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, was manifested in the 'triple bottom line' of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. First coined in 1994 by Elkington, a business consultant focused on developing corporate social responsibility, the term 'triple bottom line' reflects the inevitability of including social and economic dimensions into the environmental agenda of sustainability. To achieve environmental progress, it was recognised that social and economic dimensions need to be addressed in a more integrated way (Elkington, 2004). The rationale for the integration of dimensions was essentially a new business strategy to allow corporations to maintain their position profitably but responsibly at least as an ideal. The concept of the three dimensions has evolved into a wider public discourse which impacts significantly on institutions, organisations and civil society, generally by reinforcing the idea that sustainability requires much wider participation of stakeholders and co-ordination across many areas of government policy (Elkington, 2004).

However, it is argued by some researchers that integration needs to go further for sustainability to include the integration of the values of social justice, equity and diversity, and an acceptance of human rights (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006; Hodge, 1997). Daly and Townsend, for example, state that Sustainable Development 'must be developed without growth but with population control and wealth re-distribution' (1993, p. 257). Sustainability as a socio-ecological concept requires a philosophy of integration but with reflexivity that enables the realisation of its outcomes for the good of society. In other words, it reflects the idea of integration and striving for the common good. These are core principles of democracy and political theory, which tend to be implicit in public administration but are radicalised in sustainability discourse. One example of this

radicalisation of the common good comes from the environmentalist Heinberg on the topic of inter-generational equity who states that:

The core of it is that if you want to put sustainability on the agenda, then it implies a radically new kind of policy... where the basic consideration has to deal with the fact that the consequences of a given practice here and now, will hit someone at another time and place. Thus: what I am doing here to take care of myself, my family, my time, my world has consequences. Not for me but for someone else, not here but at another place... (Heinberg cited in Reid et al., 2008, p. 144).

The extension of the concept of sustainability within an ecological perspective as indicated earlier has developed relevance to social systems. To do this, as Ife states, the concept gradually has become informed by social theory and particularly the concept of social justice:

...an integration of ecological and social justice perspectives leads naturally to a further extension of the concept to incorporate an understanding of social sustainability. This suggests that social institutions such as the family, the community and bureaucracies... need to be evaluated from the point of view of their sustainability (Ife, 1995, p. 84).

Therefore, the concept has relevance to all levels of social organisation for good societal outcomes. The expansion of the concept to social sustainability is further explored later in this chapter. In summary, the general discourse on sustainability considers that there are many advantages to a holistic integrated approach to all activities in the public sphere. At the same time, it considers diversity and flexibility as fundamental maxims of policy responses to meet societal and eco-system needs.

The theme of sustainability as a response to an ecological crisis

As discussed above, in the 1960s the early discourse of sustainability focused on the threat of ecological harm. It was argued that changes to social and economic structures were necessary to avert large-scale ecological disasters (Cheney et al., 2004). There was the realisation of the finite nature of all resources and included the capacity for

consumption of resources⁹. This point emerges as one of the major, strong themes of the sustainability discourse which considers that economic growth is harmful. With a focus on the inadequacy of mainstream responses to social problems, Ife and Tesoriero believe that the ecological crisis is caused by social, economic and political systemic crises. In other words, the systems themselves are unsustainable (2006).

Although sustainability has evolved from an ecological, physical base such as the essentiality of biodiversity, it has over time incorporated core democratic values such as freedom, peace and participation. It is argued that these values cannot be realised without placing an emphasis on the limitations of resources that is, on growth, and that unregulated exploitation causes degradation and depletion of the natural and human resources. This point implies that unless carefully planned and controlled, pursuing immediate material wealth will inevitably result in long term poverty and ecological disaster (Yencken & Wilkinson, 2000). These perspectives assume two key priorities for sustainability that need to be reflected in public policy, legislative efforts and practices. Firstly, accountability for today's actions and the preservation of *all* resources that is, beyond the natural resources as implied in environmental sustainability. What is considered necessary is the need to strike a balance between seeking immediate gain of some sort, such as meeting vital population needs, and preserving available resources (Thompson, 2003).

Many economists dismiss these notions of sustainability. Economic growth is seen as the inevitable result of population growth and technological innovation. As early as the 1970s however, a small dissenting group of economists argued that a sustainable

⁹ This point became widely accepted and is still known as the 'ecological footprint' and the general goal of sustainability of reducing the footprint as far as possible.

economy and zero economic growth were essential to maintain long term prosperity and sustainability (see for example, Daly & Townsend, 1993; Georgescu-Roegen, 1971). As Daly and Townsend put it:

In physical dimensions the economy is an open sub-system of the earth eco-system which is finite, non-growing and materially closed. As the economic sub-system grows it incorporates an ever greater proportion of the total eco-system into itself and must reach a limit of 100%, if not before. Therefore its growth is unsustainable (1993, p. 267).

This ideology underpinned the development of sustainable *development* as a global and local manifestation of managing resources without compromising the future. Therefore, in the present discourse sustainability can simultaneously inhabit different ideologies and practices (Ife, 2010). Although this has been identified as a reason for not using the concept (Ife, 2010) it is argued, alternatively, that its fluidity and what has been described as a ‘fluid paradox’ still has the potential to inform policy and practice as a theoretical construct (Kearins & Gilson, 2005; Cheney et al., 2004). It is acknowledged however, that fluidity can also fuel skepticism, particularly from the business sector where growth is an assumed mantra. These disagreements exemplify the potential political and theoretical debates of sustainability between particular groups such as advocates of social justice and the business community (Cheney et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, as mentioned, sustainability has also been described as potentially having great strength in its flexibility as a, paradoxically, post-modern concept in a diverse world (Bell & Morse, 2008). An example of this ‘fluid paradox’ from the field of sustainable development considers that:

Sustainable development tolerates diverse interpretations and practices ranging from ‘light ecology’ which allows intensive intervention in nature, to ‘deep ecology’¹⁰ which allows only minor interventions (Jabareen, 2009, p. 57).

¹⁰ Deep ecology is discussed further in Chapter 6 however, for the present its meaning is accepted as ‘encouraging an egalitarian attitude on the part of humans not only toward all members of the ecosphere but even towards all identifiable entities or forms in the ecosphere. That is implying a non-instrumental value

This example suggests that the concept of sustainability requires a comprehensive approach to its study and interpretation as it is multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral by its nature, value based and draws on diverse sources of knowledge.

In summary, addressing the issue of sustainability as a response to an ecological crisis involves tackling: biophysical systems which provide the life support systems for all life, human and non-human; economic systems which provide a continuing means for livelihood (jobs, money) for people; social systems which provide ways for people to live together peacefully, equitably and with respect for justice, human rights and dignity; and political systems through which power is exercised fairly and democratically to make decisions about the way social and economic systems use the biophysical environment (Benn & Dumphy, 2005). If we take this scope of sustainability, another dimension is necessary, which is governance. In this thesis, governance is considered to be an overarching domain for sustainability and is discussed in Chapter 4 to contextualise sustainability in policy and political institutions and activity.

The theme of environmentalism

It is not my intention to elaborate on this theme which is immense as a research subject. Nonetheless, it is important to note that environmentalism is part of the sustainability discourse. Many people in Western Anglophone countries identify themselves as environmentalists in simple terms. This implies that they care about nature and the environment (Porter, 1995). Paradoxically, over 80% of the United States population indicated environmental concerns in a country which is the largest consumer of the world's resources (Porter, 1995). However, environmentalism has been transformed into

should be given to non-human life and implying also that diversity is intrinsically valuable (Buher & Reiter, 2006).

a political ideology because of trade-offs and the conflicts arising from competing priorities of the 'triple bottom line'. Environmentalism or a 'green identity' has become a highly symbolic and central asset in modern society albeit one that can be aligned to a wide range of underlying interests and environmental concerns (Eder, 1995). For instance, it has become part of the discourse of problem solving and survival as a counterpoint to a denial of any ecological danger which views the existing market and price system as adequate for solving socio-ecological problems (Yencken, 2002).

The theme of 'the future'

The theme of futurity which, as mentioned above, was implied in the WCED definition of sustainability, is a fundamental principle in the sustainability discourse with implications for good decision making. That is, how good decisions are made and how we can make them *without* comprehensive knowledge of the future impacts of our decisions. For example, there cannot be full knowledge and information about such problems as climate change or population limits. Nevertheless, in this context, for good decisions to be made requires more than an equity commitment for the future. For an equity principle to apply into the future requires the recognition that present and future generations have the right to non-deteriorated ecological and socio-economic capacity and an appropriate institutional system to monitor and enforce the recognition of rights in decision making processes (Dasgupta, 2010).

A sense of future is part of sustainability thinking and studies have noted that futurity is an educative process which needs to be incorporated as a part of activity of civil society (McKenzie, 2004). In this vein, futurity is closely linked to social justice and trust in social institutions, such as democracy. A sense of future for example, redefines ownership of activity and goals and visioning systems in communities without necessarily having specific markers such as human services programs as initiatives (McKenzie,

2004). Researchers in the human services have called for a just and lasting change where communities own their futures (Sarriot et al., 2004). Similarly, sustainable development which is intrinsically futuristic is often described as the ability of communities to initiate and control their own development enabling them to participate more effectively in their own destiny (Lyons et al., 2001). This theme reflects the visionary nature of sustainability, which is linked to aspirational and transformative goals and the deliberate inclusion and dissemination of new values such as inter-generational equity (Jabareen, 2009). The theme of the future implies a global perspective which is essential for sustainability.

The theme of sustainability as a neo-liberal economic imperative

With the vastness of the literature on environmental economics and sustainability it is not deemed possible (or productive) in this thesis to fully explore the discursive and operational elements of an economic perspective on sustainability. However, there are key points of relevance to the social context of sustainability and therefore to this thesis, which require discussion. Sustainability from a neo-classical perspective has been described as basically a policy problem of managing a country's capital to maintain it at a constant level. It does include natural capital relevant to the ecological principle of sustainability but only in principle, as this approach allows for almost unlimited substitution between manufactured capital and natural capital, that is, of trade-offs (Ayres, 2008). The point here is that the integration of economic-ecological dimensions of sustainability is potentially critical for the operationalisation of sustainability in human services, as human economies and natural eco-systems interact on a wide range of spatial and temporal scales. For instance, economies can be viewed as 'serving' society both in terms of goods and services. Therefore, it is useful to conceptualise this integration to

understand how to assess the sustainability under uncertainty (as it is about the future) of goods, or service, project or program, a community or a nation.

Many theories and hypotheses have attempted to clarify this integration in the context of sustainability and for its operationalisation. However, for the purpose of this discussion it suffices to give an example of how the integration of ecology–economics has been captured discursively; the idea of ‘weak versus strong sustainability’ (Brekke & Howarth, 1996; Pezzey et al., 2002; Howarth, 1997). Weak sustainability is about the acceptance of gross economic output or consumption as proxies for health, well-being and welfare¹¹ (Ayres, 2008). Strong sustainability usually refers to sustainability as non-diminishing life opportunities and achievable by ‘conserving the stock of human capital, technological capability, natural resources and environmental quality’ (Brekke & Howarth, 1996, p.10), and seeing this as *separate* capital (and therefore not accepting trade-offs) (Brekke & Howarth, 1996). In summary, weak sustainability does not step outside the market framework in order to establish the conditions for sustainability. Whereas strong sustainability assumes that economic well-being does not cover all other concerns and that substituting financial capital for natural resources is incompatible with maintaining a bio-physical and socio-ecological environment for societies. This implies that for sustainability, it is imperative to shift out of the neo-liberal market framework perspective in order to establish the conditions for maintaining human health and well-being (Ayres, 2008; Dovers, 2001). It is important to acknowledge, however, that economics is broader than the neo-liberal imperative, and some strands of economics increasingly in the

¹¹ The economic definition of sustainability has its roots in the work of Dasgupta and Stiglitz from the papers of a symposium titled *The Review of Economic Studies*. Their definition of a sustainable economy is one that ‘exhibits dynamic efficiency and a non–declining stream of maximised social welfare over time’ (1974, p. 3). In this context social welfare was based on individual utilities and equated with consumption broadly defined as the measure of welfare and allocation through time of an exhaustible resource.

context of sustainability deal with bigger issues and consider the issue of economic de-growth, for example, as imperative for social equity and ecological sustainability (see for example, Schneider et al., 2010).

The conceptual expansion of sustainability

In the introductory section of this chapter, the semantic and conceptual foundations of sustainability were outlined. These are important to understand the way that the concept has been expanded generally and particularly in policy practice in the human services. The fields of interests relevant to the human services such as management and administration, organisational practice, public policy, finance, and program development and sustainable development have each developed their own ‘take’ on the interpretations of sustainability. However, generally the conceptual expansion of sustainability has been based on the assumption that the concept is in some way implementable spatially, in varying settings in local communities for example, and temporally that is, that sustainability is an achievable outcome over time (Dovers, 2001). With this focus, the following provides an outline of the major expansions which are evident in the research literature.

Policy sustainability

The general literature on sustainability in a broad range of domains considers sustainability of policy as a positive goal. It incorporates discussion as to how to ensure that a policy is a ‘good’ policy with longevity, durability and consistency of the policy process (Cherry & Bauer, 2004). Generally, the debates about what makes sustainable policies have been vague about what sustainability in this context means. More specifically, some writers have defined sustainable policies as rules that are politically adoptable and for which the desired policy goals are likely to be achievable (Cherry &

Bauer, 2004). However, policy sustainability in social domains generally deals with improving the quality of policy *per se* and how public policy can contribute to social, environmental and economic sustainability. Therefore, the expansion of the concept has focused on the quality of decision making *processes*, such as fiscal modeling (Talvi & Vegh, 1998). These types of studies have sought to develop fiscal sustainability indicators such as a lower current account deficit, to evaluate the durability and effectiveness of monetary policy, particularly in vulnerable economies and with the objective of achieving a more sustainable position for the economy and for enduring prosperity (Talvi & Vegh, 1998). Policy sustainability studies also include a focus on improving policy processes through soft systems methodology, such as sustainability is regarded as a unifying concept for policy practice as its socio-ecological focus enables people to see a bigger picture that makes more sense of the world (Chapman et al, 2005).

This genre calls for the development of sustainability indicators for sustainable development projects and community health (Pepperdine, 2000; Sarriot et al., 2004; Sibthorpe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005a). This latter field of inquiry is highly relevant to my thesis as it aims to embed sustainability principles and values into public policy processes. Policy sustainability is also used to mean the enhancement of the qualities of policy making to ensure more robust institutional responses to identified problems. That is, where the nature of decisions / policy is more aligned to the reality of the outcomes required. For this to occur, policy sustainability implies that the process should focus much more closely on what happens after reforms for example, become law (Patashnik, 2003) and whether, and under what conditions, broad based policy reforms can become socially and politically durable (Patashnick, 2003). In a United States study on the political sustainability of policy reform it was argued that the conditions for the long term

sustainability of any given policy reform hinges upon the successful reworking of political institutions and especially the empowerment of social groups with a stake in the reform's maintenance (Patashnick, 2003).

The conceptual expansion of sustainability assumes that it can be contextualised in sub-systems (for example, organisations, communities) as part of larger systems. The interest of sustainability research in this context is system quality where quality remains the same or increases. The general argument is that if quality declines then the sub-system and possibly the system can be regarded as unsustainable (Chapman, 2002; Bell & Morse, 2008). This use of the term sustainability in the example of fiscal policy sustainability for instance, has little to do with the conceptual history and foundations of sustainability *per se*. The above researchers argue however, that the expansion is underpinned by fundamental sustainability principles such as inter-generational effects and the distribution of exhaustible resources. Additionally, policy sustainability considers variables of longevity, space, time durability and requires a systems focus particularly for understanding people's interactions with their environments at all levels of social organisation.

Policy sustainability research as indicated by the above examples, have identified significant variables that indicate whether a policy or reform will endure and this area of inquiry is a conceptual expansion that can contribute to sustainability. This point is taken up further in Chapter 7 in the context of the operationalisation of sustainability in human services.

Organisational sustainability

Organisations and institutions have been studied for their ability to adapt and to better understand how and why they change long before the current understanding of sustainability. The current understanding as demonstrated in this chapter is socio-ecological and incorporates the idea of adaptation, capability and diversity as well as the core elements of longevity and durability to organisational study (Bell & Morse, 2008). In this context, organisations are viewed as sub-systems that are able to adapt to external pressures and to build their adaptation capability on the diversity of their resources (Bell & Morse, 2008).

The sub-text of any sustainability discourse about organisations is that the basic need of organisations is to maintain their external boundaries. Notwithstanding that all boundaries in complex systems are permeable, the maintenance of organisational boundaries is a powerful concept based on the premise that organisations aim for longevity and ‘immortality’ (Porter, 2005). Porter argues that if viewed in the context of their sustainability, some organisations should not exist at all (at least not in their present form) (2005). Nevertheless, there is a deep conditioning that occurs at all levels of social organisation that implies that organisations and individuals resist facing their own demise.

Inquiries into organisational sustainability focus on the capacity of organisations to maintain human and other resources both through funding strategies and human resources functions such as recruitment and retention strategies. It also denotes the capacity of an organisation to meet demand with quality processes for good outcomes, such as in studies that aim to identify the indicators for the survival of non-government organisations following initial funding or the viability of rural organisations (Porter, 2005). However,

as sustainability is always context dependent, the local effects of using any model or strategy require an appreciation not only of the macro effects of sustainability but also of the micro effects. For example, the effects at an individual and group level require that the basic agendas of stakeholders should determine the real objectives of any organisation of what sustainability means for them (McKenzie, 2004).

Although the general focus in the above context is on the organisation itself most organisational sustainability studies make the link between organisational sustainability and the broader 'triple bottom line' meaning of sustainability (Mohrman & Worley, 2010). The critical elements of this approach are essentially about the ineffectiveness of management, leadership and organisational systems to respond to the challenges of sustainability. A great deal of organisational research on sustainability focuses on the uptake and success of organisational responses through programs and projects to the 'triple bottom line' indicators and the integration of the three dimensions. Mostly, programs and projects happen under the auspices of organisations and therefore consequently, the same core elements of organisational sustainability such as maintenance over time and increase in quality have been applied to program sustainability. As will be seen in the analysis of the research data sample for this thesis, program sustainability is a major area of inquiry that is inextricably linked to organisations in human services fields such as community development, community health, local government and education.

In summary, the rationale that has expanded organisational studies toward sustainability research is essentially about the critical nature of organisations as sub-systems that impact on the health and well-being of societies. In addition, there is recognition that

sustainability of organisations is dependent on broader environmental health and well-being (Mohrman & Worley, 2010).

Program sustainability

Closely linked to the study of policy and organisational sustainability program sustainability occupies a significant field of inquiry. The sustainability of programs is increasingly capturing the interest of the research community in the human services especially in the fields of family and community services, community health, education and local government (Berkes & Folke, 1994; Edwards & Sen, 2000; Faber et al., 2005; Blackburn, 2007; Crowley, 2008). A sustainable program or project is generally referred to in the literature as one designed permanently to increase the economic and social well-being of people and thus, their independence, as ‘dependency depresses adaptive capacity’ and therefore of sustainability (Simpson, 2004, p. 22). This means that the program or project structure is one which can eventually function without external assistance and that it will have a long term impact on the quantitative (measured by income) and qualitative (measured by quality of life) aspects of people’s lives (Pal, 1998).

Human services programs¹² are considered to be important sites for social change and are linked to a higher order goal of social sustainability through institutions. For example, it can be demonstrated in the placement of important resources, including technology in activities and institutions that are inherently socially sustainable, such as educational institutions (Pal, 1998; Simpson, 2004). However, the question of who defines what sustainability will mean in a specific project or program context is critical and underpins all research into program sustainability (Pal, 1998).

¹² In this thesis programs are defined as projects and any initiative which is planned and implemented with an identified budget.

The interest in program sustainability in human services generally acknowledges the importance of understanding programs as deliverers of social provisions and fundamental instruments of organisational policy and practice. This idea connects sustainability conceptually to its various expansions in policy and practice as programs also address broader policy objectives of larger societal, national or international priorities (Pal, 1998). This idea is important for this thesis as this overview of the conceptual expansion of sustainability suggests that sustainability can be operationalised at an organisational and program level mostly through policy processes.¹³ In other words, it is essentially a policy problem insofar as it is a goal of policy and difficult to achieve (Rogers & Kimberley, 2005).

Social sustainability: the 'lost' dimension

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the sustainability discourse is situated in societal widespread concern over degradation of significant valued resources with an emphasis on the environmental and economic dimensions of sustainability. The meta concept of sustainability primarily with roots in biophysical systems was applied subsequently to economic systems (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006) in the context of neo-liberal economies. While the concept has environmental roots, it also has strong social, ethical and moral foundations. The Brundtland Report stated that:

...even a narrow notion of physical sustainability implies a concern for social equity between generations, a concern that must logically be extended to equity within each generation (WCED, 1987 p. 43).

This integration of ecological and social justice / human rights perspectives suggests that organisations and institutions need to be evaluated for their sustainability (Ife &

¹³ At this juncture it is sufficient to say that most organisations operate with policy processes that are instrumental and at least within an organisational structure that can identify some sequencing of activity. The purpose here is to situate sustainability in a policy context. This subject is taken up comprehensively in Chapter 5.

Tesoriero, 2006).

A substantial body of research in sustainability however, remains focused on environmental and economic resources interfacing government and community interests and activities in the use of natural resources. The role of the social dimension in the literature is underpinned by two major assumptions: firstly, that the success of sustainable development programs are generally determined by the highest increase in living standards measured against the least possible environmental degradation. Secondly, that the social sciences provide useful knowledge and tools to promote environmental and economic stability (McKenzie, 2004).

Similar to environmental degradation, the idea that there should be a focus also on the degradation of human resources of a society makes as much sense as environmental concerns (McKenzie, 2004). Most research on social sustainability has focused on enhancing integrative strategies in policy and reform of social, economic and environmental dimensions. However, some researchers have attempted to separate the 'social' as a constructive conceptual leap in order to find meaningful connections to develop a relevant theoretical base for a renewed focus on sustainability (McKenzie, 2004). McKenzie for example, whilst acknowledging the importance of integration of the dimensions also affirms the reality of attempts to do so without trade-offs. McKenzie attempts to separate social sustainability as distinct from the 'triple bottom line' so that it can be used as a meaningful framework (2004). Starting with a definition of social sustainability, he proposes that it is more useful if it is seen as a condition with identified indicators that would lead to sustainability. Additionally, viewing social sustainability as a process where indicators become actions (similar to the WCED's driving forces as

mentioned above) with a specific focus on ‘developing a series of mechanisms for a community to collectively identify its strengths and needs’ (McKenzie, 2004, p 40).

Research on social sustainability is usually about whether it exists and to what extent in a rural community for example, its sustainability can be realised (Pepperdine, 2000). When it is deemed not to exist the community may be considered ‘at risk’ and in need of support (Pepperdine, 2000; McKenzie, 2004; Baines & Morgan, 2004). As an overarching concept, sustainability is also viewed as an asset that a society possesses allowing it to maintain coherence and overcoming the unintended consequences of change and hardship. In other words it is considered as the social capital of a community (McKenzie, 2004; Simpson, 2004). The type and make up of current social sustainability indicators are influenced by theories of social capital and community development both reflecting what elements are important in achieving sustainability and playing a role in helping communities determine sustainability (Baines & Morgan, 2004; Schlossberg & Zimmerman, 2003).

Although there is little consensus about what is meant by the ‘social’ and even less about implementation of social sustainability, there is enough consensus about its maxims (Hodge, 1997). These maxims or elements that are included below, have been identified by the World Health Organization, the World Bank and OECD reports and in many other jurisdictional reports and research studies on sustainable development, particularly in developing countries. These broad elements of social sustainability are major themes in this thesis. In particular, they have provided a context in which to search for research projects that share some ‘overlapping consensus’ across fields of interest (Rawls, 1999).

Elements of social sustainability have been described in the literature as desirable social goals. These are described as ‘driving forces’ for the health and well-being of societies and demonstrate a high degree of consensus across the literature on social sustainability. These elements include good governance, a human rights perspective, investing in health and education, improved income distribution, participation and diversity in human and ecological systems (see for example, Hodge, 1997; Rawls, 1999; Meagher, 2000; Koning, 2001; Patashnik, 2003; Cheney et al., 2004; Benn & Dumphy, 2005; McKenzie, 2004; Ife & Tesoriero, 2006; Baehler, 2007). Progress towards social sustainability is viewed as fundamentally good and requires that attention is paid at all levels of social organisation to the development of these elements (Magis, 2010).

In an example from the social work literature, McKinnon describes an imperative for social work should be to define its role in finding long term solutions to the human condition through the incorporation of social sustainability as a core concept in social work theory and practice (2008). This example reflects the emerging interest demonstrated in social change fields generally, to use the ‘triple bottom line’ to pursue ethical and political goals. However, this argument is mindful that demarcation of the ‘social’ can miss potential benefits in finding solutions to social problems through the sustainability phenomenon (Cheney et al., 2004). These authors suggest that the social dimension provides a context in which social scientists are considered to have particular expertise and to be able to make relevant contributions to public policy and decision making *across* the dimensions. This knowledge is underpinned by the explicit recognition of ethics and values with the advancement of what should be rather than what is (Cheney et al., 2004). For example, social sustainability as a primary agenda situated in an ecological framework assumes that a priority goal is firstly to tackle social problems

such as poverty and low social cohesion that will ultimately make a difference to the environment in its broadest sense (McKenzie, 2004), rather than the other way around. In reform activity in the human services, an acknowledgement of social sustainability taken in the above context can direct governments as decision makers to achieve a social justice agenda which underpins higher order sustainability.

Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the development and expansion of the general concept of sustainability particularly to understand the importance and relevance of the social dimension of sustainability in policy practice in human services. Sustainability was identified as an important policy issue both locally and globally. Key themes of sustainability have also been identified from the general sustainability literature to map the concept's 'social' evolution and to guide further analysis of conceptual development of the research data sample for this thesis. To situate the 'social' in sustainability is a necessary step in answering the research question of the usefulness of the concept in human services. It is argued that the 'social' in sustainability is an important perspective which has been underscored so far in the application of sustainability as a major policy agenda for many Western countries. Nonetheless, the increasing interest and policy focus on the integration of the three dimensions and on social sustainability in the field of social work and other social change professions as demonstrated in the most recent literature explored in this chapter, demonstrates its potential value to policy practice in human services. The study of social sustainability has particular implications for social work policy practice as a major conduit for change in human services and will be explored further in the next chapter and in Chapter 7.

In summary there are some key considerations for this thesis which emerge from the analysis of the general literature in this Chapter. A key issue that influences the development of the model of sustainability for human services which is presented in Chapter 7 is the idea that sustainability can be operationalised at an organizational and program level, mostly through bottom up *and* top down policy processes. Another key consideration that emerges from this Chapter and that is critical to answering the research questions is that the concept of sustainability has strong social, ethical and moral foundations. This suggests that at all levels of social organization, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 7, the evaluation and/or monitoring of policies and programs *for* sustainability is both possible and desirable.

Another key consideration is the idea that the concept of sustainability reflects the integration of the ecological and social perspectives of sustainability that are based on universal values such as social justice and human rights. The implications of this idea that has emerged from the analysis is that the goal and development of *social* sustainability in programs, policies and communities for example, as already mentioned in the above Chapter, can also provide useful knowledge to promote economic and environmental sustainability (McKenzie, 2000).

These issues are crucial to the objectives of this thesis, to develop a model of sustainability for human services that could potentially influence policy processes which can steer meaningful action in human services policy practice.

CHAPTER 3: THE SOCIO-ECOLOGY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Introduction

As presented in Chapter 1, the research question concerns the use and value of the concept of sustainability in human services with a specific focus on public policy¹⁴ and reform. This directs attention to how human services are linked to public policy. In the previous chapter it was established that sustainability is a major public policy issue and a complex socio-ecological concept which is concerned with solving social, economic and environmental problems in an integrated way. It was also argued that the concept is increasingly informing policy to solve major social problems at a local and global level such as poverty and inequality. To answer the research question therefore, it is necessary to examine key theoretical foundations of social problems to understand how social problems are constructed and addressed. Drawing on the literature on the sociology of social problems, this chapter firstly sets the context in human services and examines a number of theories and concepts that inform the study of social problems and sustainability.

Setting the context in human services

Human services can be considered as the objects of policy, that is, entities that are developed and changed through policy. Human services (and its human services workers) are viewed as a system, both influencing and being influenced by public policy (Fawcett et al., 2010). In its broadest manifestation, human services comprise

¹⁴ The term ‘public policy’ is used in this thesis rather than social policy or policy to firstly differentiate the scope of public policy from other policy such as internal procedures and particularly to reflect the broader domain of policy in the context of sustainability.

organisations and processes that aim to provide services to populations for their survival and to enhance their quality of life. The term covers a broad range of services and facilities provided by public, not-for-profit and private agencies and the involvement of different levels of government such as Commonwealth, state and local jurisdictions. Some countries use the term ‘public services’ or ‘social services’ to denote the same categories of provision (Fawcett et al., 2010). For the purpose of this thesis however, ‘human services’ is used as it is broad enough to include education and health services for example, which form a large part of service provision that is relevant to sustainability. Human services span many fields of provision that include income support, child welfare, child care, community health, health services generally, community development, early childhood, youth and community services and care for the ageing. This of course is not an exhaustive list and administratively, jurisdictions include a wider or less restricted variety of domains within their human services. This is influenced by many factors but particularly by funding, governance arrangements and structural boundaries. Societies vary widely in what is considered an area of public need and responses as human services interventions. The identification and construction of what constitutes a problem such as child abuse as a public problem and as a statutory responsibility, or child care as universally provided are decisions which evolve and are contested in the policy and political arenas.

The scope of human services research

Typically, the study of human services or social provision considers historical perspectives such as the rise and the (debatable) fall of the welfare state (see for example, Titmus, 1968; Pierson & Castles, 2006). The scope of study includes the origins of contemporary social provision for basic needs such as sanitation and water, or viewing a history as the increasingly professionalised and institutionalised provision (Fawcett et al.,

2010). Other perspectives include the history of charitable institutions and their development and relationship with government organisations (see for example, Kramer, 1981). These perspectives are important in understanding the nature and scope of current social provision in liberal democracies and particularly on the changing nature of agency and its impact on public policy and social problems. The perspective that is taken in this thesis, while acknowledging these socio-historical approaches, is to identify social provision through human services as sites for development and change that have the potential to facilitate sustainability.

Changes in public provision

Over the past three decades the rise of the new public management¹⁵ incorporating the principles of managerialism in liberal democracies has had a major influence in changing the meaning of what constitutes public social provision¹⁶. These developments have resulted in a proliferation of diverse organisations and agencies engaged in policy and service activities. It is no longer adequate to simply consider a recognised governmental formal authority as the domain of policy development and service provision (Fawcett et al., 2010; Colebatch, 2005). The structure of human services involves a much wider domain than the government and the church based charitable organisations that have been a fundamental part of human services systems. The system includes many other ‘not-for-profit’ organisations, private agencies, formal and informal networks and the formation of private – public partnerships (Graddy & Chen, 2006).

¹⁵ This point will be elaborated further in the context of public policy in Chapter 4. At this point it suffices to note it as a major influence on human services.

¹⁶ For the purpose of this discussion it is not necessary to draw on privatisation literature which, although highly relevant to changing public provision arrangements, is to some extent also separate from the discourse of the new public management and public policy.

Most public-private partnerships however, which involve non-government agencies, are led by government and they have been described as only ‘weakly’ collaborative in the sense of shared authority (Gazeley, 2008). Another view however, considers that government funding of agencies does not necessarily lead to constraint of agency authority (Kramer, 1981). This is a vast and contested field of human services activity, however, what is generally agreed is that despite these shifts in the role of direct government involvement in the human services, governments continue to have a major role in providing for human needs. It is also argued that greater ideological and theoretical clarity is required regarding the nature and relationship of the community and the state and indeed of their partnerships to ensure that ‘community’, as the collective understanding of social life, is not developed at the expense of the state or as a ‘mask’ for the state (Redell, 2004).

A corollary of this ideological and theoretical under-development as critiqued by many writers of the third way politics¹⁷ of the United Kingdom and other liberal democracies is that community and partnerships have become the key principle of new governing arrangements. Often new governing arrangements lead to a ‘diminution of power and a shift of policy responsibilities and risk to under resourced disengaged local communities’ (Clarke & Glendinning, 2002, p.45). This kind of social development is seen to not go far enough to achieve the balance required for effective and inclusive participation of civil society whilst maintaining effective state responsibilities and its political institutions (Redell, 2004; Shannon & Young, 2004). This view of maintaining state responsibilities

¹⁷ With its origins in Giddens’ writings and the Blair’s labour government in the UK, the third way politics questioned the role of state interventionist and competitive market approaches to public policy. This approach also resonated in other liberal democracies such as Australia and NZ. This approach drew on the idea of network governance with a retreat from the state to a participatory community (see Giddens, 1994; Clarke & Glendinning, 2002; Mouzelis, 2001; Redell, 2004).

strongly emphasises the essentiality of a constitutional basis for the development and operation of a democratic civil society (Di Palma, 1997 cited in Redell, 2004). Redell argues that a more integrated view of the state and civil society is required (2004). The emphasis of sustainability is also on addressing major inequities and disadvantage and therefore the provision and protection policies of governments are also critical for sustainability. However, in countries such as Australia (see for example, Saunders, 2002) and New Zealand, the changed view of a citizen's rights in provision and protection policies is demonstrated in increasing sanctions and mutual obligation policies which have shifted the focus from rights to responsibilities of citizens (O'Brien, 2008). This policy shift from rights of social provision and protection against poverty and disadvantage is viewed as a weakening of social citizenship (O'Brien, 2008). O'Brien has described social citizenship as the hallmark of the development of welfare states and refers to it as the development and provision of sets of social rights that are inherent in the very nature of being a citizen who is entitled to a range of social good and services (2008). This idea is important in the context of sustainability as the shift to a greater involvement of civil society is critical for sustainability and so is the nature of participation. This idea is further discussed in Chapter 6. For the purpose of this discussion however, it is important to broadly recognise a shift from provision and authorisation by the state to increasing involvement of civil society and the role of participation for sustainability, as it has a direct bearing on how policy and social problems are constructed and managed.

The idea of social development

This shift can be observed specifically in human services policy practice. For example, the New Zealand Government (2002, cited in Shannon & Young, 2004) has described the change as one from social welfare to social development. It is important to note however,

that this approach to social development or the third way, although it shifts the lens toward a more participatory community focus, does not, in effect, necessarily change the institutional or structural arrangements of society. Economic growth remains the priority and sustainable jobs are merely about longevity (Shannon & Young, 2004). At this point of development, human services remain fixed as a top down economic based process where there is no reference to environmental or to social sustainability dimensions, as discussed in Chapter 2, that are holistic and transformative and, it is argued, essential to a serious social development agenda (Shannon & Young, 2004). The importance of new governance arrangements, as indicated above, will be further explored in the context of public policy processes in Chapter 5.

To shift to an emphasis on social development, public policy would require a change in structures and institutions where more active mechanisms for human services delivery are expected. For example, social development that focuses on income support and poverty alleviation differs from traditional welfare as it aims to support people with skills development within communities and to strengthen both. In other words, social development aims to seek longer term solutions to poverty and social exclusion through supportive participatory mechanisms (Shannon & Young, 2004).

Definitions of social problems

When discussing human services as one major system through which problems are addressed in societies, it is important to acknowledge a basic assumption, that finding solutions to social problems is linked to the theoretical perspectives that inform human services policy and practice. Therefore, in this section a general description of how social

problems are defined and examples of descriptive and explanatory theories of social problems is presented.

A widely accepted definition of what constitutes a social problem as distinguished from other types of problems is that it meets three criteria: that it has a social origin, that it is perceived as a threat or is a threat and that it is amenable to a social solution (Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998). This assumes that if the problem is to be considered as 'social' it is neutral and does not have a presumed value or objective (Spector & Kitsuse, 2001). In this sense, natural disasters, for example, generally do not meet the criteria for definition as a social problem. On the other hand, if the problem of a flood is ignored, the flood does constitute a social problem. It can be argued therefore that a flood can be subjectively defined as a social problem as a *relational process* (Spector & Kitsuse, 2001). In other words, the emphasis should be on the process of how the issue gets defined and what happens in pursuit of solutions rather than a labeling of a harmful condition that meets the above criteria.

Social problems have been described as an integral part of social life and that they are:

Social conditions, processes, societal arrangements or attitudes that are commonly perceived to be undesirable, negative and threatening certain values or interests such as social cohesion, maintenance of law and order, moral standards, stability of social institutions, economic prosperity or individual freedom (Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998, p.8).

The idea that social problems threaten *specifically* dominant values or interests is at the core of the theory of residualist conversion of social problems which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The social construction of social problems: theoretical perspectives

In Chapter 2 it was acknowledged that the major objectives of sustainability as an evolving social concept are the resolution of intractable social problems such as poverty and disadvantage. The literature on sustainable development has confirmed that to address social problems is fundamental to a sustainability agenda. For its usefulness and value to be explored further it is necessary to set the theoretical groundwork for how social problems are currently viewed and addressed.

Historically, perspectives on the causes and manifestations of social problems focused on theories of pathology based on the labeling of a particular group or sub-population as the problem (Shannon & Young, 2004). The pathology or deviance theories focused on populations whose characteristics departed from the norm. This approach remains highly evident in human services policy and practice. It is argued that although a constructionist approach to social problems is widely accepted in theory, human services activity is generally centred on the people *with* the problem rather than seeing the potential solutions through transformation of the structures and institutions of society. The punitive compliance policies that have surrounded the implementation of ‘welfare to work’ agendas in the United States and Australia and similarly, punitive current child protection policies of many liberal democracies are examples of an existing ‘pathological’ approach to social problems (see for example, Considine, 2002; Ainsworth & Hansen, 2006; Lonne et al., 2009).

As Ife and Tesoriero wrote in the context of the rise of individualism:

Blaming the individual renders iniquitous structures invisible and encourages hostility, fear and suspicion towards those who deviate from the norm and those

against whom one competes. The other is no longer to be embraced and included but feared, suspected and excluded. Trust is eroded and replaced by increasing mistrust... (2006, p. 10).

This point directs attention to the discourses of community, risk, social capital and justice which are discussed later in this chapter. Another group of theories, conflict theories, have their origins with the writings of Marx, incorporate structural explanations that acknowledge the foundations of social problems as inequality across groups in society (Shannon & Young, 2004). These explanations of social problems are based on the ideology of class struggle and theories of social order and social control that moves us away from the potential for participatory processes in society and the achievement of sustainability.

The 'claims' perspective

The development of a constructionist approach to social problems and social needs changed the direction of the inquiry toward a sociological approach. The focus is on who makes *claims* that a particular condition is a social problem and how these claims are made (Spector & Kitsuse, 2001). This perspective defined social problems subjectively as 'activities of individuals and groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions' (Spector & Kitsuse, 2001, p. 75). The approach allowed an analysis of such complex social problems as child abuse. The case of the 'rediscovery' of child abuse is an example of a 'claims' approach to social problems. In the early 1960s in the United States, Kempe and his colleagues, a group of radiologists, labeled what they saw in babies and young infants in emergency wards of hospitals as a condition of multiple fractures and trauma that potentially required a social rather than a purely medical explanation (Kempe, 1971). Questions were asked of this condition,

labeled the ‘battered baby syndrome’¹⁸ about who makes the claims that these babies were in fact abused. What was the nature of the claims and what reactions did these claims produce in societal structures such as in law, media and the public’s reactions? (Best, 2004)

A social constructionist approach to social problems therefore links problems to public policy as it questions what people do to convince others that a condition exists that must be changed (Best, 2004). This lens is interested in how power is distributed and how groups such as politicians and the media can influence opinions and concepts of what is to be considered a public problem. Linking personal problems with the big picture also describes the sociological perspective on social problems initially observed by Mills in his seminal work on the sociological imagination as:

...the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances (1959, p.12).

Mills set the foundations for a *socio-ecological* understanding of social problems. This perspective recognises that private problems are often caused by socio political and economic institutional and structural forces that impact on people’s lives. The social construction of social problems, coined by Berger and Luckman, encapsulated this view and went further in explaining that the world and its phenomena evolves through people’s everyday actions and ideas and that social problems become a reality only when they are subjectively defined or perceived as problematic (1999). This position assumes that the ‘problem’ has both a subjective and objective reality as problems *do* impact on the lives of people, with negative consequences for individuals and societies.

¹⁸ The ‘battered baby syndrome’ has been a highly significant reinterpretation of a social problem. Nevertheless it was and still is known as a ‘syndrome’ reflecting the medicalisation of child abuse.

The corollary of this position is that the interpretations themselves, such as how a concern becomes identified as oppressive or unjust, are able to be analysed socio-historically. Consequently, the analysis can contribute to strategies and policies that can address finding solutions to the problem. This view is about *process* that takes the study of social problems to understanding power structures in society and therefore to public policy and the political environment. Policy processes are the subject of the following chapter.

A 'public arena' model of social problems based on a socio-ecological model

The traditional view of seeing social problems as specific conditions enabled their analysis through a linear, staged approach of identification, legitimation and solution (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). This has been referred to as the natural histories of single social problems. One description of this perspective suggests that:

The natural histories of single social problems evolve in a system of public arenas that serve as the environments where collective definitions occur (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988, p. 54).

This approach applies ecological concepts such as competition, selection and adaptation to public discourse about problems. In other words, it is a descriptive theory regarding the prioritisation of problems and how they compete for public attention and resources and how social forces select particular problem definitions of what constitutes a social problem.

The residualist conversion theory

According to the residualist conversion theory, a social problem is viewed as a form of a negative 'residue' that logically emerges from the everyday pursuit of dominant values and interests of society (Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998). For example, unemployment or underemployment in a society can potentially affect the whole community (in a recession for example), but as mentioned earlier, in many jurisdictions it has been 'converted' into a

personal problem. As mentioned in the earlier example, interventions focus on participation as a responsibility of the individual, skilling of the unemployed and penalties for not achieving employment within a given time period (see for example, Marston & McDonald, 2007). Shifting the perceptions from the social nature of the problem to the population *with* the problem diverts the attention from societal arrangements and effectively ‘confirms and validates the legitimacy of these arrangements’ (Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998, p.4). In other words, little attention is given to the structural character of the problem. The residualist conversion theory proposes that dominant values and interests are translated into policy decisions on political, administrative and operational levels of social organisation and that social problems may emerge at any of these levels. The perceptions of problems will be different at each level within systems.

This means that the focus is on the *processes* which ‘convert’ personal problems into public problems. Certain social problems appear to be intractable despite sustained efforts to alleviate or solve them. Jamrozik and Nocella suggest that policies and methods of intervention into these ‘wicked’ problems are repeatedly used almost ritualistically, although the claimed or expected results are not forthcoming. They ask why then do such methods or interventions or policies continue to be used? They theorise that policies and interventions may have other aims that are equally or even more important than the solution or control of a given problem. Namely, it is the need to demonstrate that the problem is being addressed. In their theory they propose that such demonstration shows a commitment to the maintenance of dominant values and interests and therefore the legitimacy of the institutions that support these values and interests (1998).

This point attempts to explain why some social problems become public concerns and why others do not. Public problems become the concern of public policy because they serve to legitimate the power structures representing the dominant values and interests of society (Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998). Huge intractable problems such as inequality or the degradation of the environment are public problems that have become resistant to reform and resolution. In summary, a social reproduction of values and interest and organisational structures also entails a reproduction of social problems. These intractable problems usually lead to further problems and attempts to explain the process by which construction occurs or does not occur, becomes a critical concern (Spector & Kitsuse, 2001; Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998).

Systems theory

The above discussion reflects systemic and dynamic perspectives to social problems. Aristotle's statement that the 'whole is more than the sum of its parts' simply and essentially defines any complex and uncertain problem¹⁹ and has pervaded thinking across all disciplines in the modern and post-modern era. Of course it is not necessary to look this far back for an overview of systems theory but it does serve the purpose of being reminded of its long roots and its fundamental laws.

Bertalanffy is considered to be the modern father of systems theory. His quote, though less well known, placed the 'bones' on Aristotle's maxim that:

...since the fundamental character of the living thing is its organisation, the customary investigation of the single parts and processes cannot provide a complex explanation of the vital phenomenon (1972, p.140).

¹⁹ That is, non-linear in cause and effect and uncertain in its origins and trajectories. It is not necessary (or possible) for the purpose of this thesis to examine the roots of non linearity and uncertainty that originate from physics and mathematics, however it is important to at least acknowledge that systems theory and the idea that all systems evolve and change through states of equilibrium and states of fluctuations are fundamental physical principles adapted to the social sciences that have far reaching implications for understanding order and change in social systems (Prigogine cited in Burgelman, 2009, p. 9).

Moving away from a reductionist approach of the biological sciences, systems theory provided the potential for sociological thought and for seeing relations within units of organisation. A system, theoretically, is a general model that is made up of *universal* traits of observed entities (Bertalanffy, 1972). Hence this leads to the interdisciplinary nature of systems theory. Bertalanffy defined a system as a set of elements standing in interrelation among themselves (nested) and their environment. Among these elements that were initially described are familiar maxims in many domains including ecology, social work and sociology is the idea of holism that leads to purposeful broad synergistic units of social organisation. Other elements of systems theory include the openness and the interdependence of sub-systems bounded yet with the capacity to be influenced and to influence their system and other sub-systems. The equifinality, that is, the adaptability of systems, provides some conceptual order to inform and to add meaning to human development and to the relationship of all ‘organisms’ to their environments (Bertalanffy, 1972; Haines, 2010).

Although Bertalanffy was theorising about the biological world, he clearly conceptualised a generalisability from the biological world to any units of organisation such as social groups (1972). The extension of systems theory into the social realm provided a leap beyond critical thinking, to incorporate systems thinking that would add a practical and generalisable theory to investigating human problems. The first thing that this ‘extended’ systems theory provided was recognition that complex problems required multiple levels of analysis (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Stokols, 1995).

The major implication of systems theory for sustainability is that complex systems are unpredictable but there is capacity to better understand how systems work through

adaptation towards coherent and desirable patterns of behaviour and outcomes. This idea has major implications for human services as complex and uncertain systems. For example, Prigogine states that ‘layers of short term narrow planning based on the extrapolation of past experience from one system to another ... leads to a collapse of systems’ (cited in Burgelman, 2009, p. 9). In other words, one cannot extrapolate one experience from one system to another and expect the same effect, as all sub-systems interrelate with their specific environments and these are open to constant change and adaptation. This systems principle relates to the idea of diffusion. Its relevance to sustainability is taken up again in Chapter 6.

A socio-ecological perspective of social problems

The conceptual expansion of systems theory to the social sciences directed the study of human development and societies to an ecological perspective. Ecology,²⁰ being the science of the relationships between organisms and their environment considered the entire system in which all growth and development occurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The socially organised sub-systems of this entire system were seen to help support and guide development. The sub-systems such as our institutions of family, school or law, have become accepted as the basis for the study of social problems and for the analysis of policy. This perspective includes the micro-system which refers to the relationship between the developing person and their immediate environment such as the family and subsystems in between (often referred to as the meso level), with the macro sub-system referring to institutional patterns of culture such as the economy and bodies of knowledge (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Throughout the evolution of systems ideas a core element has been a commitment to the idea of the ‘whole’ system which is adaptable (that is, not fixed

²⁰ Ecology as a fundamental multi-disciplinary science critical to the study of social problems and sustainability will be discussed further in Chapter 6 when presenting the analysis of the research data for this thesis and the constructs of sustainability.

in a physical and social order) and can survive in a changing environment (Hodge, 1997). The complexity arises when the sub-systems as described earlier, function within the larger whole but with different purposes and contradictions in their pursuit of their own constructed and 'whole of system' goals.

The ability to integrate several levels of analysis is a fundamental property of systems thinking and ecological theory. Therefore social problems viewed as uncertain and complex inevitably are informed by a systems based approach. What is important to note here is that systems thinking sets the study of social problems in a context that can examine interactions among problems as relational processes. Processes that occur on each level influence all others. There has been a shift most recently to the application of general systems theory from optimisation of ideal systems with well-defined objectives such as in informatics or cybernetics, to an emphasis on systemic processes of learning related to problems with *ill-defined* objectives such as most of the human services. It is argued that sustainability falls well within the bounds of this latter category of problems. Ecological approaches based on systems thinking in this context can support a preventive approach to social problems that go beyond the 'after the fact', residual interventions, toward a holistic, facilitative approach for longer term or even permanent solutions (Hodge, 1997; Shannon & Young, 2004). Systems thinking is therefore fundamental to sustainability.

Social work and ecology

Ecology, when applied to the human condition is intrinsically a critical inquiry, that is, its purpose is emancipatory and directed toward the betterment of society. Social problems such as poverty, homelessness, child abuse and mental illness most recently, have been understood as socio-ecological phenomena. That is, they take into account multi-causal

or influencing pathways of individual, social, economic and environmental factors both locally and globally that impact on people and communities (Gitterman & Germain, 2008; Homel, 1999). Social work is a discipline that is particularly concerned with the definition and the alleviation of social problems. A focus on the interrelationships between people and their environments has been a characteristic of social work since it emerged in the late 19th Century (Nash et al., 2005). Indeed, taking ‘person in environment’ as the basis of all interventions with individuals, groups and communities is considered to be the key feature of social work theory and practice, setting it apart from other disciplines from which it draws its theoretical knowledge and skill base (Gitterman & Germain, 2008). The International Federation of Social Workers definition of social work encapsulates this ecological foundation:

Social work bases its methodology on a systematic body of evidence-based knowledge derived from research and practice evaluation, including local and indigenous knowledge specific to its context. It recognises the complexity of interactions between human beings and their environment, and the capacity of people both to be affected by and to alter the multiple influences upon them including bio psychosocial factors. The social work profession draws on theories on human development and behaviour and social systems to analyse complex situations and to facilitate individual organisational, social and cultural changes (IFSW, 2000).

Similarly, the Australian Association of Social Workers’ definition suggests an ecological relationship:

The social work profession is committed to the pursuit of social justice, the enhancement of the quality of life and the development of the full potential of each individual, group and community in society. Social workers work at the interface between people and their environments utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems (AASW, 2010).

Over the past three decades, an ‘ecological system’ has been the main theoretical metaphor in social work and other social change professions as a framework for practice through an understanding of context and the interrelationships between people and their environments (Nash et al., 2005; Shannon & Young, 2004). I argue however, that

sustainability thinking goes beyond systems thinking with the potential to take ‘ecological systems’ from a metaphorical level toward literally unifying the natural and social systems based on common theories and principles²¹.

The ecological framework uses as a scaffolding framework for social work and other human services, disciplines such as health promotion, which emphasises strong links between the micro and macro levels of social organisation (see Nash et al., 2005; Shannon & Young, 2004). As discussed in Chapter 2, these connections are fundamental to the realisation of sustainability as a higher order human goal. Early work in health promotion for example, used ecological models for major World Health Organization (WHO) projects such as *Health for All* (Baum & Cook, 1992) and *Healthy Cities* (Ashton & Grey, 1986). These projects were influenced by significant international charters aimed at reducing the inequities of health across the world through social action, increased participation of citizens and inter-sectoral collaboration (Ashton & Grey, 1986). These proclamations included the Declaration of Alma-Ata of 1978 and the Ottawa Charter (1986). They considered that ‘health’ was both an expression and a component of human development, seen in an socio-ecological way as the ‘pattern that connects’ and recognising that links exist between health, the environment and the economy; envisaging that health can be a goal for all humanity (Hancock, 1993). These examples of projects based on socio-ecological models have had a major impact on the development of public policies across many domains both locally and globally (Marmot, 2007). More recently, the principles of socio-ecology are manifested in other international projects such as the

²¹ Wilsons’ unity of knowledge thesis is the inspiration for this point however, others have also taken this up in the context of sustainability (see Redclift & Woodgate, 1997; Swyngedouw, 2006). It will be explored again in the context of building a model of sustainability in Chapter 7.

Millennium Development Goals that address poverty, disease, environmental degradation, discrimination against women and illiteracy (UNDP, 2002).

As these projects demonstrate, there is an increasing interest in integrating the domains of social, economic and the environmental through an ecological perspective internationally. However, the anthropocentric nature of many domains in the human services including health, has limited this world view to a ‘person in environment’ approach that is often represented as a metaphorical eco map within a bio-psychosocial political system, falling short of an integrated ecological system. The anthropocentric social nature of this perspective is further discussed in Chapter 6 and in the concluding chapter. It is an important point in the context of sustainability as it limits an ecological world view to an ‘environment’ that is solely controlled by human action (Shannon & Young, 2004; McKinnon, 2008). At another level, the ecological perspective does provide a critical framework for sustainability but as Ife and Tesoriero have argued, it is also necessary to incorporate other critical concepts and values, of social justice and human rights into any ecological framework (2006).

The ecological turn: complexity and uncertainty

The latter point suggests that socio-ecological principles do not go far enough in solving social problems. Governments increasingly frame social problems as needing management rather than solutions (Blackman & Woods, 2004). This is due to complexity and uncertainty of pervasive social problems. As defined earlier, complexity is viewed as non-linear processes which effectively lead to new concerns with patterns of change that are often not predictable from past events (Burgelman, 2009). Furthermore, organisations that intervene in social problems are themselves complex adaptive systems and yet tend

not to adapt adequately but instead, seek to manage and regulate social problems through capitalist and growth related ideologies (Ritzer, 2004).

Further to the discussion in Chapter 2 regarding the problems of un-sustainability of growth and development, Ife makes the point in the context of social provision by the welfare state that reflects this idea:

The crisis in the welfare state is the result of a wider crisis of a social, economic and political system which is unsustainable, and which has reached a point of ecological crisis. Each conventional response to the crisis in the welfare state is itself based on the same unsustainable growth oriented assumptions and is therefore itself unsustainable (1995, p. 10).

Ife and Tesoriero argue by adhering to sustainability principles, economic growth can be limited and:

...would ensure that as much as possible, resources are only used at a rate at which they can be replaced, and that output to the environment is limited to the level at which it can be absorbed (2006, p. 33).

This perspective of society's problems orients thinking to a truly ecological level that demands the recognition of key values and principles. It follows that un-sustainability is unacceptable and the responses of capitalism and consumption are inhibitors of a sustainable society (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). This perspective has relevance and implications for all fields of human services and at administrative, management, operational and community levels of social organisation.

In the area of child protection for example, recruitment and retention policies have contributed to the un-sustainability of the systems of child welfare in a number of Western Anglophone countries (Scott, 2006; Lonne et al., 2009). Similarly, growth in services provided to prevent and intervene in the area of child welfare has been linked mainly to reform activity through public inquiries. This has resulted in a lack of attention

to evaluate societal conditions such as inter-generational disadvantage that contribute to the intractability of child abuse (Manthorpe & Stanley, 2004; Richmond, 2007). The plethora of public inquiry recommendations made through these public inquiries are mostly about administrative and program changes or enhancements. This has the effect of reinforcing similar administrative arrangements, thus limiting the potential solutions *within* a narrow administrative system. This ensures the reforms are un-sustainable.

Key concepts

In this section a number of important and interconnected concepts that influence sustainability are discussed: community, social capital, risk and social and environmental justice. There are other major concepts that are highly relevant to sustainability such as human rights and participatory democracy. These are discussed comprehensively in Chapter 6 as being central to sustainability. These major concepts have also emerged from the analysis of the research data sample for this thesis.

Community

Earlier in this chapter the changes in public provision of human services towards a general ‘community’ focus was discussed in the context of agency of public provision. But to elaborate further on the conceptual value of community that influences sustainability it is necessary to consider some of the ways that community is used in public policy and in the political arena. In ecological terms, community can be described as an open subsystem *of value* to society that affects and is affected by its wider environment. Within the political and academic domains however, there is no agreed definition of community (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2008). The word ‘community’ is liberally used in policy practice in the human services to denote the level of intervention for example, or the ‘revival of community’ as an alternative to ‘social disintegration’

(Giddens, 1994, cited in Cunningham & Cunningham, 2008, p. 106). Community is used to denote geographical space but also as an area of interest where people come together to act on a common cause. The latter meaning assumes that a community acts beyond self-interest toward achievement of some wider goal. Communities of interest are of particular significance for any activity that aims for social change. Ife and Tesoriero describe community as an essential categorisation in which people have the right scale of place within which their interactions can be readily controlled and used (2006, p.86). If we take this definition it can best be conceptualised by identifying its essential elements. One already mentioned is scale. Others include a sense of belonging, identity, empowerment and participation (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). Its meaning however is always contested and the use of language around these elements has reinforced certain assumptions about the meaning of community as stable, concrete and unified (Mavhunga & Dressler, 2007). It is not possible here to discuss each of these elements and their constructions, however they are fundamental to sustainability and they emerge as concepts in the building of key constructs of sustainability presented in Chapter 6.

In this thesis the term ‘community’ is used to demonstrate these elements and as a unit of social organisation that provides a boundary for conceptualising societal processes at a local level. Mindful of the key elements of community it is also important to note that using the term requires sensitivity to its potential usage. For example, in the context of using the ‘community’ to achieve sustainability outcomes, such as in the protection of the environment, it has been observed that often ‘community’ is predefined by others where consensus can be identified. That is, it can be used to identify homogeneity rather than diversity which is a fundamental principle of ecology and therefore of sustainability (Azar et al., 1996). A study of how local communities respond to conservation challenges

found that local development initiatives are usually pre-defined conceptual categories of ‘community’ by others in positions of power either as researchers or bureaucratic policy actors. This study found that often it was assumed that communities had social institutions sufficiently intact for the community based management of natural resources. The researchers concluded that the unfortunate outcome of this scenario was that upon achieving the desired result or of ‘consensus’, it became necessary to consider local people’s everyday lived experience and how this can conflict with the ‘production’ of sustainability strategies. The point here is that community needs to include the nuances of the terms of engagement of individuals and groups in ‘community’ through their stories and struggles (Mavhunga & Dressler, 2007, p. 45). The notion of ‘community’ is often conceptualised as endowed with social boundaries viewing otherwise heterogeneous social groups as discrete entities.

Social capital

One fundamental principle of sustainability as discussed in Chapter 2 is that there should be no depletion of natural or social resources over time. Put simply, this implies the maintenance of all forms of ‘capital’- social, human and natural capital. The concept of human and social capital is of particular concern for this thesis. Human capital is defined by OECD as ‘the knowledge, skills and competencies and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to economic activity’ (Schuller, 2000, p. 9) such as participation in the workforce, its qualifications etc. (Becker, 1962, cited in Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). That is, based on the individual’s capacity to contribute to economic development. This interpretation however, was developed beyond a purely economic lens, although it arose out of a concern for economic development, to the language of social capital.

The roots of the concept of *social* capital can be seen in the paradigm of individualism versus collectivism although social capital is a much more recent discourse on the same subject (Allik & Realo, 2004). It owes its popularity mainly to the work of Helliwell and Putnam (1995) (political science) and Fukuyama (sociology) (Edgar, 2001). Helliwell and Putnam's work on Italian regional differences in economic development showed the value of informal networks and the building up of voluntary associations for the economic prosperity of the region (1995). Expanding the theoretical lens from human capital, as an individualistic focus of building economic capability alone to social capital, shifts the paradigm to a longer term perspective on the building of trust and reciprocity across societal institutions.

The most common measures of social capital look at participation in various forms of civic engagement or levels of trust in public institutions as people express it. To date, it has been deployed as a concept to explain social problems such as crime, unemployment and health problems. For example, the *lack of* social capital increases crime (Hommel, 1999) and the lack of collective engagement has been identified as a social determinant of health, that is, as a contributor to ill health (Marmot, 2007). Social capital both arises out of and helps build a sense of social trust, the norm of reciprocity on which social exchanges are mostly based. Edgar posits critically that:

Without trust co-operation is impossible and without co-operation society building cannot happen - the freeloaders and Machiavellis take it all (Edgar, 2001, p. 101).

Putnam showed that the density and the scope of local civic associations laid the foundations for social trust thereby creating conditions for effective governance and ecological development (Putnam, 1995). Communities endowed with a rich stock of social networks and civic associations would be in a stronger position to confront poverty,

vulnerability and to take advantage of new opportunities (Putnam, 1995). The links between social and human capital have been explored of building social capital as fundamental to development (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). This views social capital as a socio-political variable that needs to be seen in its institutional context within which any networks of communities are embedded and particularly the role of the state. This perspective is particularly relevant to sustainability as it purports that the importance of the concept of social capital is to direct attention to getting 'the social relations right' as both a means and an end for sustainability to be realised (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000, p. 21).

It is important to note however, that building social capital as a focus for progress toward sustainability is very difficult to translate into action in organisations and communities (Kira & van Eijnatten, 2008). Nevertheless, a number of studies have pointed out that social capital should remain a key focus for the development of communities and societies (Kira & van Eijnatten, 2008; Schuller, 2000; McKenzie, 2004). McKenzie illustrates how a study in the Riverina district of NSW used social capital as a concept and a framework within which to categorise and assess community social change. Its thesis was that sustainability could be considered in terms of whether various stocks of social capital are declining or growing. The subsets used in the Riverina study are interesting insofar as they use subsets of social capital to measure sustainability as a broader societal goal. These subsets included human social networks and values and institutional structures in the private, public and third sectors (McKenzie, 2004). This concept has been remarkably successful in the sense that it has informed many aspects of the social sciences. One view about the reasons for its success is that it reintroduced

normative issues explicitly into the discourse about relationships which shape the realisation of people's potential both individually and collectively (Schuller, 2000).

Risk

Generally, the issue of social anxieties that arise from perceived or real threats to well-being has been contained in the discourse of safety and its moral and rational boundaries (Cohen, 2002; Ungar, 2001). Although the pessimism and mistrust associated with threats to society is not new, it is argued that the safety discourse 'faces rupture in the new risk society' (Ungar, 2001, p. 287). Safety has developed into a language of risk that is omnipresent in societies and has resulted in a social reflexivity of citizens who are increasingly aware of risk but whose trust in traditional institutions' response to risk to meet their needs is in decline (Taylor-Gooby, 2001).

The new risk discourse began to surface in the 1980s and 1990s and has become a significant one in discussion in social science on social organisation, and human behavior and activity (Bessant, 2003). Risk is generally defined as a hazard that is potentially preventable. To understand most human services contexts requires an understanding of a risk discourse, how it has shaped public policy over the past three decades and the social construction of services, providers and recipients. Beck's work contributed to the idea that risk pervades all social activity and coined the phrase the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992). Giddens' development of Beck's theory considered that while risk and uncertainty remain features of human life the new perception and understanding of risk is about 'manufactured risk' through the interventions of government and economic activities (1994).

Risk and human services have changed the nature of interventions. It is in fact difficult to find the boundaries of any complex social problem without reference to the service responses to manufactured risk that make up the system (Wearing & Dowse, 2000). For example, there has been much debate about how risk impacts on human services policy and practice (Beck, 1992; Bessant, 2003; Munro, 2004). Beck argues, in a more recent dissertation, that there is a deliberate exploitation of the vulnerability of modern civil society which has replaced the principle of mere chance or accident (2006).

The transformation of policy and practice through an unequivocal acceptance of the pervasiveness of risk has been manifested in human services systems. This is shaped by the new public management and now increasingly reliant on risk frameworks and risk management instruments in order to identify who is at risk and what to do about it (Hough, 1993; Bessant, 2003).

The service responses have developed into a 'science of risk' that tries to understand social problems through who is actually involved. For example, in the role of experts in developing risk assessments for identifying who is 'at risk'. This moves away from a collective, structural explanation and intervention through public policy, or an explanation about its constructions and the maintaining of dominant interests in society (Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998). The science of risk moves further than the residualist explanation as discussed earlier in this chapter, into a Foucaultian direction where the solution to social problems lies in the discovery of what kinds of experts and mechanisms are involved in its construction and the people that it affects. In other words, it links the emergence of the discourse of risk to governmentality (Bessant, 2003). This is clearly demonstrated in the example of the highly risk averse nature of child protection policy

and practice in most Anglophone countries. That is, that all risk can be *managed* regardless of its unpredictability or complexity. In child protection this translates into legislation and policies that attempt to predict risk and hazard reduction.

The critique of risk in this context is that there is an *a priori* division of society into sub-populations across new boundaries. No longer is it just in terms of traditional socio-economic participation boundaries or class or gender, but more exact, predictive ‘scientific’ boundaries. These factors shape policy and practice in the human services. To continue with the example of the problem of child abuse, it is particularly evident that there is a clear bifurcation at a number of levels to identify individuals and families as well as behaviours as levels of dangerousness (Hough, 1993). It is argued that it is the intolerance of risk itself and the risk of failure to intervene rather than the intolerance for child abuse that has driven the systems of child protection to the level of instability and un-sustainability (Mansell, 2006).

Beck’s risk society thesis coincided with the emergence of the new public management that is discussed further in the next chapter. Put simply, Beck’s risk society thesis requires more and more technical, managerial and economic interventions in continually changing systems to be able to control risk (Winkworth & McArthur, 2007). In the developing risk discourse the shift has been from the idea of welfare provision that responds to risks such as poverty and crime, to a reflexive modernisation where welfare has been ‘displaced by mechanisms for creating self-governing individuals and communities’ fed by neo-liberal individualism and contractualism (Wearing and Dowse, 2000). The ‘decline’ of the welfare state (managing risk encountered in every-day life) and the rise of individualism

can be seen as a historical shift towards a risk society. One outcome of a risk society is a decline in the trust in rationality and decision making by government. Another outcome as mentioned earlier is a decline in the trust and reciprocity of communities through the decline in trust in state institutions (Taylor-Gooby, 2001). It can be postulated therefore that a risk society reduces social capital. A risk society is one that has to address the consequences of its development, namely, the hazards across social, economic environmental and governance dimensions.

What is also important to consider is that the shift towards a risk society is about a more intense awareness by society of socio-political and environmental risks; a reflexivity that scrutinises the roles and responsibilities of government and its institutions in being able to protect people from risk. However, what is key in a risk discourse and that is reflected in Beck's thesis is that risk is produced and managed technically by society's institutions but it leaves no higher 'authority' ultimately responsible for the hazards and problems.

This is an important discussion for this thesis as it situates the current policy and reform processes in human services within a government framework that is based on the discourse of risk rather than on a structural or a more phenomenological basis. If the latter approach was taken, it would reflect the aims and elements of sustainability as discussed in Chapter 2. Additionally, a structural and phenomenological basis to human services could address some of the problems that I presented in Chapter 1 on the impetus for my research. This different approach would include a conceptual shift towards the subject - individuals and communities in the context of their experiences and actions (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Social and environmental justice

There is much contest in the discourse of social justice particularly in its theory base and in attempts to operationalise its principles and values. The origins of a social justice discourse arise from Rawls' distributional theory of justice that is based on the principle of equality of opportunity, freedom and well-being and the distribution of resources (1999). The main critiques of these essential components of social justice are that they do not go far enough in explaining the reasons for the inequality in the first place or with a focus on the equitable distribution of non-material resources (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006).

The distributional theory of justice is based on the concept of fairness as a *hypothetical, abstracted* position of equality. It posits that the subject of justice is the structure of society and how societal institutions manifest the first principle of virtue of all societal institutions (Rawls, 1999). If this interpretation is the nature of social justice it can be applied to all conceptual expansions of justice such as environmental justice. That is, if the virtue of institutions is fairness then all activity and function in society must take wider account not only of redistribution *per se* but also of positive discrimination in order to achieve a fairer distribution for desirable outcomes for nature and societies (Dobson, 2003).

This brief description of the concept of social justice is presented to provide some background to environmental justice as a key concept of sustainability. Many conceptual elements of justice and social justice such as equity and intergenerational equity emerge in the research for this thesis as intrinsic to the building of constructs of sustainability and these are part of the discussion in Chapter 6. Therefore, the focus here is on the conceptual expansion of environmental justice for sustainability.

Environmental justice

The discourses of inequality and equality of distribution of society's resources, the role of the welfare state, structural disadvantage, oppression and social exclusion inform the discourse of social and environmental justice. But the discourse of environmental justice has had a more specific development. Similar to the broader discourse of social justice, it involves both distributive and procedural elements that deal, for example, with participation and the development of cross-sectoral partnerships. There has been a rapid growth of environmental non-government organisations whose *raison d'être* is the preservation of the environment through mainly broad strategies of community development (Hillman, 2010).

Cross-sectoral systems under the banner of environmental justice have developed in many countries that have expanded both the discourse of development and environmental justice. Often however, these discourses uncover unresolved tensions between the consensual and the conflict nature of development that place major constraints over the realisation of sustainability goals (Hillman, 2010). As just mentioned, the discourse of environmental justice has been a conceptual expansion of social justice and has a significant role to play for sustainability.

The term emerged originally in the United States and has emerged more recently in the United Kingdom and other Anglophone countries as a new discourse that informed the activities of community organisations that campaigned against environmental injustices. However, as the discourse developed it has been identified as having a much greater influence on the wider sustainability agenda (Agyeman & Evans, 2004). Researchers in the United States argued there is a much higher and disproportionate burden of

environmental risks such as hazardous wastes on low income groups and racial minorities (Cutter, 1995). As a result of this finding, the United States legislated that every federal agency must achieve the principle of environmental justice by addressing and improving the environmental effects on minority and low income populations (Cutter, 1995). This example clearly links oppressive practices and the politics of redistribution to environmental justice. As a consequence of this connection, a strong link exists between environmental justice and sustainability. However, the question needs to be asked: will justice produce sustainability? Additionally, is environmental justice a movement for environmental sustainability? Dobson argues that the environmental justice movement is not necessarily a movement for environmental sustainability, as the environmental justice movement is about a re-distribution rather than a reduction of waste (2003).

Another example of an environmental justice issue is the impact of climate change. Climate change is a global problem with potentially disastrous effects on marginalised populations around the world. The discourse of climate change has therefore incorporated appeals to universal human rights, participatory democratic principles and equity and justice in determining appropriate governance to address the problem for communities and societies (Adger, 2001; Dovers, 2001). Adger argues that the:

...greatest single equity issue and the spectre that overshadows all mitigation debates is that of the differential impact of climate change and the highly skewed costs of adaptation at global and local scales (2001, p.922).

This point highlights the costs of mitigation, that is, the *reduction* of the human causes of climate change that have major differential negative impacts on the most vulnerable. In turn, this raises awareness on the important social equity issues and particularly the equality of opportunity. The uncertainty and long term nature of climate change impacts are key equity debates such as the social causes of vulnerability. This implies unequal

opportunities for people and communities to adapt (Adger, 2001). Nonetheless, the important point from the above example is that at least conceptually *social justice* demands the sustaining of critical natural capital and its fair distribution around the community of justice. Social justice and environmental justice however, do not necessarily demand a value of biodiversity for example, despite the fact that social justice based policies influence biodiversity (Adger, 2001). It is potentially the case that social justice therefore, although compatible conceptually with such sustainability values as biodiversity; are potentially in a trade-off relationship rather than of mutual advantage. Environmental justice does not go far enough in identifying other capital that is critical to the survival and well-being of the planet.

It is argued that social and environmental justice concepts that are underpinned by the distributional theories of social justice are limited in informing sustainability. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the traditional approach to social justice does not take into account or explain the ‘social processes and practices that caused the mal-distribution in the first place’ (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006, p. 54) nor a true socio ecological approach to social problems. An eco-centric view of the world that is not limited to the centrality of humans among other things requires a transformative agenda that addresses the way that power is distributed and used. The concepts of social justice and environmental justice are therefore necessary but not sufficient for sustainability.

Chapter summary

This chapter has established the context for further exploring sustainability concepts in social fields. Key theoretical perspectives and concepts which arose from the analysis of the literature on social problems were presented. It was argued that a socio-ecological perspective as the basis of social work policy practice needed expansion but nonetheless

was fundamental to understand and solve social problems. This expansion and implications for social work policy practice is further explored in Chapter 7. Key concepts which emerged from the literature as important for sustainability were discussed and contributed further to exploring the usefulness and value of the concept of sustainability in human services policy practice. The next chapter presents some approaches to public policy as sustainability is mainly reliant on public policy processes for its operationalisation through societal institutions.

CHAPTER 4: PUBLIC POLICY PROCESSES

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2 the concept of sustainability is embedded in a change agenda reliant to a large extent on public policy developed through societal institutions for its achievement. In Chapter 3, a discussion of how society constructs and finds solutions to social problems was presented in order to situate sustainability in the social realm. Drawing on the general policy literature this chapter provides a ‘baseline’ for the development of a new model of sustainability for use in public policy processes which is presented in Chapter 7. As a central objective of this thesis is to develop a new policy model, it is important to establish a ‘baseline’ or benchmark of examples of contemporary policy models and key approaches to public policy processes. In this chapter, the strengths and limitations of current examples of models are analysed in order to provide a basis for comparison for the development of a new model. Furthermore, in order to answer the research questions for this thesis it is necessary to explore the influences on public policy. The central and secondary research questions ask:

Could a broad conceptual model of sustainability be of use and value for addressing social problems through the development of public policy in human services?

Can policy and programs be made more enduring and effective through an understanding of sustainability?

As I also discussed in Chapter 1, my impetus for this research emerged from experiences in human services as a social work policy practitioner. My interest therefore lies in exploring the potential of sustainability to contribute to social work policy practice and to build on this existing practice to influence public policy. This point is taken up further in this chapter as part of the discussion of different perspectives of public policy.

Policy models are conceptual maps that aim to organise and carry out public policy work (Jenkins, 1990). Models are pragmatic guides to action, ‘a conceptual map of linked understandings about the underlying dynamic of the process’ (Colebatch, 2006, p. 6). They integrate different useful components and processes that are developed from research and practice. Policy models can be used for policy analysis, program evaluations and for monitoring progress against set indicators. In this thesis public policy is viewed as a ‘process’. Although this approach is used in this thesis, there are other approaches to policy such as authorised decision making (Colebatch, 2006). In this thesis the work of public policy is described as ‘policy practice’ to emphasise the *purposeful* activity around policy development. The specific use of the term ‘policy practice’ in social work also has implications for this thesis and will be explained later in this chapter.

‘Public policy’ or ‘social policy’?

As noted in Chapter 3, the term ‘public policy’ is used in this thesis rather than social policy, as public policy is a broader generic term that covers other domains and processes in areas such as education, the environment and finance. Public policy is the preferred term for this thesis as the main focus is on the nature of policy processes, policy models and some of the conditions under which effective policy is possible (Cherry & Bauer, 2004). A focus on sustainability requires the integration of knowledge across various policy domains. Social policy however, is *centrally* concerned, but not exclusively of course, with the content of policies rather than the processes. For example, in the study of poverty rather than processes in welfare provision (Spicker, 2008). However, it is acknowledged that the context of much public policy in human services is around issues of social needs, social justice, welfare and institutional reform.

What is public policy?

Public policy is explained in a multitude of ways and it is impossible and unhelpful to rigidly define it. Generally, public policy is described as the work of public institutions to regulate processes that aim to meet people's needs and interests and to solve societal problems. People talk about policy and mean very different things. For instance, as a field of activity, an expression of a desired state of affairs, as a proposal for an initiative, as a decision of government, a formal authorisation, as an achievement and as theory or model (that is, if you do X then Y follows) (Hogwood & Gunn, 1984). Policy can also be described by its elements, such as: authority, expertise and order (Colebatch, 1998). In this interpretation, policy denotes endorsement by some authorised decision maker, by a body of specialised policy expertise where decisions are made for specific activities and content to be pulled together into a common framework (Colebatch, 1998). For example, child protection policy, if deconstructed, would be made up of units of knowledge and processes that are identifiable in a number of other policies in different jurisdictions. To some extent, this common framing (Rein & Schon, 1996) has to do with the underlying principles and origins of the collective response to a social problem such as child abuse and to the specialisations which follow.

This perspective also considers that policy as decision making and the goals of policy are not neatly separated from the activity which surrounds both its development and its implementation²². It is difficult to isolate policy decisions. Policy as process which is

²² Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) started a long standing debate of how the technical problems of implementation make it difficult to implement public policy. Additionally it started the debate whether policy and implementation should be understood as two separate processes. This is a vast field of policy studies, however the point here is that the analysis of policy implementation as part of policy as a process attempts to answer questions about the causes of policy failure and therefore I argue, should be included as policy practice rather than seeing implementation as: 'a process of the policy makers hand(ing) over the policy mandate to others – policy agents such as street level bureaucracies - the service providers' (Bardach, 2000).

discussed later in this chapter, argues that it is more accurate to talk about a continuum or policy as evolving (Sabatier, 1986). For example, the activity that brings issues to the attention of government as a priority and is legitimised by it does not necessarily come from the expert field or from cabinet. Problem identification and activity is pervasive and systemic. Furthermore, the nature of our institutions and organisations in the public sphere and civil society does not neatly organise public decision making and implementation activity sourced and directed by policy (Barrett & Fudge, 1981). That is, policy is always contested by the variety of actors and perspectives on any issue and this plurality reflects competing priorities. This is often reinforced in practice by the sequestration of administrative functions in the public sphere. Additionally, the privatisation and the new public management principles of competition such as the purchaser-provider arrangements (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) of outsourcing public services to non-government agencies have transformed the landscape of the policy process and service provision across all sectors.

This suggests that authorised decisions cannot be implemented without the co-operation and a ‘shared understanding’ by other agencies and participants, given effect via policy instruments and institutions (Colebatch, 1998, p. 39). Therefore, where and how policy is made becomes a question of process rather than acts of decision making from one source and rarely relating to one single decision by authorised decision makers. This interpretation of the policy process is aligned with the idea of advocacy coalitions which will be discussed later in this chapter (Sabatier, 1986).

The policy context

Societal institutions as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter are the context in which public policy is made. In addition to the formal structures and institutions of

governing and decision making such as the executive, parliament, the judiciary and the bureaucracy are the ‘informal’, non-constitutional structures that include the professions and non-government organisations. Generally, as argued in Chapter 3, liberal democracies have experienced a decline in the agency of government as the central decision maker. The centralised agency of government has been shifted by such developments as globalisation and the rise of technology and to some extent by the sharing of provision of services by government through new managerial arrangements. Simultaneously, there has been a shift from central agency to a demand for identifying and solving problems collectively with the increasing participation of groups and communities. Both formal and informal processes and structures are used to influence policy decisions and for the implementation of policy through the agency of policy actors (Considine, 2002). As Considine stated:

...formal, coercive laws as well as implicit, habitual conduct, or what Bourdieu has called the habitus, a structuring in the dispositions which actors bring with them to each new engagement. These commitments typically connect several agencies and a number of different actor groups (2002, p. 3).

To talk policy therefore, it is also necessary to talk about other social institutions such as the family, school, workplace, or club that provide the micro structures for reform and change. Institutions of course vary across societies but generally they set a path and often a direction on how society can change itself. Institutions also set up boundaries or barriers to what people can and cannot do and in this way they influence ‘the distribution of power and collective problem solving capacity of a society’ (Considine, 2002, p. 85). How voices of interest groups and communities have access to, use and change policy instruments and institutions within which they operate, has a fundamental effect on policy outcomes.

This wider policy environment also has a major effect on the policy process and direction. For example, the conceptualisation of policy networks and policy communities directs the understanding of the process towards linkages beyond the top down decision makers in a political context, toward a multitude of potential groups of people who share a common interest in an issue or social problem (Atkinson & Coleman, 1992). The idea of a policy community or a network expands the policy environment and considers the role and the interests of policy actors who participate. Policy instruments and ideology, as well as people, need to be considered as policy context, as focusing simply on policy actors does not necessarily consider the institutional beliefs that underpin the evolution of policy.

Policy instruments

Generally, policy instruments can be explained as the endorsed choice of means to accomplish a purpose, for example, using legislation to regulate child safety. The choice of policy instruments is a crucial matter in the implementation of policies. However, choices of instruments are not necessarily based on informed judgment rather, in highly politicised areas of human services for example, choices are made on the basis of convenience, often through disciplinary bias or familiarity of instruments by the policy actors (Dovers, 2001). Some of these instruments used regularly in human services policy making include: intergovernmental agreements, statutes, assessment procedures, community involvement, royal commissions and public inquiries, institutional and organisational reform, common law and market mechanisms (Dovers, 2001).

This instrumentality deserves attention as much of the success of policy relies on the potential of the policy instruments used to effect changes. Rarely is one instrument used alone; public participation through consultation processes, for example, usually forms part of a cluster of instruments such as public inquiries and evaluations. Public participation in commissions for inquiry and in parliamentary committees for example,

has become a critical process for policy development. Public inquiries into ‘policy failure’ around social problems such as child abuse, domestic violence, youth justice, policing, drug abuse in most recent times across many countries of the West can be seen to enhance public participation in the making of public policy (Prasser, 2006).

Policy and ideology

Ideology is another key influence on public policy. Ideology incorporates elements of critique of the status quo, a vision or goal and action (Schwarzmantel, 1998). Ideology, according to Taylor-Gooby, separates the empirical from the normative and stands between fact and value, between description and evaluation (2001). The major conflicts which occur in the field of human services, in crime prevention, substance abuse, child abuse and Indigenous health for example, occur and are maintained because of differences in ideology and in how power is used across the spectrum of interests (Fawcett et al., 2010). The initial principles that may set the contested positions for any policy issue as mentioned earlier however, do not preclude ideological drivers throughout a policy process. The continuous driver of policy is the use of power, seen as a Foucaultian interpretation and therefore understood as plural or pervasive, un-centred and not held by the state or a central political force (Considine, 2002; Bessant et al., 2006).

Considering ideology in the policy process addresses questions such as how an idea gets adopted and the forces that drive the political agenda towards more radical change. Cameron suggests that crises such as natural disasters drive more radical change, however the force of ideology is the most frequent catalyst for change. In describing the drivers for policy changes, Cameron stated that policy changes can be traced to underlying changes in social structures. As the system evolves over time, certain characteristics of changing social structure conflict with ongoing policy (1978).

Ideology provides the intellectual and emotional pressure required for the system to change in a particular way. The point here is that ideology upon which policy is justified is generally formulated as fixed principles and often unrelated to specific contextual variables. As a consequence, these underlying variables tend to be taken for granted once a policy decision is made. As a consequence, policy decisions may become divorced from actual problems and therefore can be neither verified nor refuted:

The ideas may therefore retain their social validity long after the policy effects of those ideas are dysfunctional (Cameron, 1978, p. 306).

In this approach, socio-economic and political factors become the main drivers of what information and knowledge is acceptable in the process (Stone et al., 2001). Ideologies serve to define the problems that are addressed and what policies and instruments are appropriate to resolve them.

Political effects

The ‘outcomes’ of public policy are service or program based and political. They are also political as governments or any interest group can contest ideas and can influence policy both for effective and ineffective or unproductive ends. Power and ideology as the continuing drivers of policy explain to some extent the role and influence of interest groups and agencies and the media influence on public policy (Kennamer, 1992; Fawcett et al., 2010). It is important to acknowledge the important role played by the media as a driver and a direct political player in public policy (Fawcett et al., 2010) through its issues management, its continual reporting of government activity with its political effects and as a filterer of public opinion, as arbitrary as ‘public opinion’ might be (Kennamer, 1992). The media is central to the public sphere and its role has also been described as the ‘primary connector between people and power’ (Fawcett et al., 2010, p. 59).

One of the most institutionalised influences on policy is the existence of political parties in liberal democracies. The key driver of political parties of course is to gain political office to enable the support and enactment of their ideologically driven policies. Their policies are developed through their membership in the first instance²³ but leads to a consideration of policy enactments that may occur at a moment in time, as well as how policies develop. For policy sustainability as described in Chapter 2, as a facilitator of sustainability, it is important to understand whether policies are or are not likely to become enduring elements of a policy regime or if they would have a much more fleeting impact on patterns of governance (Pierson, 2005, p.39). Sustainability necessitates that policy is developed as a general interest reform which has an enduring influence on patterns of governance through wide authorisation, participation and trust of the population (Patashnick, 2003).

Public policy is about decisions and processes in social life beyond the customary practice of everyday life towards a more deliberate choice of possible futures. It has as a key characteristic of social life that, both as individuals and as groups, there are opportunities sought and found to identify alternative courses of action and its consequences (Yeatman, 1998). Policy decisions and political imperatives shape actions and as Colebatch suggests, unless policy could shape actions there would be no point in making policy (2006).

Understanding the political system in which policy is made is therefore critical to understanding policy, typically involving a pattern of action over time with many different types of policy. This perspective requires consideration of different actors such

²³ Party membership varies in number depending on the socio-historical environment and can at certain periods such as the present in the Australian Labor Party, be considered unrepresentative in influencing public policy, with low numbers as a proportion of the size of the population.

as parliamentary committees, interest groups, non-government organisations, public servants and structures and institutions in public policy as a process. Public policy can only be understood therefore in the context of a political system in its environment and by exploring how the system maintains and changes itself over time (Pierson, 2005).

Conceptual interpretations of public policy

Drawing mainly on Colebatch's categorisation, this section builds on the above discussion and considers some specific approaches to policy practice as *purposive* activity for the proper functioning of society.

The classical view sees policy as a product or an object which can be described as an instrumental or rational model of making policy as problem-solving activity in the public interest. Colebatch describes this approach as an authoritative rational choice model (2006). One analysis of policy as authorised choice for example, explains this perspective as:

...leading to the achievement of known ends... grounded in our image of ourselves as rational goal oriented actors. We may not be confident that our own behaviour is the systematic pursuit of known goals but it is a perception that we are happy to project onto the government (Colebatch, 2006, p.41).

The function of the authorised choice therefore is more than just the ability to record an accurate policy process. It offers some reassurance that outcomes have been based on knowledge, options well researched and considered and are directed at the well-being of society. Policy is viewed as choices made by leaders in government for public policy and its implementation. The classical view situates policy making within institutions of a political system. That is, by government and its bureaucracy and potentially for example, of formal committees and lobby groups of which they are a part. Executive government decisions such as income tax reform in Westminster systems of government such as Australia have political, policy and administrative implications. If government

intervention is likely, then policy instruments such as the process of enactment of legislation are used as part of a policy process (Bridgman & Davis, 1998). As discussed in Chapter 4, the implications of policy making at these institutional levels impacts on the way that social problems are addressed (Jamrozik, 2001).

Colebatch describes two other different but possibly overlapping 'accounts' of policy. The second is policy as a process of interaction between groups and individuals of shared interests and participation and understandings about the way a problem or issue is seen and what is done about it. This is described as structured interaction (Colebatch, 2006). The third 'account' describes policy as a social construction where policy is viewed as a construction of meaning of particular situations and problems and how validating claims are made and instruments applied to finding solutions to the identified problem (Colebatch, 2006). This perspective views public policy as the construction of meaning, interpreting and acting around problems. It overlaps with a structured interaction approach as it also places importance on what instruments and institutions are relevant to policy and who becomes involved in the process (Colebatch, 2006). Discourses are developed through these interpretations and choice of policy instruments. As a social problem, child abuse and neglect for example, can be viewed as either a child protection policy issue or a health and community issue, or all of the above. The discourses direct the way that these problems are managed, who should be involved and what solutions are chosen. The 'battered baby syndrome' was offered as an example in Chapter 3 of a social problem of child abuse which was defined by doctors as essentially a medical problem. This 'construction' has affected the way that child protection policies have developed into medical and forensic fields of policy and practice. Similarly, drug abuse is defined as

essentially a criminal activity or a medical condition that leads to different policy solution pathways.

A systemic perspective of policy practice

The research questions ask whether the concept of sustainability is useful and valuable in policy processes in human services. The above discussion affirms the idea that changes can take place that respond to the nature of the problem as part of the policy process. This means that there is potential for policy practitioners to use an overarching concept such as sustainability to purposively change policy instruments and policy goals for improved societal outcomes (Eckersley, 2000). This brief description of some key approaches to policy widens the understanding of the process from the classical view of authorised choice to an acceptance that policy making cannot always be equated with causal, rational problem solving. Rather, as Fawcett and colleagues suggest, policy can be shaped by a complex merging of related issues and concerns and that the process often brings other problems into existence (2010).

The above discussion has demonstrated that policy cannot exist in a vacuum and requires an understanding of and weighting against other societal goals (Yencken, 2002). This means that policy processes need to be adaptive, integrated, explanatory and holistic if they are to meet the needs of communities and societies. Sustainability viewed as a major policy problem and a societal goal if it is to be useful and valuable, necessitates mechanisms beyond a top down approach of executive government, of an authoritative sequential activity and its institutions to influence the content and process of policy (Fawcett et al., 2010). A more participatory, inclusive approach to policy making is required (Eckersley, 2000). This type of policy change, which is assumed to be innovative to ensure that good decisions are made that fit the seriousness of the problem

in question, requires sustained critical reflection which most importantly will often lead to changes in higher order principles (Eckersley, 2000).

A systemic perspective is important for sustainability as it necessitates an understanding and a focus of the wider environment in which policy is made. Eckersley suggests that ideas and values should be treated as independent variables in policy practice (2000). While Eckersley's policy focus is essentially environmental policy, the intention that ideas and values should be treated as independent variables in policy practice is relevant to all policy contexts and to how sustainability is used in policy processes. This means that policy changes cannot be reduced simply to a power base, or an interest base, or to the dynamics of the economy as conditions which cannot be influenced (Yencken, 2002). A systemic, dynamic view of policy making that has a value base, challenges the assumptions made of liberal democratic governments. For example, the economic imperative which underpins public policy, and calls for another look at the structures of government and other institutions within which solutions to indeterminate and complex social and environmental problems are sought. To this end, Eckersley draws attention to the limits of democratic accountability and directs thinking about policy practice toward more sustainable democratic forms of politics (2000). This point is highly relevant to our discussion as current democratic institutional arrangements such as in Australia, United States and New Zealand, are unable to meet the challenge of sustainability and have been viewed as barriers to sustainability (Ife, 1995; Dovers, 2001; Curran, 2003). It is not my purpose however, in this context to explore what changes might take place in institutional arrangements for sustainability. It suffices to consider these views as a development in the context of policy practice processes that are directed, not to set up a dichotomy of instrumental, rational versus participatory approaches to policy practice, but to direct

attention to a more transformative process that sees policy instruments and institutions potentially widening and changing toward a more accessible and participatory policy practice.

Policy practice: a social work interpretation

In the previous section of this chapter, it was sufficient for this discussion to consider policy practice generically as the work and study of policy. Policy practice in the context of social work however, is a theoretical expansion of the policy process. In this context it is regarded as a professional activity that encompasses all layers of decision making as well as integrating policy activity at all levels of social organisation. Conceptually, this is important for sustainability as it directs policy practice to better connect the objectives of policy to the processes for realising the outcomes of policy. For example, the objective of a housing policy may be to provide housing for teenage mothers. Practitioners on the frontline however, may identify barriers to implementing the policy such as poor assessment processes, lack of infrastructure and that mothers are not accessing the service. Policy practice implies that the ‘problem’ is perceived as a policy problem rather than as an individual one and practitioners must see the influencing of policy for good outcomes as part of their practice. However, although I argue that policy practice as defined in the social work field potentially contributes to a society-driven model of the policy process, it is limited to a large extent by the professional effects of practice. That is, of practitioners situated in institutions of the state, maintaining the power and control within organisations and institutions.

The professional project in policy practice does not have as a *central* paradigm, a reform process to disperse power within civil society. It does however, come closer to a participatory, pluralistic model by taking account of the wider environment through a

systemic approach to public policy (Wyers, 1991; Jansson, 1999; Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009; Figuera-McDonough, 1993; Ife, 1997). This point will be taken up again in Chapter 7 when considering the use and value of a model of sustainability in the human services.

Consequences of seeing policy as ‘process’

The above discussion has presented a number of perspectives of what is meant by public policy and policy practice and conclusively it can be argued that their meaning is dependent on the conceptualisation of the policy process. A major consequence of seeing policy as a process for my research is its inclusiveness of the many ways that people as citizens or members of organisations, including government, interact with and affect policy. The setting of agendas, for example, and the prioritisation of issues become part of activities that become the necessary background to formal interaction with institutions. It allows for seeing policy both as a technical process while acknowledging that it is largely political. In other words, it directs policy as an essential function of society (Colebatch, 2006a).

Origins of policy practice as a process

Since its origins as an identified field of inquiry of policy analysis with Lasswell’s early work in the 1950s, policy practice has been understood both as a process, as previously discussed, and more simply as the policy decisions that are made by the government of the day (Yeatman, 1998). Although Lasswell saw policy as process, his basic perspective was policy as a product which emerges via a logical pathway from identification of an issue by government through a political process, through decision and finally implementation of a chosen action, and conceptualised through a model. Lasswell argued

that policy sciences could be considered as knowledge of the policy and relevance of knowledge in the process (1970).

Seeing policy as a process means that fragmented, disordered events that are the nature of political and administrative systems when dealing with public issues, can be conceptualised through models. The content of policy however, cannot be ignored. The policy sciences are grounded in specialised knowledge of the physical and social sciences (Lasswell, 1970). Lasswell observed that even the many views that existed at that time of what policy analysis covered converged toward a distinctive approach of contextuality that is, a consideration of each specific activity in the context of a cognitive map of the whole social process (1970). He saw the study of public policy as clarifying values and seeing problems and issues in context. The particular challenge identified by Lasswell was how to ensure that policy making could be informed by a new kind of interaction between knowledge and research and how it was used to develop policy. In other words, the political and democratic task was to improve the relationship between knowledge and power (Parsons, 2002). This point suggests that the substance of policy and process are interdependent and process is required for the analysis of policy content while often, content determines the process (Jenkins, 1990). As important as these observations were for future developments in policy studies, Lasswell's instrumental view set in a wider environment did not assume a causal link between good process and good outcomes (Colebatch, 2006). This point is further expanded later in this chapter in the context of the use policy models.

Conceptualising the policy process as democratic

Following in the footsteps of Lasswell's vision, Yeatman suggests that for policy as a process to be possible, the work of executive government and public administration has to

be conceived democratically, that is, an extended perspective of policy process beyond elected representatives of government (1998). What is understood as the top down, product oriented, paternalistic idea of policy process needs to change toward a process that is open to public accountability and participation including that of public servants and civil society. This democratising of the policy process has the effect of turning policy into practice through the expansion of participatory opportunities and mechanisms. This approach reflects social work policy practice in its focus on influencing policy at all levels through participatory processes to achieve individual and societal well-being. The corollary of these conditions makes policy visible, and links policy to social problem solving. For example, Lipsky identified one collective of policy actors; the street level bureaucrats, the service providers, who are part of the democratisation of the policy process, through their agency of discretion in interpreting and acting on prescribed policy (1980). The street level bureaucracy thesis comes from the literature on public policy implementation mentioned earlier, that recognises the strategic importance of the frontline. The idea focuses particularly on the way in which frontline workers, such as social workers, deal with formal organisational constraints in their work by exercising discretion in the implementation of top down policies (Hough, 2003). Lipsky was in fact *concerned* that workers, in going overboard in discretion to be able to buffer out the formal policies and at the same time to protect their clients, would *make* policy (1980).

The concept of policy practice in social work as explained earlier, is another example however, that considers that policy making *should* be in the realm of a policy community or policy practitioners situated anywhere in any system, including the front line of human services (Jansson, 1999; Ife, 1997). The point however, is that Lipsky's view of policy making highlights the inherent conflicts between the role of formal policies to standardise

outcomes and the realisation that workers require opportunities to use their judgments, that is, to use their discretion in order to sustain the quality and meaning in their work for the people they serve (Hough, 2003).

As agency becomes visible and diverse however, the environment is always contested. This normative view is essential to establishing the meaning of policy in this thesis as it assumes that the more participatory the process, the more effective and good the policy outcomes will be. The idea of policy as a *process* rather than just policy as decisions and as policy being made by government is crucial to seeing policy making as a broader, inclusive activity for problem solving in the human services.

Theoretical foundations of public policy

The previous chapter presented an overview of foundational theories of the social sciences that influence public policy as a practice domain. This discussion included organisational theory and systems theory and included some major discourses of risk, social capital and justice that have a particular influence on policy analysis and implementation. It is important to reiterate at this juncture however, that public policy generally and particularly in the context of public administration, has remained mostly a-theoretical. That is, its major influences have come from the instrumental rationalist view in spite of the reality in liberal democracies that public policy making is uncertain, complex and unpredictable. As a consequence there is a divide between knowledge and power (Rein & Schon, 1996; Parsons, 2002; Edwards, 2001). It is argued that Lasswell's theory of the democratisation of public policy to effect good outcomes has not been generally realised in liberal democracies (Parsons, 2002). This point will be further explored in Chapter 7.

The subject of much policy literature is the rationale that underpins the take-up of a particular issue or proposal as a policy priority. This area of inquiry seeks to explain the political effects, the fluidity and rapid change of policy making as politics, chance and opportunity (see for example, Kingdon, 1984). Why do shifts occur? Why do some ideas get further ahead than others in the policy process? This field is interested in the external forces on the policy content and process. Other researchers have explored the idea of ‘punctuations’ in the policy process associated with how policy gets transferred from one context to another and is explained through systems theory as an equilibrium model in which ‘a system rapidly shifts from one stable point to another’ (Peter, 2003, p. 488).

Advocacy coalitions

The policy advocacy coalition framework, mentioned briefly in the introduction to this chapter brings in the idea of causation and values in policy development through the formation of coalitions of interest (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). This perspective considers that policy change occurs because of the ability of these ideas to adapt to what works in a particular time and place through a variety of factors including wider socio-political change from policy learning and from political events (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999; Peter, 2003). This approach however, does not necessarily tell us about the quality of the policy but essentially about the type of policy, why and how it changes (Peter, 2003).

Advocacy coalitions are, according to Sabatier, groups of policy actors who share policy beliefs within a particular policy sector such as in health or education. Policy changes are seen to emerge from contested issues across these domains or policy subsystems. An important element in an advocacy coalition perspective is that it focuses on beliefs and

learning within and across the groups whilst much less emphasis is placed on policy actors' individual interests (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999; Stone et al., 2001).

The above examples of approaches to the policy process are essentially attempting to provide *explanatory* models, rather than descriptions alone of policy decision making processes and policy change. This is a broad and inclusive scope of inquiry which points to policy development as non-linear, complex and uncertain. As Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith have commented, there are no 'stages' models of the political process to provide a simple map because the pathways are multi-causal and multi-variant (1999). However, there is some consensus in the literature that the theoretical foundations of public policy studies should be about the political process and the study of formal structures and institutions such as electoral systems and the courts, and their effects on social activity and change (Peter, 2003; Clemens & Cook, 1999). Institutions and their embedded practices in organisations remain critical to policy processes and outcomes, however, it is argued that theories such as institutionalism (effectively how to make institutions more efficient effective and essentially stronger in society) are foundational, yet do not explain policy changes²⁴ and differing consequences for stakeholders. In this context policy change has been studied through the *adaptive capacities* of societal institutions (Eckersley, 2000). Similarly, the adaptation of policy actors in institutions and more broadly in society has been the focus of exploring policy change (Lipsky, 1980).

Conceptual expansion of policy as process

The above general overview of public policy and the policy environment and some theoretical foundations leads to a further expansion of the nature of the policy process to

²⁴ Policy change is quite arbitrary in time and place however there is some agreement that it usually involves normally occurring change over a decade or more and viewed as a function of sub-systems which are seen as units of analysis for understanding policy change (Shlager & Blomquist, 1996).

build a foundation of important elements and processes for the development of a model of sustainability. An important point from the above discussion on policy process which can influence policies and solutions chosen is the widening of the policy environment beyond an analysis of the power and decision making authority and activity of the state toward actions from a wider field of power and influence (Foucault, 1991). This is an important understanding for developing a model of sustainability for use in policy, reform and practice. Participatory processes that connect public administrative functions of the bureaucracy and government with the wider society build trust and can transform societal institutions, deemed necessary for sustainability. However, this Foucaultian concept of ‘governmentality’ is not to exclude the state as a major player but to ‘reposition how we think about power and authority in late modern societies’ (Marston & McDonald, 2007).

This is:

The proliferation of non-profit and for profit organisations involved in the business of welfare (which) have both undergone significant shifts... the privatisation of social risks... the remaking of... citizens into individualised consumers and customers are all significant transformations... These changes suggest the need for a wider research gaze that de-centres the national welfare state and includes a focus on the multitude of micro spaces and places where social policies both constitute and engage human subjects in the processes of welfare restructuring (Marston & McDonald, 2007, p. 3).

These changes are important to understand current public administration, the context and potential for making changes to how policy is enacted and the scope and nature of the stakeholders. An overview of some key changes in public administration is presented below in order to further develop a conceptual framework for building a model of sustainability.

The approach to public administration taken in this thesis is to view it as ‘an explication of the collective interest’. This approach views public administration as gaining its legitimacy from its role in pursuing societal collective interests through the interpretation

of government policies and the delivery of services and programs (Peters & Pierre, 2003, p. 10). The new public management in the 1970s and 1980s challenged the Westminster model where policy making was in the hands of government ministers with public servants as their 'tools'. It argued that public servants were policy actors, not tools of ministers, as policy and the administration of policy could not be separated (Fawcett et al., 2010). The new public administration has had far-reaching implications for policy practice which led to changes in bureaucracy that better reflected the people it served, that is, a more diverse, representative community. It increased de-centralisation of decision making within government agencies by introducing policy units within departments. It also led to increased opportunities for professional and community participation in bureaucratic policy processes (Fawcett et al., 2010, p. 31).

A decade later, the emergence of the new public management as a new feature of public administration in many liberal democracies however, had the effect of *reducing* the participatory potential for policy making as it pushed for a rationalisation of all public services through a business based culture of 'commodification' (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Incentive structures into public administration through 'contracting out' and quasi-markets were also introduced (Rhodes, 2000). That is, outputs such as programs were regarded as products which were measurable, accountable and based on the evidence. As I indicated in Chapter 1, the domination of this culture of measurable outputs among other things, presented an impetus for this research as it created an ethical dilemma in my position as a member of the executive and as a manager of human services in a public sector department.

It is not necessary in this context to critique the ‘new public management’. However, it is sufficient to acknowledge that it overwhelmingly changed the face of policy practice during the past twenty years in liberal democracies. Indeed it has had the deliberate effect of separating policy from practice as it relied on an overwhelmingly economic agenda for setting policy priorities (Dalton et al., 1996).

Overlapping with the new public management paradigm, the idea of ‘community’ as also discussed in Chapter 3, has emerged as an important principle of good governance. The idea of ‘community’ has gained prominence over the past two decades to some extent, through a globalisation of national concerns from key institutions such as the United Nations, as an overarching strategy to address the problems of the 21st Century (Fawcett et al., 2010). Essentially, it is the idea of participation in policy making by the re-direction of attention to the diversity of interests and where governance is viewed as a network of overlapping interests (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). This leads to the idea of governance as a more complex process of decision making and implementation that involves the mobilisation of authority dispersed in the wider public arena through a range of often intersecting organisations and institutions (Colebatch, 2006a).

What is governance?

One the key dimensions for social change is the manner in which governments and society arrange their administrative and decision making institutions and processes. In traditional forms of policy research, the state and its instrumentalities are ‘normatively marked out as an arena that is distinct from civil society and the market’ (Marston & McDonald, 2007, p. 3). Moreover, the state is typically viewed as an agent of democratic governance and policy making reliant on rational processes of problem solving (Marston & McDonald, 2007). In other accounts the state is analysed in terms of working either for

or against the interests of collective well-being, depending on the time period being examined and the specific policies under analysis. In these types of analyses, the state is positioned as an entity which invites a whole series of dichotomies: of good and bad government; of the enabling or disabling state, for example (Marston & McDonald, 2007).

The emergence of governance for liberal democracies directs attention beyond the state to include institutional mechanisms that are potentially accessible for wider participation beyond the state's authoritative environment. 'Governance' is a label used widely to highlight the changing nature of how public policy is made in recent times. It raises awareness and highlights the importance of widening the variety of actors and sites of policy making (Kennett, 2008). Governance is therefore important as a dimension of sustainability as previously mentioned in Chapter 2, and as a focus of attention for understanding the usefulness and value of the concept in policy development. As will be seen later in this thesis in Chapter 6, participation is an important element of sustainability. Some examples of these mechanisms include: federations and coalitions, networks, partnerships agreements, government policy units, government advisory and consultative mechanisms, consumer councils, think tanks, research institutes and public inquiries. Governance is concerned with these arrangements and their activities and more specifically with the relationships between the public and private spheres and the community (Demirag, 2005). Although governance reflects shifts in public policy processes towards more participatory, bottom up, community involvement, it is noteworthy that the idea and use of 'community' and 'participation' in this manner is contested. It is argued that the use of 'community' in the context of governance is developed as a form and process of extending the state's management of risk and another

form of control (Marston & McDonald, 2006). This point has been discussed earlier in this thesis in the context of key concepts of ‘community’ and ‘risk’ in Chapter 3.

Empowerment and participation

The contested environment that is created through changed governing arrangements in societies necessitates an understanding of how power is dispersed and used for increased and effective broader inclusion and participation of people to influence public policy. As discussed in Chapter 2, a fundamental requirement of sustainability is local governance and this point is relevant to how local mechanisms are set up to skill people in the community to utilise mechanisms for participation (Lyons et al., 2001). This point resonates with the idea of social development in contrast to traditional welfare mechanisms in the New Zealand example, which was discussed in Chapter 3. New systems of governance in many Western states are centred in smaller entrepreneurial units ‘acting within some de-bureaucratised whole’ (Considine, 2002) with potentially greater capacity to align public policy to local needs. This area of study is particularly fruitful for sustainable development and community development projects where deployment of development professionals that would work on mechanisms of participation, is a key factor in assisting local action (Lyons et al., 2001). Larger scale policies need to be informed by local inside knowledge ‘implying in turn, a need for an iterative process of participatory policy formation (Lyons et al., 2001, p. 1241). A model of sustainability therefore to be useful in policy development in human services, would need to be meaningful to a broad scope of societal actors at all levels of social organisation.

The empowerment of people is implicit in any account of governance:

...the idea that consumers will add their weight to efforts to regulate new multi agent systems. In other words these arrangements are expected to grant consumer sovereignty to clients of public programmes, whether these are quasi-markets, networks or some combination of both (Considine, 2002, p. 182).

Empowerment of people is both an outcome of participation and a condition for participation. As Considine states:

Participation is itself defined and determined by policy, by the history of policy and by the climate of expectations about policy (2002, p. 186).

Community participation as a key driver of public policy is further discussed in Chapter 7 in the context of participatory democracy as a key construct of sustainability.

Community governance

As established earlier in this discussion, policy making environments have extended beyond the traditional liberal democratic view of elected governments as primarily responsible for governing (Adams & Hess, 2001). This has led to more emphasis placed on community governance, that is, ‘a potential for increased democracy and civic engagement in matters of policy and social development’ (Fawcett et al., 2010, p. 29). Community governance denotes a qualitative shift away from an emphasis of either the state or the market as the most appropriate provider of social provisions (Fawcett et al., 2010).

The emergence of community as a policy concept raises questions about the policy instruments used in public policy (Adams & Hess, 2001). This point leads to the need to develop specific mechanisms, such as social indicators, that ‘measure’ better connections between policy goals and outcomes through a community focus. It also leads to shifts of the relations between institutions and policy change mechanisms based on the respective dominant paradigms of state democracy, market capitalism and community.

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the above discussion contributes to answering the central research question of this thesis. It aimed to provide a sound

understanding of policy as process, the major forces which influence public policy and solutions to social problems. This understanding is a pre-condition for the development of a policy model of sustainability as it identifies some generic conditions and processes that are used to develop an effective model. This was necessary before presenting a specific analysis of some examples of current policy models.

Policy models

The varying approaches to policy practice as discussed in the chapter, assume that seeing policy as process is a necessary but not sufficient condition for good policy outcomes (Lasswell, 1970; Bridgman & Davis, 1998). That is, as Keating summarised:

A good policy process is the vital underpinning of good policy development. Of course, good process does not necessarily guarantee a good policy outcome, but the risks of bad process leading to a bad outcome are very much higher (Keating, 1996 cited in Bridgman & Davis, 1998, p. 26).

This assumption is supported by policy practitioners who have adopted a rational, instrumental approach for the analysis of their own policy practice and who consider experientially that sound conceptualisation and analysis of the policy problem is correlated highly with good policy (see for example, Edwards, 2001).

As this thesis is concerned with the potential usefulness and value of conceptual models, a discussion of examples of policy models and their strengths and limitations is now presented. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this is necessary to set a baseline for the development of a model of sustainability for use in policy practice.

Policy models have been described as synthetic accounts of the policy process as they conceptualise and bring together the relationship between institutions, structures, social change processes, knowledge and ideas (Peter, 2003). The use of models in policy

practice assumes they are theoretical constructions and therefore do not necessarily reflect practice. They are developed to potentially inform policy if they are built on sound descriptive and explanatory theories which can be modified and developed through experiential learning. Colebatch points out:

The model shapes the way that policy is discussed: it frames the discourse about policy... They express a particular way of framing social practice so that it may be talked about in terms of instrumental rationality (2005, p. 15).

Any model implies a theoretical framework and a set of categories and assumptions which direct the user to ask certain questions about the activities surrounding policy practice. It is argued that any model must be for the purpose of simplifying a usually complex and uncertain phenomenon. No policy model can claim universal application since every policy process is grounded in particular government institutions. However, the point is not the detail but the structure of the questioning:

...a model enables people to make sense of complex patterns of action giving prominence to some things and obscuring others, asking some questions not asking others (Colebatch, 2005, p. 45).

The question therefore, is not whether a model of the policy process is an accurate representation of it, but in what way it illuminates the process (Colebatch, 2006, p. 39).

The rational model

This model is variously called linear, rational choice, instrumental or mainstream model of policy practice. It outlines policy making as a problem solving process which is rational, balanced, objective and analytical (Sutton, 1999). It begins with decisions that are made in a series of sequential stages with the identification of a problem and ending with a set of actions to solve it or to manage it. Generally the levels where policy decisions are made in this context include strategic or government policy, departmental administrative, operational policy and service or program policy. A typical linear model involves the recognition and the framing of the problem that the policy is addressing, its

analysis for example, the potential causes of the problem, its stakeholders and its action; that is, its implementation, evaluation and monitoring (Peter, 2003).

As mentioned previously in this chapter, the rational model, essentially a top down approach to policy, denotes policy as logical and an ordered sequence of policy making phases and assumes an element of security and certainty in the political system and in society. It is considered to be comprehensive in its gathering of data and information to analyse possible options for problem solving and reliant on expert participation (Stone et al., 2001). A critique of this model is that in reality, policy makers in this context often respond to more immediate public demands rather than seeing the potential for longer term societal gains (Stone et al., 2001).

The 'muddling through' model: incrementalism

This approach has its origins in the writings of Simon who described the ideal of rational decision making described as 'bounded rationality', realising that it was impossible to know all the possible options and consequences of policy activity (1955; 1982). In other words, people choose *satisfactory* options rather than optimum solutions (Hill & Ham, 1997). This approach focuses on the boundary between the rational and the non-rational aspects of social activity. A corollary of this approach suggests that decision makers accept the limits of their situation (and knowledge) and choose compromise policies which satisfy rather than maximise organisational or social goals and which are acceptable in the face of competing priorities and demands (Stone et al., 2001).

Lindblom is the main, earlier proponent of this model and one of the critics of a rational model for not leading to an understanding of the reality of the policy process (1979). His main argument was that new policies tend to be only marginally different from previous

ones. The idea is that policy makers do not usually go for options that involve radical change as policy always operates in a political context. What is feasible politically is only incrementally different and not radically different from what already exists. Therefore policy change is incremental and policies are modified gradually (Sutton, 1999). In this pragmatic approach to policy making, innovation and change are sidelined as potentially inefficient and unnecessary to make and implement policy, and tends to rely on crisis driven change rather than informed evidence based knowledge for continuing improvements (Parsons, 2002). This has been described as the ‘muddling through’ approach to the policy process (Kingdon, 1984).

Schon’s theories of societal change and the development of good public policy reflect the complexity of finding solutions to social problems. Schon describes policy development as messy and unpredictable. In a much quoted piece Schon describes the ‘swampy lowland’ of practice where the practitioner faces messy problems incapable of technical solutions:

The difficulty is that the problems of the high ground however great their technical interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or to the large society, while in the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern... There are those who choose the swampy lowland. They deliberately involve themselves in messy but crucially important problems and, when asked to describe their methods of inquiry, they speak of experience, trial and error intuition and muddling through (Schon, 1983, p. 42).

Policy streams model

This model focuses on policy change and on the time dimension of policy, and asks why *now*? It explores how policy actors capture the opportunities for policy change and reform (Kingdon, 1984). Kingdon found that policy actors often do not know where policies come from and ‘particularly when they are asked to explain how it was that a proposal emerged rather than another’ (Kingdon cited in Peter, 2003, p. 487). Kingdon

presents an analytical framework for determining what policy options are politically feasible at any given time as well as identifying changes in circumstances that may likely enable the adoption of other options (1984). This paradigm uses qualitative and interpretive traditions of policy analysis (see for example, Yanow, 2000) to explore how ideas are formulated and implemented. This approach examines *conditions* under which particular change processes occur and is highly relevant to any study of policy process in the human services (Humphreys et al., 2010). This approach is therefore relevant to this thesis in considering a model of sustainability in policy processes in the human services, as it focuses attention on the *conditions* under which policies work rather than ‘what works’. As Humphreys and colleagues have stated, ‘potentially it is the principles rather than programs that may be generalisable or transferable between contexts, as the context itself will always be unique’ (2010, p. 148).

Essentially this approach describes policy as the outcome of the interaction of the identified problem which is the agenda setting process, the development of options and the gathering of consensus among policy makers during any point in time. In this model for example, institutional factors contributing to adoption of the policy can be examined as well as the stability of a policy post adoption and implementation (Cherry & Bauer, 2004).

Implicit in a systems approach is a causal model of the policy process, a logic model that connects inputs, processes and outputs, for example, of programs, services and outcomes. That is, that links the phases of the problem solving approach with distinct stages of specialised activities (Fawcett et al., 2010). One example of the policy cycle approach, similar to the linear model stages, identifies five stages which include agenda setting,

policy formulation, decision making, implementation and evaluation (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995). Many iterations of policy cycles such as this one, are to be found in the literature (see also Figuera-McDonough, 1993; Jansson, 1999; Bridgman & Davis, 1998; Edwards, 2001). These writers share the belief that it is useful to separate policy activities and that sequenced approaches can help policy makers work out where they are up to and what to do next (Fawcett et al., 2010).

Linear models and cycles are ubiquitous in academic writing, management and public administration fields and increasingly in tertiary curricula. They are rarely discussed however, without a qualifying critique of their role in policy practice. A major critique of instrumental cycles is that they do not reflect the reality of what policy practitioners' account as their experiences in the activities of policy. Instead, they see policy processes as complex and chaotic (Kingdon, 1984; Everett, 2003).

Strengths and limitations of policy models

Generally, critiques of policy models are equated with critiques of top down authorised choice approaches. One limitation of top down approaches to policy practice is that they start from the perspective of a central decision making authority and as a consequence tend to neglect other actors. This can lead to a negative view of policy communities or actors as impediments rather than as stakeholders in decision making (Sabatier, 1986).

As Sabatier has remarked:

...this in turn leads them to neglect strategic initiatives coming from the private sector, from street level bureaucrats or local implementing officials, and from other policy subsystems (1986, p. 30).

Of course, this characteristic of a top down model illustrates merely a potential limitation of the model, as a focus on causal, hierarchical systems of policy do not in themselves exclude the understanding of a wider environment of participation and the dispersal of

power. The main limitation however, that is often indicated in the literature, is that top down models are difficult to use, as the reality of political and policy environments, discussed earlier in this chapter, are pluralist with a multitude of governmental directives and actors and not necessarily any being pre-eminent (Sabatier, 1986).

More recent critiques of the top down models emphasise the potential neglect of the interactions between policy actors and the socially constructed nature of policy (Howard, 2005). However, the policy cycle is considered as a descriptive tool which *can* take account of the experiences and values of policy actors if it is viewed as descriptive and not normative in its use (Howard, 2005). On the other hand, the main criticism according to Colebatch is that this type of policy cycle model supports and reflects a centralisation of power agenda of imposing standardised policy processes (Colebatch, 2006). Advocates of the rational policy cycle approach most recently in Australia include Edwards, and Bridgman and Davis, who consider that the rational policy cycle model is a worthwhile and useful heuristic tool for policy practice (2001; 1998). This staged approach to policy practice makes sense if it is understood in the context of a bureaucratic agenda that reflects the rise of ministerial departments and their strong influence on policy making (Colebatch, 2005). At least, as Colebatch suggests, policy cycles are ways for practitioners to account for and to formally present their work within a bureaucratic context (2005).

It is argued that rational planning models give some heuristic order to highly complex bureaucratic and political processes. They are useful in identifying stages such as problem identification, development of options and setting objectives as long as it is understood that these stages and activities are not linear (Dalton et al., 1996). In effect,

policy analysis is instrumental as it examines the relationship between objectives, interventions and the effects of policies. It is also instrumental insofar as it influences the construction of policies through a systematic reflection of the causal pathways of policy.

However, as Elmore eloquently described it, policy analysis as an instrumental activity:

...brackets most of the deeper philosophical issues behind public policies, holds constant the question of whether policymakers would behave differently if the political system were designed on different principles, operationalises ideological conflicts in terms of competing sets of objectives... much of the richness of public policy-philosophical, historical, ethical is lost in this conversion to instrumentalism. But some things are also gained notably a clearer understanding of better or worse ways to get things done within a given set of preferences (1987, p. 174).

Another view of top down instrumental models focuses on the difficulties of their use in situations where there is no dominant policy directive or statute or agency. In reality, this is the situation in many human services contexts, where there are many government policies and actors involved without clarity of who has pre-eminence in the situation (Sabatier, 1986). Another key criticism relates to Lipsky's thesis that top down models are more likely to underestimate or ignore the 'coping mechanisms' or strategies used by front liners and clients to interpret central policy and or divert it to other purposes such as the protection of their clients (1980).

An alternative to an instrumental rationalist cyclical policy model encapsulated in Elmore's quote above, seeks policy practice that contains a sound theoretical foundation in order to better understand the relationship between a heuristic approach to policy such as in policy cycles, experiential knowledge and policy research (Colebatch 2006).

Chapter summary

This chapter has described policy processes as prescriptive, problem oriented, rational and adaptive, reflective and transformative. I argue that an understanding of policy

processes is fundamental to sustainability, as sustainability is focused on the construction of change processes which requires attention to all levels of social organisation and 'stages' in the policy process (Jamrozik, 2001).

Researchers in public policy want to understand why public decisions and their outcomes change or stay stable or vary in different environments and differ in their consequences for people who are affected by them. They also want to know about the relationship between the nature of the policy input and what outcomes are achieved, that is, the nature of the policy output and its impacts on populations (Peter, 2003). This is at the core of public policy theorising to be able to understand how good decisions are made over time through good processes in policy making. Additionally however, there is a place for descriptive but not prescriptive heuristic models to enhance policy processes for good policy outcomes. In all public policy areas, it assumes that good policy connects policy objectives and decisions to the desired outcomes. More specifically, good policy can be viewed as policy that legitimises and mobilises political support as a process of participation as value based and enduring (Mosse, 2004). That is, good policy meets its intended objectives through the behaviour and motivations of the policy actors and the institutions that are involved. This point is critical to this thesis as policy practice needs to draw on theories of the social sciences to improve policy processes and outcomes to connect knowledge, values and action.

The current policy models as described in this chapter, although useful in some contexts generally represent bureaucratic processes which do not provide a value base for action at all levels of social organisation. This argument points to a preference for a system based model of policy practice that incorporates the need to transform and strengthen social

institutions through shared understandings of problems and shared identities as the foundations for transformative societal change. Policy practice therefore becomes an evolving dynamic through interactions across communities of interest over time. This potentially leads to increased participation and co-operation and more enduring institutional change.

The specific themes and key concepts identified so far from the literature on sustainability in Chapter 2, social problems in Chapter 3 and public policy processes in this chapter, provided the context from which the research data sample was chosen for this thesis. This sample comprises sixty-five sustainability studies in areas related to human services. The research methodology and the methods used for the identification of the research data sample and its analysis are covered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: THE RESEARCH APPROACH

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, the general context and purpose of my research on sustainability, is social and emancipatory. The aim of this chapter is to situate the study of sustainability in an epistemology and methodology that reflects and supports this context and purpose. The epistemology and methodology is described and an overview and rationale of the research approach is presented. A description of research methods used to achieve the research objectives is also offered.

The reflexive and emancipatory researcher

Before exploring the research approach and the epistemological position for this research, it is necessary to explain the purpose and usefulness of taking a reflexive and emancipatory position. Reflexivity suggests that a ‘meaningful interaction is achieved between the philosophical, the theoretical ideas and the data’ (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 10). Reflexivity also means that the researcher’s role is strongly present as an interpreter in terms of the meanings that people (and texts) have brought to the concept of sustainability. Reflexivity also assumes that research on sustainability is theory dependent and contingent of my own theoretical perspectives, world views and experiences (Lewins, 1992, p.9). In other words meanings are co-constructed between the researcher and the subject studied, whether it is a participant or a text (Hayes & Oppenheim, 1997; Prior, 1997). As stated in Chapter 1 of this thesis, my experiences in executive positions in public sector organisations in Australia during a time in the 1990s and early 2000s of change towards a market orientation for human services, meant that many of the organisational initiatives in which I was involved were aimed at the development of an organisation as a high functioning, innovative and productive entity.

A decade later, the idea still concerns me that there was a deliberate sequestration of professional and management identities and values. In other words, there was a belief that social work principles and values conflicted with management principles. As a social work policy practitioner in positions of authority over many decades, I argue that social work as a profession has failed to come to terms with this dilemma. It presents a barrier to the development of public policy and good decision making as it limits the organisation's capacity to utilise *all* of its resources. I was drawn to explore concepts that could illuminate some strategies for bridging the gaps and limitations of the fragmentation of knowledge and experience. As I mentioned in the last chapter, it is not my intention to critique managerialism *per se*, however as a reflective researcher it is necessary to establish the perspectives and experiences that I bring to this project.

In their work on reflexive methodology, Alvesson and Skoldberg call for an awareness among researchers of a broad range of insights of interpretive acts into 'the political, ideological and ethical issues of the social sciences and into their own construction of the 'data' (2009, p. vii). They state that as a reflexive researcher, the reflection is a question of recognising the ambivalent relationship between what the researcher writes, that is, the authorship and the realities studied (that is, interpreting one's own interpretations) (2009). Therefore, it is necessary to explain the reasons behind the choice of methodology and methods. As stated in Chapter 1, the goal of the research is emancipatory as it purposively aims to ameliorate social problems, among other interventions, through the improvement of societal institutions. Therefore, the focus of the research must also include an exploration of public policy processes that attempt to solve societal problems.

Public policy activity is dependent in its processes and content on the persons who hold various roles and ideas about social problems and what would be their solutions. Therefore, as Guba suggests, no one explanation or ‘truth’ as to the causes or what influences social problems or their relationships to other social phenomena is possible (1990). It is for this reason that for my research, I require a theoretical perspective and a methodology that allows for a qualitative approach to the analysis and interpretation of data. In summary, this places the research in an epistemology that is constructivist, informed by a theoretical framework that is interpretivist and critical in its inquiry. As a qualitative study, this thesis examines through a reflexive, interpretive methodology, the general assumptions and interpretations that have been made of sustainability and how it has been developed and used as a concept in a variety of domains in human services and generally also in the natural sciences. This was the content of Chapter 2 which presented the knowledge on sustainability required to build a new model of sustainability.

The qualitative nature of the study presupposes that sustainability is political and ideological in nature and therefore its exploration would either, support, reproduce or challenge existing social conditions (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). As will be seen, the usefulness of the concept of sustainability is mainly about *challenging* existing social conditions. This necessitates a critical approach to any interpretations made of the nature of the concept and its usefulness. It is argued that challenging the social conditions for the betterment of society is effectively an emancipatory role that is inherent in a critical inquiry.

The research approach

A critical approach makes the research more reflexive through an interpretation of the data while at the same time it places importance on the data. In this case, it is the

research sample that is the main data source for this thesis (Thomas & Harden, 2007). A critical approach is also taken to meet the research objectives for the amelioration of society's problems. If this is to be achieved, the researcher needs to be skeptical towards societal processes and institutions and to have a view of societal processes that ties ideas and language to social and historical conditions (Guba, 1990).

The rationale for choosing an interpretivist, critical inquiry paradigm as a way of knowing, is that knowledge about sustainability and its associated problems is contextual and is socially constructed. Therefore, an important area of concern for this research is the development and 'behaviour' of social institutions, understood through language and ideologies (Hodge, 1997). Taking the approach that sustainability is a problem that is socially based and constructed means that sustainability lends itself to a conceptual analysis. A conceptual analysis provides meaning and understanding that will inform how and why the concept of sustainability has developed and how it is currently used for addressing and alleviating social problems.

I have made certain assumptions that further reflect the chosen research approach. Firstly, it is assumed that the use of systematic techniques to interact with the data will more closely ensure trustworthiness and reliability of the interpretations that are made (Torraco, 2002). This in effect means that the research approach is one that requires a general awareness and 'explicit treatment' of the data. The approach requires an explicit rationale for the choice of data and an explanation of how the data are interpreted. This is explained later in this chapter (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). This 'explicit treatment' of the data is achieved through 'grounded' methods and the interpretation is informed by critical theory that is discussed further in this chapter. The grounded theory methods are

important in recognising the explicitness of the data used and will also be taken up later in this chapter.

The use of research studies as textual data

The data for this research are textual comprising sixty-five research studies on sustainability. These research studies are treated as objects of inquiry and meaningful action (Prior, 1997). The methodology does not aim to search for ‘truth’ however, but for relevant constructed meanings in text. This is achieved by drawing from evolving themes and concepts of sustainability and related fields of inquiry that are specific to a particular socio-cultural and temporal location. This research is situated in a Western tradition in countries that have a democratic system of governance within the past four decades. This time period mainly reflects the beginnings of ‘sustainability’ as a focus for research and practice that was discussed in Chapter 2. The study uses thematic synthesis to be able to coherently analyse and identify embedded knowledge in the data source. This analysis is interactive, that is, there is an iterative process of looking for elements that are indicators of meaning and asking questions of text throughout the analytical process. I am mindful of personal and subjective responses to the text and content. Contradictory themes are discussed for example, in the analysis in Chapter 6 by drawing out the socio-cultural differences of the policy actors and other stakeholders involved at all levels of social organisation. Identifying the dominant themes in the macro discourse of sustainability allows a consideration of the political, professional, social norms. Furthermore, it allows consideration of specific texts that are inherent in the development of the concept such as the Brundtland Report (1987) as discussed in Chapter 2, and other relevant policies and their effects.

In summary, the research problem, the examination of the use and value of a concept of sustainability in human services, requires an awareness that the interpretation of data will be influenced by my own subjective understandings and on the theoretical perspectives, such as critical inquiry, that underpin the methodology. Furthermore, interpretation, as a research activity, is informed by critical theory. One of the key elements of critical theory is the importance of context and in understanding the historical and political nature of social problems such as chronic illness, homelessness, child abuse or the impact of disability. The above discussion has argued that the aim of ‘understanding’ the concept of sustainability and synthesising and categorising knowledge about sustainability contained in text, language and ideologies situates the research in a reflexive, emancipatory and constructionist epistemology. To further explain the research approach however, it is now necessary to outline the epistemological position for this study as it directly influences the chosen methodology - the theory of knowledge that underpins the key theoretical perspectives that informs the research.

Constructionism: The epistemological position for this research

The epistemological position explains the way of understanding the world: ‘how we know what we know and the nature of that knowledge’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). The epistemological position of this research is constructionism which directly influences the methodology that in turn underpins the choice of methods for the study. An assumption that underpins a qualitative methodology is that all meaningful activity is constructed between ‘human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). As mentioned earlier, this position assumes that there is no ‘truth’ that is intrinsic to the concept of sustainability but that there are interpretations that can be made to add meaning to it and to provide the context for solving the identified problems. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, when exploring the

concept of sustainability and its varied meanings, a constructivist approach meant that there were many possible explanations of sustainability (Guba, 1990).

It also follows that if many constructions are possible, therefore facts cannot be value free. Taking a constructivist approach to this research is therefore to assume that the methodology used is value based and context dependent (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). For example, a constructivist methodology aims to identify and make transparent the discursive aspects of societal injustices and inequalities (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Constructivism therefore assumes that no objectivity is possible and as a consequence the results of this research are shaped by the interaction of the researcher and the subject of the research (Guba, 1990). With the position taken that there is no dichotomy between the researcher and the subject it:

...renders the distinction between ontology²⁵ and epistemology obsolete; what can be known and the individual who comes to know it are fused into a coherent whole... this position depicts knowledge as human construction never certifiable as ultimately true but problematic and ever changing (Guba, 1990, p 26).

Social constructionism, according to Berger and Luckman, calls into question the existence of rationality and objective knowledge but instead views knowledge as emerging from processes more related to ideology, interests and power (1999). This definitional point on social constructionism is particularly relevant to sustainability that is viewed as a social construct with inherent conceptualisations as discussed in Chapter 2, which are transmitted not only between individuals in society at a certain time but also over time between generations (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). This theory of intersubjectivity, that is, of the world that is shared socially with others, explains that meanings can become more permanent and institutionalised that go beyond present social encounters. Through roles and language it is assumed that it is possible to mediate the

²⁵ That is, the theory of reality.

face to face encounters between the individual levels of society and the institutional levels. The 'social' therefore in constructionism assumes that concepts develop from a questioning of societal conditions at an individual level that would consider an alternative that is, that what may appear self-evident is not in fact inevitable (Berger & Luckman, 1999). These processes explain how routines and patterns of behaviour are established at all levels of social organisation and for the transmission of intergenerational knowledge.

The research data

Studies in my research data sample share a common and combined interest in sustainability for its potential in solving social problems. I argue that the research data sample for this thesis (see Appendix A), reflects social realities through texts that are reflexive interpretations of other empirical interests. This approach is what Alvesson and Skoldberg call a 'reflexive empirical research' (2009, p.4). Interpretation therefore is at the forefront of this approach. In summary, this situates the study of sustainability and the research question within a qualitative methodology that is well suited to a potential transformative agenda for societies through sustainability.

In the discussion that follows the categories of the research logic are explained in the context of the usefulness of sustainability in policy processes and its emancipatory purpose. Critical theory and interpretive approaches are discussed whilst other relevant theories that inform the research such as systems theory and ecological theory are explored in Chapter 4 and in Chapter 7, in the analysis of the research data.

Theoretical perspectives: critical theory

Critical inquiry

Theories that inform how knowledge is developed and interpreted are particularly relevant to this research. There are a number of broad theoretical perspectives that arise from a social constructivist epistemology. Firstly, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, this research is approached from the perspective of critical inquiry. Critical theory or inquiry is based on ideologically oriented inquiry, with its Marxist roots but spanning ‘a far greater field and with a common core that rejects value free inquiry’ (Guba, 1990, p. 23). This tradition has been part of a western epistemological tradition since the middle of the 19th Century and has focused on the problems that have social, political, cultural and economic bases (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997).

The term ‘critical’ in this sense considers conditions of social regulation, unequal distribution of resources and power. It is most developed in the Marxist concern with the alienation produced with the division of labour in capitalism. Weber however focused on problems of rationalisation and bureaucratisation and furthermore Durkheim’s interpretation was mainly on the breakdown of the collective organisation of culture (cited in Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). More recent social criticism has sought to respond to these earlier theorists. The Frankfurt School’s critical theory (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997) and feminist theories are examples of contemporary views that vie for the authority to speak for a critical science (Guba, 1990, p. 48).

In summary, critical inquiry is a critique of the current position of society and is inclusive of approaches and strategies that aim for social change through emancipatory values such as democracy, freedom, human rights and social justice. This approach assumes that data

cannot be neutral and the research process attempts to explain and interpret data as part of social, political and ideological conditions (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). What is relevant to this thesis and why this theoretical perspective has been taken is that social problems, and particularly intractable social problems, cannot be treated as discrete phenomena which can be tackled with instrumentality alone, that is, through the use of technology for example. As the concept of sustainability is socially constructed and therefore possesses no one inherent truth, it is therefore open to a discursive analysis as opposed to a situational analysis alone (Fergus & Rowney, 2005).

Interpretivist inquiry

The complexity and uncertainty of many social problems require a critical interpretation of empirical data with the purpose of ‘stimulating self-reflection and overcoming the blockages of established institutions and modes of thought’ data (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 128). That is, ‘reflexive research has to consider the ideological-political dimension’, so as to avoid the ‘uncritical reproduction of dominant ideas and institutions’ (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 131).

The interpretivist methods are essentially about constructing understandings of text with the potential to go deeper or further than the author of the text’s own understanding, as importantly, social problems are inextricably linked to texts (Crotty, 1998; Prior, 1997). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the methodological implications in taking an interpretivist position are an acceptance that self-reflection is a necessary part of finding meaning in empirical material (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 5). An interpretive methodology assumes that ‘every interpretation must be built on claims of validity’ (Harbour, 2006, p. 3). If a new interpretation appears to better explain a given phenomenon that new interpretation will replace the old one (Harbour, 2006). In

hermeneutic theory, this is a continuous process as there are no criteria for the identification of the ‘ultimate interpretation’ in social research (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 368). Harbour suggests that when examining texts, our analysis occurs within a hermeneutic circle, where, as we question and challenge texts’ meanings, ‘we construct an interpretation’ (2006, p. 3). It is argued that the general hermeneutic principles just mentioned are useful as they illuminate a methodology that enables the application of conceptual frameworks to analyse literature and texts that are socially constructed. Research that is based on a theoretical foundation of interpretation assumes that analysis is synonymous with interpretation. This interpretation is sustained by developing new understandings while acknowledging the broader contextual realities that inevitably condition different interpretations of text (Harbour, 2006).

Qualitative methodology: thematic synthesis

As discussed in Chapter 2, sustainability is contested and has been interpreted in many different ways across a variety of disciplines both in the social and natural sciences. The contested nature of sustainability and its pervasiveness in public policy and research directs the methodology for this thesis toward a qualitative interpretive analysis of existing literature on sustainability and its related fields. This research is interested in the clarification of paradigms and concepts through examining the issues in text and reacting to the content of text. As Guba and Lincoln argue, trustworthiness is essential in this approach and in trying to achieve the goals of the research. Trustworthiness is established by identifying similar and dissimilar themes and concepts from using different sources of literature and data and by using multiple theories and perspectives during data analysis and interpretation stages of this research (1994).

Thematic synthesis provides reliability in testing the data as its aim is to synthesise qualitative research findings in order to inform policy and practice (Thomas & Harden, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2006). It also has the potential to bring research findings in order to inform effective policy and practice and potentially to bring research closer to policy and practice (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Synthesising *qualitative* research requires a broad scope of research methods that are contained in the research sample of studies. That is, a broad range of research projects in contrast to quantitative analysis that may focus particularly on randomised control trials (Thomas & Harden, 2007). In this research the saturation of analysis from a broad range of research studies on sustainability ensures that all the data share some common contextual, structural and temporal elements.

The research data sample of sixty-five studies on sustainability for this research (see Appendix A) includes studies which involve quantitative, qualitative and mixed method methodologies. The majority of studies are primarily qualitative in their approach. An overview of how I conducted a thematic synthesis for the purpose of this research is illustrated in Table 1 below. This involved the identification of key concepts that emerged from the research data sample. In other words, the synthesis involves identifying the same concepts in different studies though they may not be using the same words (Thomas & Harden, 2007). The analysis of the literature identified themes that directed my attention to what to look for in sustainability studies while allowing other themes and concepts to emerge.

Thematic synthesis allows for a systematic review of the findings of the research studies in the research data sample. However, as stated earlier in this chapter, the value of the synthesis of these studies is the potential to construct meanings beyond the content of

individual pieces of research (Thomas & Harden, 2007, p. 6). As Richards suggests that it may be important to deliberately include studies that are conducted across diverse fields and settings to achieve a higher level of abstraction (2005). Meta syntheses are therefore integrations that are more than the sum of parts in that they offer potentially new interpretations of the findings. These interpretations are new as they will not be found in one source but rather the interpretations are derived from taking all the sample as a whole (Thomas & Harden, 2007).

Thematic synthesis has been used in domains of research such as health and community services, in order to facilitate effective and appropriate policy and practice by bringing together and integrating the findings of multiple qualitative studies through a systematic review of these findings from an extensive evidence base (Ottman et al., 2009). It is used in a similar way in this research to identify, analyse, and report on patterns of concepts and actions within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In effect, it seeks to answer the question of what is represented by the data in terms of new understandings of policy and practice in human services.

In summary, the aim of using thematic synthesis is to study evidence informed policy and practice with the intention of bringing research closer to policy and practice. The value of thematic synthesis is that it aims to respect the content but the researcher is not bound by the content (Thomas & Harden, 2007; Torraco, 2002). This directs the research interest in the discovery of patterns of thought and language that bring understanding (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009).

Grounded theory methods

Thematic synthesis as a methodology necessitates an approach that uses grounded theory *methods* in the research. The early researchers on grounded theory, Strauss and Corbin based on Glaser's original ideas, defined grounded theory as 'one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon that it represents' (1990, p. 23). Using grounded theory methods in this research is a way of ensuring validity wherein the concepts developed are comprehensive and as complete as possible by ensuring that 'premature closure' has not occurred (1990). An analysis of the concept of sustainability necessitates the collection of its essential characteristics and attributes. However, there is an underlying assumption that the attributes identified and synthesised are necessary but not sufficient to describe the whole phenomenon. That is, it assumes that much still remains undiscovered. Morse suggests that only by collecting rich and relevant data around the bare bones of what is known using principles of saturation and verification can we recognise the pertinent data from other data (2006). The direction taken therefore in my research, are methods of coding, verification of textual themes, systematic comparison of concepts, linking and developing categories. I used Nvivo software as my main research tool for the analysis of the research data sample through the processes presented below (see Appendix B for a list of concepts generated from Nvivo).

The research processes

The diagram below is included here as a guide to the process of carrying out a thematic synthesis conducted in this research. The table illustrates the sequencing of the research processes and also indicates where the information on the research steps is to be found in this thesis. A discussion of the key steps conducted for concept development and model building is presented later in this chapter.



Table 1: The process of thematic synthesis.

As just illustrated in the Table 1, thematic synthesis involves the sequencing of analytical processes and the development of concepts. This approach is based on grounded theory in qualitative research. It is explained as ‘grounded’ insofar as theorising is through a process of continually grounding this theorising to a constant comparative analysis ‘initially of data with data, progressing to comparisons between their interpretations translated into codes and categories’ that in turn, generate more data (Mills et al., 2006, p. 3). Rather than describing the issues of importance alone, concepts are used and data are grouped and given conceptual labels. This requires placing interpretations on the data. Using this approach I used specific coding paradigms to ensure conceptual development through methods that are inductive and procedural (Strauss, 1990). This approach is a

‘context based process oriented description and explanation of the phenomenon rather than an objective static description’ (Jabareen, 2009, p. 52). Therefore this synthesis from the data goes beyond the identification of themes from the content to concept development, from description to analytical concepts relating the concepts to each other to form a conceptual framework (see Appendix B for a list of concepts).

The central aim of this research as stated in Chapter 1 is to develop a conceptual model of sustainability for use in policy, reform and practice in human services. In summary, my approach to building a model of sustainability that would contain key concepts and processes for use in policy and practice is to use an essentially inductive method of inquiry which does not presume any specific hypothesis that needs to be proven or disproven (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). My research is essentially inductive, however, it is also deductive insofar, as I stated earlier, literature reviews conducted on sustainability, social problems and policy (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) sensitised my analysis of the research studies in the data sample. In summary, in order to answer the central research question about the use and value of sustainability in human services, my research has taken the grounded theory approach as a process that seeks to construct theories about sustainability and its usefulness and value from data sources that include the relevant literature and the identified research data sample.

Model building

In Chapter 4 examples of policy models were presented as a ‘baseline’ for building a new model of sustainability for use in policy practice. Sustainability (as explored in Chapter 2), is considered to be a complex, multidimensional problem which is unable to be understood solely through linear cause and effect conditions. Singer defined models as essential ways of depicting complex realities (1984). Model building as a generic process

assumes that the building blocks of a model are concepts that will assist in the development of meaningful questions; allows the identification of key dimensions; and assigns indicators of complex processes. This provides the rationale for exploring the role of concepts and conceptual models and their use in understanding complex social problems and conditions. Models are used in the social sciences generally to provide systematic and logical interactions between the identifiable parts of a complex whole (Sarriot et al., 2004).

Model building reflects a constructivist epistemology as it assumes that the development of concepts is not predetermined but unfolds through systematic processes, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In this thesis a model of sustainability is based on the development of constructs built from concepts. For example, the concept of ‘participation’ is linked to the concept of ‘collaboration’ (see Appendix B for list of concepts). They are separate but interrelated concepts that emerge together with other concepts to develop a higher order construct of participatory democracy (see Chapter 6).

Conceptual models provide a mechanism against which the operationalisation of policy and practice, for example, can facilitate learning. The purpose of a heuristic model is essentially to improve processes and functions that ultimately could result in better decisions being made for the well-being of society. The assumed potential of model building in this research is about providing a framework which can reflect the available evidence and value base underlying the concept of sustainability.

Table 1 above was presented as a guide to the process of concept development and model building, illustrating the sequence followed to identify the research data sample and the

identification and analysis of the constructs. The following section explains more specifically the process involved in the thematic synthesis. The aim of this section is to identify the meaningful concepts of sustainability which have their own characteristics and functions. These concepts are organised into a hierarchy which allows the identification of key constructs for the purpose of building a conceptual model of sustainability.

The development of concepts and constructs

Selection of the data sample

The data sample for this thesis consists of sixty-five studies on sustainability in the area of human services policy and practice. Sampling for a thematic synthesis is broadly inclusive of different perspectives and attitudes that provide maximum variation within relevant contexts. This approach reflects the general purpose of this research as theory building (Yin, 1979).

As the aim of the synthesis is to interpret for explanation, the texts selected as the research data sample are purposeful in their intent and context (Doyle, 2003). The studies have been grouped against criteria that reflect relevant behavioural, socio-cultural and political issues and contexts. They are sourced from multidisciplinary perspectives which focus on sustainability as a positive ideal and good for society. The objective has been to achieve ‘conceptual saturation’ rather than searching for homogeneity across studies (Thomas & Harden, 2007, p. 11). Conceptual innovation is necessary as sustainability in the human services is not a subject that has been extensively researched. Therefore, a thematic analysis alone would only provide a summary of global themes. These would be

all that could be required if there was sufficient research findings on the actual research question (Thomas & Harden, 2007).

Four steps in the selection of the research data sample

Step 1: Identifying the global themes

The global themes which emerge from the analysis of the general literature are used as a first step in the process of choosing the sample of studies that make up the data source and as a starting point for concept development from the data sample. As the development of global themes proceeded concept development, it was possible to generate ideas and inferences by linking and ‘working through logical associations between theory and data’ (Patton, 2005, p. 14). The global themes are derived from texts, and they address the questions and experiences of a sub-group of researchers and commentators in human services fields of study who have a shared interest of increasing their understanding of sustainability.

Step 2: Selecting the studies – the criteria

The ‘social’ dimension of sustainability is an important focus as it reflects most directly the purpose of human services policy and practice which is the focus of my research. The time period and origin locates the history of the discourse of sustainability and its political and administrative manifestations. This reflects the Brundtland Report and the rise of the field of sustainable development as discussed in Chapter 2 (WCED, 1987). The scope is within developed Western Anglophone countries as the inquiry seeks to provide meaningful operating recommendations for countries that share some common characteristics in their respective democracies. The fields of interest chosen also share characteristics as they involve government and non-government organisational activity, some form of public funding and in varying degrees and contexts, administrative

responsibilities regulated by statute and related public policy. As one of the characteristics of sustainability is its multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral nature, a diverse range of disciplines as sources of research is also chosen.

Dimension of Sustainability Covered	Time Period / Place	Field and Scope / Context	Disciplines
The 'social' dimension as the <i>primary</i> focus	1960 – 2009 Western, Anglophone countries	<u>Fields:</u> Child, Youth and Family Health, Well-Being and Welfare; Child Protection; Local Government; Education; Community Development; Sustainable Development; Justice Studies; Primary Health Care; Community Health. <u>Scope/context:</u> Central and Jurisdictional Governments; Non-Government Organisations; Social Institutions; Communities; Civil Society.	Social Work; Psychology; Sociology; Other Allied Health Professions; Nursing; Medical; Epidemiology; Ecology; Planning, Management and Administration; Education.

Table 2: Criteria for the inclusion of studies in the research data sample.

Step 3: Categorising the studies

The group analysis provides four categories which cover the contexts and potential outcomes of the research on sustainability. In Chapter 6 these four categories are used to analyse the four constructs of sustainability to explore and interpret the major ideas and issues from the studies. It was to be expected that a higher proportion of studies focus on program or project sustainability generally as they are aimed at increasing the life span and continuity of government and non-government programs. This partly reflects a

research agenda in a variety of fields which responds to short term political strategies and policies of governments worldwide. There is however, a growing research interest in community and population outcomes seen in groups 2-4 (Table 3) that are linked to an agenda of social sustainability and a transformative vision for betterment of society. Within these four groups there is a reasonable balance of objectives and contexts to build a conceptual framework of sustainability from a broad range of perspectives and disciplines.

Studies in data sample %	Objectives	Behavioural, socio-cultural, political contexts and key issues
Group 1 (policy and program sustainability) (37%)	Development of a knowledge base on strategies and indicators for planning and implementation to achieve sustainability in policy, programs and projects. Frameworks for assessing the sustainability of programs.	Community and organisational settings. Public Administration and policy development in the fields of health, youth work, education, child and family welfare, community development and sustainable development. Supportive political agendas in principle, but with many dilemmas; often reflect sustainability goals but without consideration of holistic perspectives and longevity and in the absence of adequate frameworks.
Group 2 (social sustainability) (26%)	Building capacity of institutions, organisations, communities and societies towards social change for sustainability. Building communities that are inclusive and free.	Community, institutional and organisational settings. Generally, related to community and sustainable development projects and policy. Involves agendas of growth versus development and problems about the lack of an explicit value base.
Group 3 (Strategies for organisational and community change) (19%)	Research into the validity and effectiveness of specific strategies such as collaborative practices, governance arrangements, leadership models, funding models as facilitators of sustainability.	Organisational and community settings, mainly an emphasis on policy environments and decision making. Some emphasis on community development contexts. Generally, 'coercive' environment of state led funding contractual arrangements and participatory models.
Group 4 (strategies for individual and group change) (18%)	Enhancing individual and group capacity, social inclusion and identity through participation principles and mechanisms and other development strategies. A higher goal is generally identified of an empowered, diverse society that builds a sustainable society.	Mainly in community settings but some emphasis on organisations and the psychosocial aspects of workforce and multidisciplinary contexts. Generally the focus is on learning and building human capital.

Table 3: Group analysis of studies in the research data sample.

Step 4: Assessing quality of the studies

In addition to the above steps for choosing a data sample of studies, an assessment of quality of research was undertaken against another set of criteria (see Appendix A). Quality of research methodology and methods are essential for drawing reliable conclusions. One method of assessing quality is against criteria that cover issues such as: the reporting of aims, the rationale of context, methods and findings. The purpose of the assessment is to determine whether the strategies employed in the studies are sufficient to maximise the trustworthiness and the appropriateness of the methods of interpretation and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For this purpose, criteria are adopted which are used for systematic reviews and synthesis in human services contexts (Ottman et al., 2009). The method of synthesising a data sample derived from the broader literature was originally intended for the use in clinical trials. However, it is argued that multidimensional design and methods and the complementary nature of qualitative and quantitative methods produce better research outcomes in the area of human services (Ottman et al., 2009). Therefore qualitative, quantitative, mixed method design, and both research and expert commentaries are included in the data sample, to reflect the breadth and variety of available approaches. It is interesting to note that there is an overwhelming representation of qualitative approaches.

Limitations of sampling

The available literature was broad enough in scope to locate a group of studies within a sustainability research agenda in the context of human services. However, gaps exist in the sample where no studies or one study within particular fields was found, such as in the areas of child protection or income support. This reflects the lack of research activity

directly on sustainability in these fields. It is argued however, that generalisations can be made that are relevant to most human services (Thomas & Harden, 2007). The systematic approach to sampling cannot be taken as evidence of validity of the findings but it is assumed that evidence of quality of the research process is a major factor in contributing to validity.

Studies excluded from the sample

The general literature on sustainability is vast and covers a wide range of research interests. The context and purpose of this thesis however, narrowed the field of interest significantly. Studies that focused only on economic and / or environmental sustainability were excluded from the data sample. However, studies which incorporated the three dimensions of sustainability (economic, environmental and social) and aimed to understand how integrating strategies would assist in finding solutions to society's problems both locally and globally, were included.

Inductive coding of the research data sample (basic level codes)

Concept development involved the coding of the data sample, based on describing, comparing and relating *each* code to the whole set of codes in order to go beyond the text for meaningful interpretations (Thomas & Harden, 2007; Bazeley, 2007). Firstly, each study in the data sample was summarised against its objectives, methods and findings. The 'summaries' were imported into Nvivo, a data management system for qualitative research (Bazeley, 2007). The studies were each identified as a 'case' in Nvivo and coded line by line for context and content, resulting in basic level codes that is, concepts (Appendix B).

Following the coding of the research data sample, it was necessary to identify and make sense of the interrelationships between codes. The process involved a combination of

viewing coding structures through Nvivo and manual methods of identifying patterns and associations (Johnston, 2006; Richards, 2005). This approach categorised concepts according to processes and functions in context and analysed concepts dimensionally, that is, on a continuum for process and function. For example, identifying the characteristics of the concept of ‘collaboration’ or ‘knowledge creation’ required an assessment from low to high influences on sustainability across the cases. The basic level codes are the outcome of the line by line coding of summaries of the research data sample. The dimensional analysis assists ultimately in the operationalisation of concepts of sustainability through the development of indicators for implementation and evaluation. That is, what and how each key concept supports policy and reform processes towards sustainability. I return to this subject in Chapter 7.

Codes from global themes

A bank of codes was initially extracted from the global themes, and these were used as a starting point for interrogating the data sample of studies (Tuckett, 2005). The inductive line by line coding of the data summaries in turn generated further codes and also refined the initial codes from the general literature. As mentioned previously, the literature on sustainability in the human services did not address the research question directly. It was therefore necessary to go beyond a content analysis of the literature and of the data in order to achieve conceptual innovation. The capacity to develop new ideas as mentioned in Chapter 3, requires ‘abductive thinking’ through logically working between theory and data. The emphasis of the analysis:

...is on constructing meanings, theorising the structures and socio-ecological dimensions and contexts wherein the body of research studies are located, rather than any individual psychologies or motivations (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p. 79).

The outcome of the above process of refining and merging basic level codes is firstly a bank of higher level codes, and consequently the building of a hierarchy of concepts based on these codes (Appendix B).

Development of a hierarchy of codes: analytical concepts

A hierarchical coding structure was used to determine the higher and more general abstractions of sustainability for the purpose of model building. The decisions on the relevance and importance of the concepts derived from the coding rely heavily on my interpretations. However, a specific criterion is also used for deciding on their inclusion; the idea that the prevalence of instances of the concept being identified across the cases is a necessary but not sufficient criterion for inclusion of the concept. Braun and Clarke explain this point such that:

The 'keyness' of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question (2006, p. 82).

The development of a hierarchy of codes is essential for concept development as it locates and organises codes based on the strength of their associations across the cases and within broad categories that included time, function, strategy and context (Bazeley, 2007). Some examples from this process are described below to illustrate their potential importance within the context of sustainability for human services systems.

Examples of moving from basic level codes to a hierarchy and conceptual development

The subject of poverty appeared consistently in the data sample and was generally linked to a sustainability agenda in developing countries that mainly focused on local economic and environmental strategies (Curran, 2003; Schlossberg & Zimmerman, 2003; Jabareen, 2009). However, often social strategies were integrated within both other dimensions of

sustainability. Across the data sample related concepts were identified which were associated with the distribution of resources, income support, and opportunities for participation in the workforce. In developing a hierarchical structure across the codes, the aim was to help conceptualise what poverty meant in the context of sustainability. The hierarchy pulls together the attributes or characteristics that are integral to understanding poverty and that provide a higher level association to add meaning to the condition of poverty and to its potential solutions. The characteristics of poverty were consistently associated across the cases with higher concepts such as participation, inclusion, capacity building, intra- and inter-generational equity and human rights.

Another example comes from studies in local development practice. Local capacity building is a major theme that consistently occurs across the studies. Some characteristics of this theme which are seen as strong indicators of sustainability include collective action, skill development and funding practices which aim to build long term networks at a community level and opportunities for decision making (Lyons et al., 2001; Lodl & Stevens, 2002; Crowley, 2008). The hierarchy conceptually pulls together these characteristics that are integral to local capacity building and development to provide a higher level association to enhance meaning and solutions. These characteristics are associated across the cases with more abstract concepts such as collaboration, social inclusion, empowerment, reflexivity and human rights.

Another example involves the theme of coalitions building which was identified in the studies as an important process in communities for achieving sustainability (Suggs, 2000; Crowley, 2008). This idea of coalitions was not necessarily linked directly to concepts of 'participation' or 'collaboration'. However, there was significant content *across* the

cases that processes such as the formation of coalitions are associated with the broader concept of participation (among others) as a characteristic of democratic activity and human rights.

In summary in this thesis, analytical concepts were chosen for their relevance and meaning of social sustainability. However, in this form these higher order analytical concepts are underdeveloped and mainly related by association and not necessarily by causal factors or conditions. The next stage was to further interpret these associations for explanations of the necessary processes and conditions as overarching *facilitators* and *inhibitors* of sustainability. These analytical overarching concepts are developed as four constructs of sustainability: adaptation, participatory democracy, deep learning and human rights and are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter summary

The aim of this chapter was to present the rationale for the research approach. Some theoretical perspectives that have informed the methodology and the process for the development of concepts and constructs were also presented. The central research question of this thesis asks whether sustainability is a useful concept to be applied to policy, reform and practice in human services. My choice of a qualitative methodology and the process of thematic synthesis of a wide variety of research studies on sustainability related to human services, assisted in answering the research question and to realise an objective of my research, to build a model of sustainability for use in human services (see Chapter 1). The choice of the process of thematic synthesis has contributed to achieving integrations of key concepts for the identification of four constructs of sustainability, the key findings of my research (see Chapter 6).

CHAPTER 6: THE CONSTRUCTS OF SUSTAINABILITY- ADAPTATION, DEEP LEARNING, PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS

Introduction

The previous chapter documented the systematic processes involved in identifying the constructs critical to sustainability in policy, reform and practice. It explained the procedures that were undertaken to develop a hierarchy of concepts from the broad sustainability literature then it described a further synthesis using a wide range of human services studies. The purpose of this chapter is to present the constructs that emerged from my research as explained in Chapter 5. Notwithstanding the discussion in Chapter 2 regarding the usefulness and value of the *general* understanding of sustainability, also in this chapter I argue for a particular focus for sustainability in policy, reform and practice in order to demonstrate the usefulness and value of sustainability in human services processes and outcomes. Furthermore, in order to establish a systemic approach which is imperative for sustainability, close links are made between the sustainability of policy and practice and broader visionary goals for social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The four constructs that are presented in this chapter are developed through the identification and the analysis of concepts that strongly emerged through the thematic synthesis of the sixty five studies in the research sample as explored in Chapter 5. A list of these concepts is presented in Appendix B. As discussed in the previous chapter, the use of the qualitative software Nvivo enables the strength of the associations across concepts to emerge. The strongest concepts to emerge from the thematic synthesis of the

sixty five studies in the research data sample are the basis for the development of the four constructs of sustainability. The four identified constructs emerge *together* from this analysis to create a framework which is critical to sustainability. A description of each construct is presented below. This includes how each is understood in the relevant literature. The examples of studies in the research data sample are discussed to demonstrate how robust the constructs are and how they are manifested in human services research on sustainability. This is done to illuminate how these constructs are evident in community, organisational and societal processes and how they assist in facilitating sustainability. In Chapter 7 a model is presented which identifies both the interrelationships between each of the four constructs and explains how and in what circumstances the constructs can be used in various policy and practice contexts.

The construct of adaptation

Adaptation in the context of sustainability: program, organisational and community settings

Generally, the literature identifies adaptation as a key condition of sustainability. Adaptation as an ecological concept has its origins in the 19th Century exploration of theories of evolution and the survival of the fittest (*Padian, 2008*)²⁶. In the context of the social sciences however, adaptation is a broader concept and refers to the functioning and well-being of individuals, groups, organisations and communities. Identifying adaptation as a construct captures the idea that change is constant and for sustainability, positive change requires the successful adaptation of individuals and groups to their wider environments. It is concerned with how individuals and groups may successfully adjust to their changing bio-psychosocial environments (*Chenoweth & McAuliffe, 2005*). In a

²⁶ In order to differentiate the references from the general literature and those from the research data sample, in this Chapter all references from the general literature will be presented in italics.

sociological context therefore, adaptation encompasses more than survival and includes developmental and social processes to explain changes at all levels (*Gitterman & Germain, 2008; Fawcett et al., 2010*).

In the context of sustainability, adaptation puts a focus on society's goals and purpose, its resilience and diversity and its institutions to understand the potential for *positive* change. In other words, adaptation incorporates ecological principles into socio-political contexts (*Ife & Tesoriero, 2006; Gitterman & Germain, 2008*). For example, how knowledge and skills are transferred and transformed within communities as systems within which change occurs (*Norris et al., 2008*). These capacities include lowering the human pressure on all resources, the management of risk in society and social resilience to adversity (*Mimura, 2010*). Understanding how people adapt to their changing environments to achieve sustainability necessitates also a challenge to our supremacy with the aim of overturning basic assumptions. As put by Shannon and Young, an assumption made is that democracy is just about formal representation and the Judeo – Christian tradition of the supremacy of humans. It is assumed that democracy is about patriarchy and the socio-cultural bias on the individual (2004).

The idea of shifting the focus from the supremacy of humans directs attention to a holistic environmental world view to the whole of existence and the interrelationships within it. This means that concepts such as democracy, community and human rights require a re-examination if sustainability is to be the ultimate goal of humanity (*Rees, 2003; Ife, 2010*). Addressing social problems through policy and reform in human services necessitates a commitment to social change and therefore in understanding the processes of change and the capacities for resilience (*Handmer & Dovers, 1996; Fawcett et al.,*

2010). Resilience as an important socio-ecological concept is discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of understanding social problems. Resilience is a key mechanism of adaptation and: ‘pertains to the ability of a system to sustain itself through change via adaptation and occasional transformation’ (Magis, 2010, p. 402).

The goal of adaptation

Generally, the goal is the health, wellness and quality of life of people, their communities and natural environments. It is described as a manifestation of adaptation to an altered environment (Norris *et al.*, 2008). This meaning links resilience for adaptation to natural environments and to human services outcomes of health and wellbeing of individuals and communities (Norris *et al.*, 2008, p. 144). Adaptive capacities of individuals and communities therefore are of major interest in sustainability research (McKenzie, 2004; Magis, 2010). What then are the processes and conditions involved in developing resilience for adaptation in order to build systems which have the potential for sustainability? Although it is beyond the scope of my inquiry to provide a comprehensive answer to this question, the examples from the research data which are discussed later in this chapter identify some key processes and conditions in some human services contexts. These include community governance, longevity of policy and practice and futurity.

Adaptation processes and conditions for sustainability

This section draws on examples from the research data sample to demonstrate the usefulness and value of the construct of adaptation by identifying key processes and conditions for sustainability in policy and practice. I argue that a program focus is closely related to organisational and community processes and conditions and these linkages need to be understood to achieve sustainability outcomes at all levels of social organisation.

Longevity

Longevity is recognised as an indicator and a key condition of sustainability in the research data. Longevity is usually defined in terms of how human services programs last beyond the funding cycle and whether they continue to provide benefits to the groups and populations which they serve (Hawe et al., 1997; Hanson et al., 2002; Sibthorpe et al., 2005; Hayes, 2006; Rogers & Kimberley, 2006; Nordqvist et al., 2009). An essential element in making programs last is to develop the capacity of institutions such as families, coalitions and schools to 'prolong and multiply' any program effects (Hawe et al., 1997; *Dovers, 2001*). Longevity is a characteristic of resilience and therefore, of adaptive processes essential for sustainability (Hanson et al., 2002). Central to the notion of resilience as an adaptive capacity is the recognition that societal processes develop over time. It follows that policy and practice which addresses complex social problems requires a long term perspective as maintaining gains over time provides the potential and the opportunities for the effectiveness of a program:

The addition of a time dimension is an important reminder that the impact of a program is as much dependent on sustaining an intervention as it is on establishing an effective program in a strategic population (Hanson, et. al., 2002, p. 37).

This Australian study on the sustainability of safe communities and other studies in primary health care and community health for example, have found that outcomes in populations through the impact of programs are the product of three factors - its effectiveness on the targeted population, its reach (that is, its penetration within the population) and the duration of the effect (Hawe et al., 1997; Sibthorpe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005). These conditions are identified as essential when looking at long term effects of programs (Hawe et al., 1997; Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998; Hanson et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 2004; Blank et al., 2000; Nordqvist et al., 2009). These factors have implications for human services programs, such as child protection programs. These are

rarely evaluated in policy and program development but instead limited to ‘reach’ based on a few output variables such as the number of reported cases of child abuse (*ACT Government, 2004*). The implications on programs from the lack of attention to these factors will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

Program longevity

Time dimensions for most human services activity have remained largely indicators of efficiency, not effectiveness. For effectiveness, a program would be designed to last in order to increase the economic and general well-being of people. In the area of sustainable development for example, program effectiveness would incorporate objectives such as the independence of people who are affected by poverty, and would link program sustainability to higher social goals (Pal, 1998). This implies intentionality in planning for long term impact on income and quality of life:

...specifically this means that the program... structure is one which can eventually function without external assistance and that it will have a long term impact on the quantitative (measured by income) and the qualitative (measured by quality of life) aspects of the peoples’ lives (Pal, 1998, p. 457).

Sustainability more broadly would envisage a future for populations without the project and without continued funding (Sarriot et al., 2004; Blank et al., 2000). Lasting impact of interventions for example is critical to reduce child morbidity and mortality (Hayes, 2006; Sarriot et al., 2004). This requires greater attention to be paid to embed initiatives in community settings and to take account of the role of institutions for sustainability (*Dovers, 2001*). This is facilitated through the use of mechanisms for capacity building such as participation and collaboration across systems and in building networks, cooperatives and coalitions (Nordqvist et al., 2009). This point will be taken up again later in this chapter. Capacity building mechanisms also include other social institutions. One Australian study on maintaining gains in prevention and early interventions for

children and youth found institutional factors to be the most potent forces for sustaining positive changes for high risk youth. Quoting from the Kauai longitudinal study²⁷ Hayes re-iterates the importance of the following institutions in maintaining gains of interventions:

...continuing education at community colleges; educational and vocational skills acquired during voluntary service in the Armed forces; marriage to a stable partner; conversion to a religion that required active participation in a 'community of faith'; recovery from a life threatening illness or accident that required a lengthy hospitalization (Hayes, 2006, p4).

This implies that social institutions are critical to ensuring that investments are sustained (Homel, 1999, cited in Hayes, 2006). This example demonstrates that sustainability can be conceptualised beyond longevity as a time dimension toward capacity measures such as participation in institutions for continuity of effect. These processes become part of assessment of sustainability beyond maintenance after funding, and as explained in Chapter 2, along a continuum of social sustainability (Mancini & Marek, 1998; Pepperdine, 2000; Syme & Nancarrow, 2002; Johnson et al., 2004; Scheirer, 2005).

This point has implications in program implementation strategies which see program longevity mostly within a three to five year period in children's early intervention programs for example, and to a large extent reflect the short termism of most western governments. As mentioned in Chapter 5, although all governments would set out for longevity of their policies, in reality liberal democratic governments are markedly short term in their policy cycles (and therefore in the sustainability of policies and programs) with terms of office ranging from three to six years²⁸.

²⁷ This is the ground breaking study on resilience of 1982 by Werner and Smith.

²⁸ There are exceptions however outside the western world and China is an example of a nation with a political vision of '*long duree*' (Braudel, 1980) in terms of its policy cycles and decisions with an very long view of the future both in local, regional and international policies (Saich, 1994).

Human services programs are therefore more likely to be terminated before their full impact is realised and problems of termination are intrinsic to the human services. Nonetheless, it is argued that sustainability requires that policy decision makers and practitioners have an *obligation* for longevity, continuity and provision for flexibility of programs (Hodge, 1997). This point is expressed by a service provider in a study on the sustainability of alcohol and drug programs in the United States:

We have a responsibility to our program recipients: they've had so many losses in their lives and for us to come in for a year or two or three and give them hope, only to have the program go away, we've just caused another loss and a further loss of hope in their lives (Akerlund, 2000, p. 353).

Research demonstrates that discontinued community programs have a negative effect both to participants who are directly involved and pose obstacles to subsequent community development (Goodman et al., 1993; Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998; Pluye et al., 2004). The above studies also illustrate an important connection between individual and community well-being and the trajectory of programs following implementation.

There are of course circumstances where the discontinuation of a program²⁹ is appropriate when circumstances and problems change. When a more suitable and effective means for meeting a given problem is identified then very appropriately a former program may be changed (Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998, p. 88).

This implies that programs should change if they no longer meet the needs of populations which are served or *should adapt* to continually benefit these populations (Dovers, 2001;

²⁹ It is often quite difficult to determine the beginning and end of a program other than by the funding arrangements. Most studies use the initial program funding and objectives as a measure and baseline from which to evaluate sustainability.

Pluye et al, 2004). This can be facilitated by taking a long view of processes rather than events alone such as a snapshot in time of a discrete evaluation of a program³⁰. It is argued that events focused policy and practice which takes limited account of institutional *processes* and behaviour, such as program evaluations or royal commissions of inquiry, can distort perception and understanding. Processes, however, can expand meanings and maintain political and social interest in what is worth explaining and keeping (*Dovers, 2001; Pierson, 2005*).

Many programs and policies however, are changed without due consideration for a better option. As mentioned earlier, the political environment often predicates short-termism for political rather than social goals. Simultaneously and paradoxically however, regulatory systems in human services are mostly deeply embedded in organisational and political practice and cultures which are difficult to shift and do not demonstrate flexibility. To continue with the example of child protection, systems of reporting child abuse and neglect in many western Anglophone countries such as mandatory reporting³¹ present a policy environment where it would be ‘unthinkable’ to dismantle them (Patashnick, 2003). However, change through innovation is also necessary for sustainability. Are then policies such as mandatory reporting policies unsustainable because they lack cultures for change? It is argued that if ‘taken for granted’ policies leave no room for change and innovative practice, the likelihood is that they *are* unsustainable (*Rogers, 1995*).

³⁰ A New Zealand example in child welfare demonstrates this point. Connelly has developed frameworks which take account of a developmental long term view of evaluation rather than snapshots, incorporating a research strategy which addresses long term operational and evaluative needs of statutory child welfare systems (*Connelly, 2004*).

³¹ Reporting of child abuse by mandated individuals is a widespread policy although the regulatory mechanisms used differ across Anglophone countries and within countries such as Australia.

However, embeddedness of a policy or practice is not mutually exclusive to being flexible and responding to changing needs. That is, policies and programs can be embedded in an institutional culture and at the same time facilitate their potential for sustainability through participation and opportunities for innovations (Sibthorpe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005a; Fullan, 2005). Therefore, all policies and practices should be considered 'incomplete' as a reflection of the 'socio-ecological landscape' which provides opportunities for innovations that respond to inevitable change (Scheirer, 2005).

Building resilience through formalising structures

A key adaptive process for sustainability is the embeddedness of valued activity. The embeddedness of activity at all levels of social organisation requires that attention is paid to routines as points of reference for studying longevity and continuity of valued activity for sustainability (Pluye et al., 2004). Middle range results are also used to measure progress of programs to sustainability, as successful programs are flexible not static (Pluye et al., 2004). There is a large body of literature on the routinisation and institutionalisation of activity particularly in the field of public administration and organisation studies, and these can be viewed as the precursors of sustainability studies (Yin, 1979; Drucker, 2001). For our purpose, it is sufficient to say that routines, important for maintaining activity, are critical for sustainability at all levels. However, in addition to the idea of routines being institutionalised, implying activity which is repetitive and fixed, sustainability also opens up exploration of conditions which provide the power to positively adapt and respond to change. These adaptive processes include good management, opportunities for participation and knowledge transfer through the diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1995; Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998; Dovers, 2001). To progress to social sustainability for example, empowerment for participation becomes an objective of establishing routines and embedding them in organisations and

communities. Sustainability requires that the integration of innovations into routines at which institutionalisation occurs is deliberate and progressive (Pluye et al., 2004). However, the idea of merging such concepts, that of institutionalisation and transformative change, which is implied in any goal toward sustainability can be confusing. To consider that on the one hand, innovations, social change and social transformation are needed for progress to sustainability while arguing that embedding routines which is a basic process of institutionalisation, is also important for sustainability. Are these concepts then mutually exclusive and irreconcilable? Fullan argues that a socio-ecological approach to social problems forces the consideration of both processes which is the perspective that is taken in this thesis (Fullan, 2005). This places the focus on *adaptive* institutions which recognise uncertainty and complexity of socio-ecological systems (Dovers, 2001).

The diffusion of innovations

The important adaptive process of the embeddedness of valued activity directs attention to diffusion processes and conditions which embed ideas, behaviour, services and policy activity and their implementation (Rogers, 1995; Pierson, 2005).

Drawing on earlier content about the diffusion of innovations as introduced in Chapter 5, a key point to reiterate about diffusion is that organisations and communities require opportunities for innovations and their diffusion for change to occur (Rogers, 1995; Drucker, 2001). A study on the sustainability of primary health care initiatives in Australia defined diffusion of innovations as:

...a novel set of behaviours, routines and ways of working that are directed at improving health outcomes, administrative efficiency, cost effectiveness or user's experience and that are implemented by planned and co-ordinated actions (Sibthorpe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005, p. 52).

Understanding the way that change occurs and how it spreads and develops requires

attention to the impacts of policy and programs. However, it is rare for policy makers and practitioners in human services to consider diffusion factors from the outset in policy processes (Scheirer, 2005). This would require consideration of the capacity of programs and larger systems to support innovations as a primary goal to meet the needs of populations (Johnson et al., 2004; Pluye et al., 2004).

Furthermore, the theory of diffusion of innovations underpins research which provides critical knowledge about the extent to which communication patterns, social norms and structures reduce the potential recipient of the innovation that is the adopter's, *uncertainty* regarding an innovation (Rogers, 1995; Rice, 2009). This point necessitates that adaptive processes and conditions for sustainability take account of psychological conditions and changes in individuals and groups and is associated with the reflexive practices necessary for deep learning which is discussed as a construct in the next section of this chapter.

In the area of assessments or evaluations of program activity, for example, an awareness of the impacts of innovations would include 're-assessment processes' that would focus on what happens to innovations. For example, such as a new skill introduced in the workforce through a staff development program, or an initial health program in a community setting. This would require the complementarity of donor and recipient³² of any innovation process to be understood in relation to what already exists and how to replicate an effective innovation for continuity and flexibility for sustainability (Blank et al., 2000). The motivation and capacity of actors / policy practitioners is also critical in the diffusion of new knowledge and activity and the routinisation of activities within

³² 'Donor' and 'recipient' are terms commonly used in diffusion studies.

organisations, as actors may continue with programs without evidence, *because* of the effect of routinisation and diffusion (Sibthorpe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005).

Demonstration projects/pilots

The full integration of an innovation into an organisation or community is necessary for empowerment of participants and therefore, for their participation. This point has implications for demonstration projects or pilots as they are sometimes called, which are based on short term objectives. It is argued that although pilot programs are short term by intent, an account of issues of sustainability and their potential negative impacts on their target populations should be a consideration. This assumes that the integration of innovations into the larger system is not a priority. That is, short-termism is a feature of pilot or demonstration projects and this pervasive condition reduces the potential for sustainability, as keeping gains for incorporation into the larger system is not seen as an objective. One reason for the lack of priority given to longevity of programs is that the pilot projects' attempts to embed, that is, to institutionalise their model and objectives, is often in conflict with the norms and models of the prevailing service system (Blank et al., 2000). It follows that to achieve sustainability through the sharing of knowledge and diffusion requires a complementarity between the donor and recipient of an innovation and an awareness of the specific purpose of pilot programs or any short term implementation. This requires a continuing adaptation for the development of services to meet the changing needs of communities that they serve (Johnson et al., 2004).

Funding arrangements

Many studies in the research sample define sustainability as the maintaining of gains beyond the funding cycle. Although funding arrangements are of course a key component of program longevity, funding is not necessarily *the* critical element as the

long term survival of programs that are aligned to community needs rely on other major variables. These include the degree and success of the institutionalisation of routines, participation of the community, organisational stability and flexibility and planning and governance arrangements (Pluye et al., 2004; Sibthorpe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005).

Also, as indicated previously in this chapter section, programs and policies should change if they no longer meet the needs of populations which are served or should adapt to continually benefit these populations. This places an emphasis on planning, assessment and monitoring processes which would *continually* consider the longevity, flexibility and continuity of program survival in addition to the connections of programs to the development of communities (Akerlund, 2000).

Although funding strategies are considered to be an essential, obvious part of maintaining gains, other variables have been found to be critical for sustainability (Pluye et al., 2004; Nordqvist et al., 2009). These include community development, empowerment and participation of stakeholders, the identification of specific points of responsibility for co-ordination and collaboration and institutional standards (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998; Pluye et al., 2004; Sanders et al., 2004; Rogers, 2006). A discussion of some of these processes and conditions such as participation and collaboration are taken up later in this chapter in the context of participatory democracy.

Planning assessment and monitoring processes

The literature and the studies which I analysed, overwhelmingly support the idea that planning at the beginning of a policy cycle or program development and the early involvement of stakeholders in planning are fundamental to sustainability (Mancini & Marek, 1998; Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998; Sarriot et al., 2004; Pluye et al., 2004;

Scheirer, 2005; Rogers, 2006). Rational policy cycles which may place sustainability at the end of the cycle do not however:

...take account of the recursive or reflexive character of sustainability and learning or of the continuous adjustments that shape the sustainability process... sustainability begins with the conception of programs (Pluye et al, 2004, p.6).

Over the past decade, administrative and managerial constructions of sustainability have been developed which sit well with the established processes of the New Public Management.³³ This development has most commonly *added* sustainability ‘tools’ such as sustainability indicators and impact studies to established mechanisms of strategic planning, organisational behaviour and operations (Porter, 2005). However, including tools to traditional processes of strategic planning, for example, for sustainability is not enough. Key conditions are required for governance arrangements for sustainability in all contexts. These are: integrating the three dimensions of sustainability - the social, economic and environmental, into an objectives-led program activity, that is, which purposefully links program goals to value based societal goals (Norris *et al.*, 2008; Crowley, 2008; Mimura, 2010); to demonstrate accountability for present actions *and* to take responsibility for the preservation of all resources (Thompson, 2005).

Managerial processes in government and non-government organisations have used these principles to inform planning implementation and evaluation activity. These have included the evaluation of the duration of programs and workforce retention and impact studies (Rogers, 2006). Sustainability strategic plans are now intrinsic to all governments and many non-government organisations. It is argued however, that so far, organisational interest and activity in sustainability in the human services has been confined to the

³³ I have referred to the New Public Management literature in Chapter 4 in the context of policy and reform processes.

rhetoric of the strategic plans with few outcome indicators developed specifically to integrate the dimensions to achieve social sustainability outcomes. Furthermore, systems continue to seek solutions to social problems based on top down approaches to planning and evaluation within existing institutional structures. The direction generally of sustainability research however, is not intended to set up a dichotomy of bottom up or top down approaches but to shift the main focus of change and adaptation toward a value based bottom up development as part of governance arrangements (Pal, 1998; Sanders et al., 2004; Crowley, 2008). This approach to policy development is well documented as critical for the development of communities and ‘underlies the whole premise of sustainable alleviation of social problems’ (Pal, 1998, p. 454). This approach of ‘bottom up’ development strongly relates to the diffusion of knowledge and the extent to which communities are consulted on the knowledge and the resources that they need and that they could develop for their futures (Rogers, 1995).

In a Swedish study of community based health promotion programs, Nordqvist and colleagues found that sustainability requires an approach to organisational practice where:

...for legislative and financial resources a top down approach structure with formal actors is needed but... incorporating informal actors such as voluntary organisations and individuals that take a bottom up approach... Therefore, different infrastructures derived from different institutions at different levels have to be managed at the same time (2009, p. 8).

This multidimensional management implies that organisations and institutions require a holistic and wider system perspective in their processes and objectives and a deep understanding of the impacts of policy and practice activity on wider societal outcomes. This point is taken up again in the context of the operationalisation of the new model of sustainability in Chapter 7.

Stability and continuity of the workforce

Workforce continuity and stability are conditions for sustainability of policy and program outcomes and are linked to social sustainability (Sibthorpe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005; Rogers, 2006). The retention of professional staff for example, working in human services in rural settings is a facilitator of program as well as social sustainability with a significant relationship established between these conditions and the trust, well-being and resilience of rural communities (Cheney et al., 2004; Crowley, 2008). The opposite effect has been demonstrated, that is, high staff turnover and succession planning difficulties as inhibitors of sustainability of programs and communities (Scheirer, 2005). The retention of staff with the needed attitudes and skills in human service organisations is also a marker for developing cultures of inquiry that are flexible and creative (Pluye et al., 2004). Workforce stability and continuity also incorporates social identity research. In this area of interest, consideration is given to the sustainability of the solutions to organisational problems through the lens of social identity. This perspective considers that good sustainable organisational and social outcomes are achieved if employees ‘internalise group-based values and goals and define them as part of self’ (Haslam et al., 2000, p. 335). One way to achieve this is: ‘by tapping into factors which lead employees to reflect on what’s in it for us rather than what’s in it for me’ (Haslam et al, 2000, p. 335). This would contradict dominant equity approaches which have argued that the best way for managers to motivate employees is by treating them equitably and offering rewards that reflect an individual’s contribution. This may lead to inequities rather than rectifying them as the interventions focus on personal activity rather than group based values and goals which are requisites for social sustainability (Haslam et al., 2000).

In summary, the analysis which has been presented here suggests that sustainability is

facilitated through the incorporation of adaptive processes and conditions such as longevity, continuity and flexibility of programs organisations and communities to build resilience, embedding valued activity such as in the retention of a skilled workforce and the diffusion of innovations into policy and practice. Furthermore, in regard to program sustainability, the connectivity between program objectives and renewed routines both organisationally and in jurisdictions determines program sustainability. Among other factors, if program objectives become unrelated to the new routines then the program becomes unsustainable (Altman, 1995; Pluye et al., 2004).

The construct of deep learning

The second construct is that of deep learning which emerges from the analysis of the research data sample studies and is supported by theories from the general literature as presented in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. In particular, developed theory of learning processes and change in community and organisational contexts as presented in Chapter 3, guided a synthesis and a way of thinking about deep learning and its significance for sustainability. Examples of different contexts and content areas such as policy and program sustainability, social sustainability and strategies for individual and group change, which have been identified in the research data sample are included in the following discussion.

What is deep learning?

Deep learning is a key construct in the sustainability literature. It demonstrates the importance of learning processes and outcomes sought that reflect knowledge creation with objectives for the betterment of society now and in the future. Essentially it is a description of the processes of knowledge creation that are of value to sustainability. This description is best commenced for the purpose of context and clarity with some theoretical discussion of learning processes.

Generally, theories of learning reflect a variety of dimensions which include the behavioural, philosophical and ontological for understanding knowledge creation and how change occurs in individuals and groups (*Daniels & Walker, 1996*). Deep learning as a theory of learning is associated with the ‘*intention* to understand’ and for ‘paying attention to underlying meaning’ (Warburton, 2003, p. 45). The premise for deep learning is ontological, as a hierarchy of learning that is based on conceptualising layers of knowledge creation through data to information, understanding and ultimately wisdom. Based on Ackoff’s original knowledge pyramid³⁴, educationalists have described levels of learning as moving from shallow to deep:

Shallow	Complex	Deep
Replication	Understanding	Meaning
Information	Knowledge	Wisdom

Table 4: A learning paradigm (*Daniels & Walker, 1996*).

According to Ackoff, wisdom as a process calls on all the previous levels of consciousness and upon human moral and ethical behaviour which builds on understanding to reach further understanding (*Ackoff, 1989*). It is fundamentally based on systems thinking as it presumes a scaffold of stimuli relying on each layer to synthesise new knowledge. Drawing on this theoretical base, a working definition of deep learning is presented below. The definition is based on the idea that it is not enough for a community, an organisation or a government institution to receive and to feedback

³⁴ Ackoff’s pyramid as a knowledge hierarchy (1989) is widely used as a pedagogical tool and theory in information systems science, education and management, however with many interpretations. It suffices for my purpose as a foundation for discussing deep learning.

information about itself for learning and development (Fullan, 2005). The transformational ideals of sustainability involve going beyond the systemic organisation of layers of learning towards a 'holistic insight and an ability to organise and structure disparate types of information into a coherent whole' (Warburton, 2003, p. 45). For sustainability, this necessitates the progression of learning and change towards meaning and wisdom³⁵ to ensure that there is a value based high connectivity between objectives and the outcomes sought.

For this thesis, I have used a definition of deep learning from the domain of education as education research into learning processes has focused particularly on the key conditions for learning for sustainability (Fullan, 2004; Warburton, 2003).

Deep learning is a process that is committed to knowledge creation for meaning and wisdom at all levels of a system. This means building collaborative cultures of inquiry that alter the culture of learning in individuals, an organisation or a community in order to reduce fear, anxiety and mistrust, thus enhancing the capacity of individuals and groups to learn (Fullan, 2004). (As these conditions reduce and often prevent the capacity to act on knowledge - my addition)

It is therefore important to purposefully aim at deep learning for sustainability in order to more closely connect objectives to outcomes sought. This requires that the highest priority is given to intention for social change (Warburton, 2004), value based decision making and of the use of good judgment to find solutions to problems (Rowley & Gibb, 2008).

³⁵ In a recent critique of Ackoff's knowledge hierarchy or pyramid, wisdom is defined as 'possession and use if required of wide practical knowledge by an agent who appreciates the fallible nature of that knowledge' (Fricke, 2007, p. 2)

Exploring the elements and conditions for deep learning

Continuous learning in policy and reform processes

Deep learning as a construct of sustainability suggests that the purpose of policy and practice is made transparent and that learning for sustainability becomes an integral part of all systemic activity (Warburton, 2004; Rowley & Gibb, 2008). Deep learning therefore implies the building of mechanisms to enhance participation and is critical to the development of an active public sphere (Crowley, 2008). This suggests that at all levels, deep learning promotes continual adaptability commencing with local systems to develop a value based common purpose. Fullan has described this intentionality for meaning and as opposed to other forms of learning for competition or strategic advantage (Warburton, 2004) for example, as a moral purpose for learning and ultimately for sustainability (2005).

Sustainability requires the ability to learn from past errors whilst maintaining core values within a system and the reduction of boundaries between learning and experience. However as has been argued earlier taking an example from child protection policy, the general strategy alone of decision making from lessons learned from past errors is unsustainable (Reder, Duncan & Gray, 1993; Stanley & Manthorpe, 2004; Cooper, 2005). As Fullan suggests: ‘there is a great deal of tacit and in-depth contextual knowledge that would be required to understand the lessons at work’ (2005, p. 11). Public inquiries for example, as instruments of policy making and reform that generally rely on the recommendations that reflect the lessons learned from past errors have been shown to be deficient in reinforcing strong links between learning and experience and between policy and practice (Stanley & Manthorpe, 2004).

As an educational researcher in the field of sustainability, Fullan suggests that facilitation of deep learning for sustainability:

...requires opportunities at all levels for mutual learning - an interdependency of learning through engagement and effort and the embracing of 'quality knowledge' and an understanding of the processes that diffuse and transfer beliefs and opinions within and across systems (2005, p. 19).

This position implies that knowledge creation should be continuous and that reaching a plateau of learning is an inhibitor to sustainability. Reaching a 'plateau' is therefore a barrier in identifying the strategies that would be needed for reform (Fullan, 2005). The aftermath of a discrete reform process such as a royal commission or a public inquiry for example, involves an avoidance of errors for the future through the review of present policies or new legislation (Prasser, 2006). It is inherent in such activity that key actors articulate and document new knowledge by mapping mistakes and successes so that organisations and individuals can build on the lessons that have been learned (Stanley & Manthorpe, 2005). This process does not lead to an understanding of how the gains which are made can be maintained across all levels of a system. This often leads to a plateau of development when the reform activity is based on discrete rather than continuous processes of learning. Sustainable policy and reform would require a diffusion of knowledge across related systems and an understanding of the processes required to continuously build and to integrate new knowledge.

Education and learning for sustainability

The opportunities that are created in communities and organisations for education on sustainability for individuals and groups are a key condition for deep learning. This is part of civil education which is crucial to the development of new ways of building trust and enabling creative solutions to social problems through an active public sphere (Benn

& Dumphy, 2005; Rogers, 2005). One study on the relationships between governments and community for more effective governance noted that:

The goal should be on inclusion of stakeholders based on recognition of the value of diversity: tools would be de-centralised networks including community-based networks rather than selected individuals acting on behalf of communities. Resulting shifts in practice would entail a replacement of short termism by long termism and organisational competition by interdependence and mutuality (Benn & Dumphy, 2005, p. 21).

This ideal it is argued, cannot be achieved without reflexivity which results in knowledge creation and innovation supported by governance arrangements which enable argumentation and reform of the status quo. This area of research is concerned with the sustainability of key bureaucratic systems and concluded that organisations need to also rethink partnership models as part of their governance arrangements (Benn & Dumphy, 2005). The decentralised opportunities for sustainability education and action include the development of clusters, networks or coalitions as decision making bodies, effectively enhancing social capital which connects any group or organisation to civil society. It also necessitates a strong commitment from decision makers that they will follow through on the decisions made by these clusters and leaders who see participation and responsiveness in any cluster as part of the long term vision and strategy of the organisation or community. To achieve this integrating condition for sustainability requires going beyond rational fixed processes towards a reflexive capacity:

...these procedures are best developed if deliberative democracy principles are employed to ensure that the diversity of the interest groups is recognised and built on in order to extend the reflexive capacity of the risk community and deliver creative outcomes. Reflexivity develops through critical dialogue which can only have its full effect if the communication is unconstrained or free from distortion (Benn & Dumphy, 2005, p. 9).

The aim is not necessarily to achieve consensus through these processes, but to develop a collective decision regardless of whether it was based on different reasons (Dryzek, 2000). Deep learning integrates individual and collective experiences. Firstly however,

this necessitates a focus on individual changes and the embeddedness of collective experiences to bring about sustainable reform. That is, at the psychological level, the capacity of an individual to learn from past errors, for example, and the development of skills through collective learning and experience. The blending of uniqueness (of individuals) and the integration of their human resources that is required for organisational activity needs to be understood. A sustainability focus enhances understanding of the need for a 'chaordic systems thinking' approach. That is, understanding that organisational and individual capabilities are founded on complexity stemming from such integration (Kira et al., 2008).

For sustainability therefore, transformational change is required in policy as well as how people function and behave. This point strongly influences the need for transformational learning in any subsystem, such as staff training in organisations which should simultaneously aim at individual, organisational and societal change (Sauvage & Smith, 2004). A United States study on the impact of transformative and restorative learning on mobilising people for sustainable societies, revealed that intentional educational initiatives focused on changes of world views and habits of thinking, and people's modes of relatedness to the world around them can effect change toward sustainability (Lange, 2004). The participants in this and similar studies demonstrated a significant disillusionment with their potential as individuals to influence the problems which they observed around them. Essentially, the objective was to develop an active public sphere where the personal and the social can be better connected for sustainability. Lange states that:

The raison d'être of critical transformative learning is to provoke a change at the radix or root of social systems that will facilitate a move beyond the existing form, including alienated social relations (2004, p. 24).

In this study however, the participants' existing ethics were revealed as not requiring transformation but restoration to a 'rightful place in their lives and in society at large' (Lange, 2004, p. 130). It was found that core values of participants were not missing but had been submerged (Lange, 2004). What is interesting about this area of research is that it reveals that it is possible to directly influence peoples' behaviour toward value based common goals *and* to broader ecological and global human concerns (Lange, 2004, p. 131). The findings suggest that participants demonstrated a 'renewed sense of relationships - both intimate *and global*' (my italics) (Lange, 2004, p. 131). In this case, the emphasis is on mechanisms for transformation through pedagogical advances in how to reduce the barriers to social action as in many contexts, there is a sense of futility and cynicism about how people as individuals or in groups can influence larger systemic deep seated social problems, including environmental ones.

An Australian study on citizen participation in local systems explored the experiences of citizen community groups and local government to enhance community building of capacity for sustainability. This inquiry found that:

Sustainability initiatives in Australia might best be implemented through a collaborative approach at the local community level involving local citizens working in partnership with local government (Cuthill, 2002, p. 79).

Earlier research in this area and supporting more recent studies such as Lange's research as mentioned above, argued for sustainability education that develops 'critical thinking, reflection and action skills needed to make life long decisions about the nature of a better world' (Fien & Tilbury, 2002, p. 25). One participant in the Australian study however, points to the reality that in Australia:

They (local community members) haven't been taught... to actually value their own participation in society (Cuthill, 2002, p. 81).

Other studies have focused on organisations and their adaptability to achieve

sustainability through deep learning:

Flexible institutional arrangements and management strategies that promote continual adaptability and learning that is, deep and transformative learning, are identified as traits with the greatest potential to guide systems towards 'inter temporally sustainable outcomes' (Sarriot et al., 2004, p. 4).

However, more importantly, as one participant in the above study put it on speaking about the sustainability of primary health projects in child health:

When we think of sustainability (our NGO) we think more in terms of, especially at the community level a well functioning health system... We should be able to say... this is a community that understands what the health issues are, for maternal and child mortality; understands why moms and kids die and knows what they can do about it. And they... look on it as... a well functioning social system that almost becomes part of the culture (Sarriot et al., 2004, p. 9).

It is argued that sustainability inevitably requires a deep learning of causes, moral purpose and continuity of participation of a variety of actors to embed what has been learned. This has been described as a 'critical democratic pedagogy for self and social change' (Shor, 1992, p. 85). Such understanding arises from a critical awareness of social phenomena that shapes the particular situation or social problem. Freire called this awareness a critical social consciousness (1970). As an educational and learning process this 'consciousness' describes people and organisations which can make connections between specific social problems and the larger social context such as revealed in Lange's study. Similarly, as Brown has stated in writing about transformative leadership education for social justice and equity:

Critical social consciousness is an enlightened awareness of tangible social structures that affect the community. They include resource allocations, planning and decision making policies as well as less tangible structures such as values and beliefs that influence perceptions as to what is possible, appropriate and desirable (2004, p.78).

Another Australian study on sustainability education has described the characteristics of deep learning as the extraction of meaning and understanding from text *and* experiences

(Warburton, 2003). The findings link deep learning with the triple bottom line of the three domains of sustainability as discussed in Chapter 2, which encourages meaningful dialogue across the conventional disciplines. This is generalisable across any learning environment by identifying the key concepts involved in the environmental, economic and social domains and considering the interpretations and implications of each concept (Warburton, 2003). I will return to some of the implications of this process in Chapter 7 when discussing the potential operationalisation of the new model of sustainability. It is argued that the corollary of a non-integrative approach that is, retreating to a single discipline such as economics, sociology or environment science alone to explain the connections between the three domains to seek solutions to problems is a barrier to sustainability (Dovers, 2001; Warburton, 2003).

The capacity of all levels of systems to *purposefully* aim for a holistic worldview, and particularly to connect the personal with the social and the local with the global concerns, necessitates that this focus is also directed to the domains of knowledge and the practitioner / professional layer of activity in the human services. A significant finding across the general literature on sustainability as well as in the data sample reveals that interdisciplinary thinking and learning is a major strategy for crossing the philosophical and practical divides of the traditional disciplines.

Cultures of inquiry

Deep learning involves the ability of individuals and organisations to adapt in the midst of changes (Johnson et al., 2004). Similar to the importance of participation of citizens in developing an active public sphere, staff involvement in human services organisations should contribute to a culture that values broad based participation in working towards program and social sustainability (Mancini & Marek, 2004; Sauvage & Smith, 2004). As

argued earlier in this chapter, to achieve the breadth of participation necessitates that staff education and training are matched with program goals and needs and societal goals and needs (Sauvage & Smith, 2004). In the Sutherland Shire of Sydney, for example, a local council initiated a sustainability education program for its managers when trying to improve sustainability outcomes through organisational change (Keen, Mahanty, & Sauvage, 2006). In this study it was recognised that simply an awareness of sustainability concepts was not sufficient to bring about the desired outcomes. The emphasis of any education on sustainability needed to address barriers preventing individuals from themselves being more sustainable and therefore it needed to link personal change to organisational change. Additionally, policies were required which strongly linked workforce, program, system and social sustainability (Keen, Mahanty, & Sauvage, 2006). This necessitates a deep learning culture of staff involvement with adaptability and creativity, and education and training that enhance the connectivity between policy and practice and between learning and experience (Mancini & Marek, 2004).

Interdisciplinary thinking and learning: crossing the divides

The capacity of systems to integrate their approaches and functions as a response to the multidimensionality and multi-causality of social problems has already been noted in Chapter 4 as a significant factor in progress to sustainability. This point highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration *and* integration of knowledge and function in the human services as conditions for deep learning. Deep learning is conceptual and value based and given the unusual breadth of the sustainability agenda, Warburton suggests that a unifying framework is required which permits meaningful dialogue across disciplines (2003).

The unifying framework that was presented in the latter study refers to a pedagogical

process which identifies key concepts and principles to identify and address various meanings and the implications of each concept across disciplines and sectors. Such principles identified included diversity, resilience and equity across the three dimensions of sustainability (Warburton, 2003). A unifying framework also requires: 'analytical skills, cross referencing, imaginative reconstruction and independent thinking which are characteristics of deep learning' (Warburton, 2003, p. 45).

Cross disciplinary learning and experiences provide some capacity to focus on the integration of potentially convergent yet disparate discourses and methodologies based on traditions and cultures. Wilson for example, expounds the theory of consilience, the unity of all knowledge, focusing on the great divide between natural science and the social sciences. He calls for a unity of knowledge that at least in theory and, taking a non-reductionist position, sits well with sustainability thinking (1998). However, pragmatically new ways are necessary to be able to 'transcend conventional disciplinary structures and processes' (Warburton, 2003, p. 44). This includes the professional and managerial barriers as discussed earlier in this thesis in the context of social work and management practice in organisations. The importance of interdisciplinary activity and learning for sustainability suggests that a re-emphasis is needed in social work policy practice to find ways of crossing the boundaries. This point is taken up further in Chapter 7.

In summary, the importance of inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary learning as conditions for deep learning cannot be underestimated for progress to sustainability. Interdisciplinary learning in the human services is generally considered to be a fundamental principle of policy and practice with an emphasis on co-operation and

collaboration. However, human services have not necessarily recognised the need for a more open dialogue as suggested by studies such as Warburton's study on a unifying framework, to identify and act on the subjective priorities that become the issues for decision making at all levels of governance.

Deep learning through collaboration

A study which focused on the role of collaboration for organisational sustainability described collaboration as a process that involved:

...a cooperative, inter-organisational relationship that is negotiated in an ongoing communicative process and which relies on neither market nor hierarchical mechanisms of control (Hardy et al., 2003, p. 322).

This description of collaboration is useful as it is inclusive enough to encompass a wide range of arrangements - consortiums, alliances, joint ventures, roundtables, networks, associations and yet provides critical characteristics that distinguish these from other forms of inter-organisational activity such as inter-departmental boards. These collaborative institutions are seen to promote capacity of any activity at a community or organisational level into a larger system and this it is argued, facilitates sustainability (Blank et al., 2000; Hardy et al., 2003; Cheney et al., 2004). The collaborative processes referred to in this context are essentially about promoting a culture of values and outcomes rather than one driven by regulation or competition (Blank et al., 2000).

Effective collaboration requires the identification of stakeholders who understand and support the goals of programs for example, and who are actively involved in meeting identified objectives (Mancini & Marek, 2004). Collaborative practice facilitates the transfer of existing knowledge and 'facilitates the creation of new knowledge and produces synergistic solutions' (Hardy et al., 2003, p. 1). In other words, it argues that the combined effect and knowledge generated through collaboration is greater (and

better) than the sum of separate efforts. The importance of knowledge creation has, in particular, been noted by researchers who have studied the role of alliances on sustainability (Suggs, 2000). Hardy and colleagues have also studied the role of networks and alliances for sustainability and view the knowledge that is generated through collaborative institutions:

...as a property of communities of practice or networks of collaborating organisations rather than a resource that can be generated and possessed by individuals (Hardy et al., 2003, p. 2).

As research on local partnerships has demonstrated, sustainability initiatives are best implemented through a collaborative approach at the local community level that involve local citizens working in partnerships at *all levels of government* but particularly with local government (Cuthill, 2002; Hardy et al., 2003; Rogers, 2005; Crowley, 2008). A United States study on the outcomes of community partnerships in health professionals' education in delivering community based health programs found that sustainability of the partnerships after funding ceased was achieved by implementing multidisciplinary educational models. This included strategies of complementary missions, partnership boards and joint faculty development (Harris, 2000). However, for sustainability, the aim should not be to replace one power with another but to develop collaborative processes which are based on trust and co-operation between people and governments (Cuthill, 2002).

The findings of these latter Australian studies suggest that collaborative action between local stakeholders will facilitate local development processes for a sustainable community. This type of research on sustainability in community settings has influenced major policy initiatives in Australia. For example, the evaluation of the Australian Government's *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004*, a major project

based community initiative, used sustainability indicators such as levels of participation, community capacity building, and the building of partnerships as the basis of the national evaluation of the roll out of programs under this strategy (Rogers, 2005). Drawing on diffusion theories, this significant evaluation found that projects that provide opportunities for communities to educate themselves on what facilitates sustainability such as building social capital and participation, resulted in enhanced access to decision making processes, partnerships and empowerment through community mobilisation (Rogers, 2005).

Other Australian studies in the field of child and family early intervention consider that the crux of sustainable community practice is:

...relevance of the early years knowledge base and good practice examples of how to share and implement... information in community settings... If based on sound knowledge and good processes that achieve participation many of the 'early years' projects will not only survive but thrive and continue to develop (Orr, 2004, p. 15).

These studies demonstrate the link between developing individual knowledge and skills, and the development of social capital through knowledge creation, networks and community involvement. Collaboration was also found to be a significant factor for long term success of programs in the fields of community health, primary health and health promotion (Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998; Sibthroe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005). Collaborative practices for sustainability involve integrative strategies for building bridges across service sectors which also support practitioners to engage with community members (Orr, 2004). At another level, and resonating Wilson's philosophy of the unit of knowledge (1998), collaboration for sustainability also requires crossing disciplinary boundaries both in the humanities and science with a balance achieved 'between deductive reasoning... and... ability to describe the meaning of what they know'

(Warburton, 2003, p. 45). This idea implies that sustainability necessitates different ways of knowing that considers different epistemologies which do not exclude scientific methods of knowing. This thesis resonates from Norgaard's (1994) ideas on the co-evolution of society and the environment and will be taken up again in the concluding chapter. In the context of the above study findings this point is essentially about a focus on the importance of contextual interpretations for successful collaboration. The corollary of this position suggests that stakeholders need to construct explicit descriptions of how they see specific problems that is, subjectively, and particularly, current practices which they interpret as unsustainable. As an element of collaborative practice, according to Wilson stakeholders in reality would find it easier to identify practices which are unsustainable without necessarily identifying a much harder task of the elements of that un-sustainability or their prioritisation (Wilson, 2005).

In a commentary on sustainability, Wilson suggests that defining the core conflicts in organisations and communities would be a first step. As sustainability necessitates cross disciplinary and cross-sectoral practice at all levels, 'stakeholders are forced to read and interpret language models and references that are outside their home domains' (Wilson, 2005, p. 2). As noted in Chapter 4, the importance of cross-sectoral policy and action for achieving sustainability has political implications, as responses to intractable social problems generally involve changes to many social and economic policies. Therefore, it does not make sense to treat complex social problems as sectoral issues which are then left to the responsibility of one minister or one department to address (*Yencken & Wilkinson, 2000*).

In summary, multidisciplinary effects in governance arrangements for planning and

implementation of programs also need to be considered in order to sustain the desired outcomes of programs (Harris et al., 2003, p. 9). Although inter-professional and interdisciplinary learning is an accepted principle and strategy in human services policy and practice, the reality is that it mostly remains program based and rarely is ‘learning and acting together’ seen as a longer term policy priority shared across the sectors.

Leadership

The strong, positive effect of interactive, collaborative learning has long been established (Vygotsky, 1978, *Chapman et al.*, 2005). Collaborative learning builds the capacity of individuals and groups beyond knowledge towards understanding and action (Chapman et al., 2005). It is also widely acknowledged that good leadership skills promote a culture of inquiry and the development of communities of learning (Fullan, 2005; *Fink*, 2010). Leaders play a particularly important role in complex and uncertain systems, where moral purpose, knowledge creation and coherence of activity in any community or organisation become critical in building sustainability (Fullan, 2005; Kira et al., 2008).

A series of longitudinal studies which focused on evaluating community based program sustainability against identified sustainability indicators found that leadership competence correlated most highly with other facilitating factors including staff involvement, strategic funding, integrating strategies and collaborative practices (Mancini & Marek 1998; 2004). Other studies obtained similar results in community based programs (Johnson et al., 2004; Sanders et al., 2004; Harris et al., 2003). However, leadership, funding and staffing are likely the primary contributors of program success and sustainability (Mancini & Marek, 2004). The skills of leadership such as communicating a shared vision are also vital for gaining commitment to realise opportunities for new insights (Benn & Dumphy, 2005).

This involves a re-evaluation and a conceptual change towards ownership of ideas and ultimately action (*Chapman et al., 2005*).

In this body of work on good leadership as a facilitator of sustainability, researchers more specifically identified the ability of leaders to draw from a diversity of relationships within and across organisations. They also recognised decision makers as conduits for sustainability initiatives identified through reform as good leadership influences system transformation through capacity building³⁶ (Sauvage & Smith, 2004; Fullan, 2004; Benn & Dumphy, 2005; Rogers, 2005). Another study however, has cautiously considered the differences between decision makers and leadership champions implying that there *is* a difference and reinforcing the importance of seeking diversity of participation and empowerment of stakeholders for good decision making (Scheirer, 2005). Nonetheless, in this latter United States meta-review of nineteen empirical studies of program sustainability, Scheirer found that:

The importance of leadership... was shown by the fact that more than three quarters of the studies that examined influences on sustainability cited the importance of a champion, someone who is strategically placed within an organisation to advocate effectively for the program (2005, p. 340).

Australian studies in the sustainability of primary health care also considered that individual champions both locally and nationally are also facilitators of political sustainability, as the timing of policy and program changes to take account of long term program effects requires that decisions are in tune with national policy directions. In summary, the adaptability of complex systems through the activity of champions and networks emerged as critical for sustainability (Cuthill, 2002; Fullan, 2005; Pluye et al., 2004; Sibthorpe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005; Benn & Dumphy, 2005).

³⁶ Capacity building is defined by Rogers as ‘increasing the personal and collective resources of individuals and communities so that they can respond to challenges and seize opportunities...’ (2005, p. 2).

This section presented some examples from the research data which demonstrate the nature and value of deep learning for sustainability. It is argued that the key elements of deep learning such as, reflexivity in policy and practice, strong leadership and a strong interdisciplinary approach and education for sustainability, enhance the connectivity between the objectives of any policy or practice and the outcomes sought. Furthermore, deep learning is enabled through systems thinking which facilitates the development of connections at all levels of social organisation, environmentally, socio-politically and economically. These multidimensional connections reflect the holistic nature of social problems and their solutions (Warburton, 2003).

The construct of participatory democracy

The third construct is that of participatory democracy which emerges from the analysis of the research data sample studies and is supported by theories from the general literature as presented in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. A brief description of the meaning of participatory democracy is provided. This is followed by an analysis of the research sample which demonstrates the value of participatory democratic processes for sustainability in program, organisational and community settings. Linkages are made across these levels to establish the importance of participatory processes for social sustainability as a higher order goal.

What is participatory democracy?

Participatory democracy is viewed as a conceptual expansion of representative democracy which is fundamentally about society's practices in reaching decisions. The formalised processes of democracy are focused on voting, that is, representative democracy as an aggregation of individuals' preferences. More recently over the past two decades, the

deliberative aspects of democracy which require participation of individuals at all levels of social organisation in the transformation of individual's preferences in public forums of discussion have gained attention in the literature (*Dryzek, 2000; Eckersley, 2004; Hendricks, 2006*). Additionally, as *Alvesson and Deetz* have suggested, participatory democracy is a deeper conception of democracy which requires *joint* decisions and a focus on the production of personal identity (1996). This point leads to the idea of participatory democracy which contrasts with representative democracy alone as it seeks to enhance people's participation in the process of decision making (*Ife, 2008*).

Deliberative democracy further expands the meaning of participatory democracy insofar as people can make wiser decisions if they have full access to all the relevant information and time to study and debate important issues. As *Ife* has suggested this is about extending the jury system into the area of policy development from the grass roots (2008). The key element of deliberative democracy is therefore opportunity for all to contribute to and develop policies, and to build their rights rather than to react to what already exists (*Ife, 2010*). Although the field of deliberative democracy is highly contentious, there is growing research interest in making the idea of deliberation more viable and inclusive such as in community development work and:

...one that integrates all kinds of deliberation from the micro to the macro contexts and one that best is described as public deliberation as an activity occurring in a range of discursive spheres that collectively engage a diversity of civil society actors (Hendricks, 2006, p. 489).

For progress to sustainability, this process also translates in the context of organisational settings not as particular structures or activities but 'instead (it is) a very special shared comprehension of the *purpose* (my italics) of the organisation and the way it operates' (*Kira et al., 2008, p. 12*). This systemic view implies a need for dialogue and

understanding across all levels of social organisation of what sustainability means (Kira et al, 2008; Fullan, 2005).

One of the key dimensions for social change is the manner in which governments and societies arrange their administrative and decision making processes and institutions. As more and more support is provided to the idea of governance, more emphasis is placed on community governance, that is, ‘a potential for increased democracy and civic engagement in matters of policy and social development’ (Fawcett et al., 2010, p. 29).

Processes and conditions of participatory democracy for sustainability

Redefining democracy for sustainability

As sustainability requires a focus on holistic, integrative approaches to complex problems to achieve widespread societal goals, participatory democracy becomes a necessary condition as one of its characteristics is to provide:

...an educative process that seeks to facilitate citizen and community empowerment... (to) develop both an understanding of their rights and additionally their responsibilities for the common good ‘ (Cuthill, 2002, p. 61).

This implies normative and ethical processes are involved in participatory democracy. This construct incorporates the idea that the purpose and the interests of people extends the reflexive capacity of the community to be creative in reaching common decisions and goals. Reflexivity is identified as a key element of participatory democracy. It ensures that the diversity of interests is recognised through critical dialogue, not necessarily to achieve consensus but as Dryzek has noted, to develop a collective decision that has been arrived at for different reasons (2000).

This means that for sustainability to be achieved, the opportunities and mechanisms by which people can communicate freely and with purpose to share decision making, are enhanced and should continuously contribute to the development of an overarching purpose in everyday institutions, organisations and societal processes. In reality however, there are many barriers and constraints in reaching common goals. As *Eckersley* argues, given the short term perspective of policy makers in current democratic systems of liberal pluralism, complex issues such as environmental or social sustainability are inevitably downgraded in the competition of power (2004). This view considers that deliberation and not competition must be the basis of governance structures and processes for participatory democracy to develop (*Stewart, 2003; Eckersley, 2004; Benn & Dumphy, 2005; Ife, 2010*). In this context, deliberation refers to an open society where policy decisions for the common good can be influenced through discourse and processes of participation of community members.

The concept of community in participatory democracy

One facilitator of sustainability has been identified as the community's understanding of economic and political considerations related to program planning and implementation for strengthening community engagement (*Mancini & Marek, 2004*). Seen in the context of societal influences on public policy (*Adams & Hess, 2001*), the concept of community has often been associated with good public policy through community involvement, its loss being detrimental to good policy decisions. It has also been associated with the concept of identity and belonging. A sense of community is valued in society. It is a powerful construct, one which has long been recognised as a rhetorical tool in policy and politics (*Ife, 1995*). Similar to the concept of sustainability, *Ife* suggests that:

Despite its problematic nature... the power of the idea is significant as a basis for the organisation and development of alternative social and economic structures

(1995, p. 15).

The word community is significant in the discourse of sustainability. Through the lens of sustainability therefore, democracy is revisited conceptually to include a focus on the development of people's identity and agency in society and for the good of society. Participatory democracy is considered as a necessary reinterpretation of representative democracy if sustainability at all levels of social organisation is to be achieved.

Participation

Participation is a useful concept for understanding sustainability and the conditions that can maximise opportunities for people's productivity, health and well-being (Shannon & Young, 2004; Scheirer, 2005; Nordqvist et al., 2009). Widespread civil and political participation of the population, particularly at a local level, has the effect of spreading gains made for the betterment of society (Lyons et al., 2001). This perspective posits that change is more likely to occur when the people it affects are involved in the change process, such as in community based approaches to health and well-being (Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998; Lyons et al., 2001; Johnson et al., 2004; Crowley, 2008).

Participation as a key mechanism for democracy necessitates a commitment to community goals and an ethical stance which places community needs at least equal to, or above, self-interest. Effective participation involves both micro level, psychological and macro level, socio-political considerations of empowerment (Cuthill, 2002; Hendricks, 2006). To address issues of power requires a focus on ethical considerations of sustainability (Cuthill, 2002). In this study, the practice of local development in Australia, took a 'seeds of change' approach to facilitate broader citizen and local understanding of problems at a local level. This study linked participatory principles of sustainability to Freire's ideas and concepts of empowerment; that citizens should take responsibility for their own backyards and 'as seeds take time to mature so too will this process seeking to develop a citizen and societal 'critical consciousness' (Cuthill, 2002, p. 79). This higher order goal requires widespread political participation of citizens particularly at the local level that involves ways of thinking and working that are inclusive (McKenzie, 2004; Crowley, 2008; Cuthill, 2002).

Establishing relationships between participation, empowerment and sustainability is mostly concerned with how empowerment, as fundamental to participatory democracy, can be achieved (Lyons et al., 2001; Cuthill, 2002; Crowley, 2008). This outcome necessitates connecting with the community to collectively identify its needs and strengths through specific processes that facilitate participation (McKenzie, 2004). However, the quality of the participatory relationship including who is involved (the stakeholders) as well as its purpose has been found to also be important for sustainability. Quality of participation, both of depth and purpose, has been described as a ‘ladder of participation’ which ranges from enforced participation, namely co-option to agency (to work on behalf of and towards for example, the state’s agenda), towards liberating participation (Lyons et al., 2001). This point is highly relevant for understanding the different models of policy development. At one end of the spectrum of participation, generally co-option is based on a top down approach to decision making. Lyons and colleagues considered this type of decision making to result in a ‘failure of participatory involvement as a development approach’, as very little learning takes place and the ownership of decisions is rarely taken (Lyons et al., 2001, p. 68). At the opposite end of the ‘ladder’ is the approach which encompasses grass-roots structures involving control and decision making which is de-centralised, leading to a negotiated power sharing. The point to make here is that understanding the objectives of participation are critical to reflect whether the participation is oppressive or liberating (Lyons et al., 2001).

The importance of local governance

An overview of the developed theories of governance are presented in Chapter 4, it is argued that specific governance arrangements, such as community governance, build resilience at all levels and therefore are able to adapt to socio-political conditions for sustainability (Demirag, 2005). As mentioned in Chapter 4, community governance

denotes a qualitative shift away from the state or the market as the most appropriate provider of social provisions (*Fawcett et al., 2010*). This has implications for how these social provisions are delivered and the impact on their sustainability and ultimately for social sustainability. It is in this context that the construct of participatory democracy is explored.

A study of local governance in Australia focused on community participation mechanisms and whether these are affected positively by partnerships as an institutionalisation of participation (Crowley, 2008). This study of partnerships in local government has found that participation and sustainability are connected through legitimacy. The findings suggest that increased public participation leads to sustainability through increased legitimacy and empowerment. Interestingly, the study also concluded that the efficiency focus of programs and partnerships was found to be less important to sustainability than the elements of participation and empowerment (Crowley, 2008).

Essentially the kind of participation which is in question here includes political participation *and* the uptake of socio-political community resources for influencing policy and action. Crowley's analysis of the state planning initiative, *Tasmania Together*, found that any local governance initiative or partnerships initiative for sustainability cannot be deemed successful unless it is evaluated against more complex criteria of participatory democracy such as legitimacy. Although the program had not achieved the network governance objective of increased legitimacy through public participation in decision making (Crowley, 2008, p. 18), it demonstrated at least a better example of governance, of a participatory framework which was able to actually shift policy making power back to the community.

This finding was in contrast with another earlier Australian sustainability initiative, *Growing Victoria Together* which was not able to demonstrate that participatory processes lead to the empowerment of the community (Crowley & Cofey, 2007). Conclusively however, these researchers argued that in order to progress to social sustainability and empowerment, a deepening democratic engagement needed to be promoted as a key principle of governance arrangements (Crowley & Cofey, 2007; Crowley, 2008). These studies support the link between program and social sustainability through community participatory mechanisms. In this context, Pal asks; how does the notion of making a system sustainable manifest itself at a program level? A further question posed is, how can programs and services be improved to help alleviate or solve a social problem? (1998) Pal suggests that the ‘bottom up’ approach in policy and program development which includes the early participation of stakeholders in planning and defining program objectives is crucial to social sustainability. She concludes that:

The bottom up approach... underlies the whole premise of sustainable alleviation of social problems - this relates to the assumed flow of knowledge and the extent to which end users will be consulted... on the knowledge and resources that they need and that they could use also in the future (1998, p. 454).

It follows that institutional support for policies is required to build and use mechanisms to enhance participation of stakeholders and the up-skilling of the community for the greater good (Pal, 1998; Lyons et al., 2001; Patashnick, 2003; Orr, 2004; Crowley & Cofey, 2007). This is particularly relevant to the field of community development where the locality becomes the focus in the introduction of new infrastructures or activities (Rogers, 1995; McKenzie, 2004). In the development of communities for example, how local and regional governance is conducted is crucial to the adaptation and therefore to the sustainability of that locality (Pal, 1998; Lyons et al., 2001; Maloutas, 2003; Cheney et al., 2004; Thorpe, 2008).

Capacity building: Up skilling the community and organisations, for sustainability

Longevity, flexibility and continuity are key factors for program and social sustainability. As discussed earlier in this chapter, increasingly researchers have expanded their scope of interest to include measures of capacity building for sustainability (Hawe et al., 1997; Johnson et al., 2004; Orr, 2004; Scheirer et al., 2005; Rogers, 2006). Capacity building is a key element for the understanding and assessment of any system and how it develops. For example, the health promotion movement, beginning with the Ottawa Charter,³⁷ emphasised capacity building in communities as a key driver for good outcomes in populations. The movement has influenced more recent sustainability research which supports community processes of appropriation and capacity building as the main drivers for multiplying gains within community based programs (Hawe et al., 1997; Sarriot et al., 2004). Capacity building is both normative and instrumental. Normative development through good communication processes and leadership are required that build on skills in organisations and communities (Benn & Dumphy, 2005). However, as one participant in a study on the sustainability of primary health care delivered by non-government organisations observed:

Capacity building and sustainability... are very different, in that sustainability is about... true benefits or some other important achievement are in fact being sustained... and it is inherently good. Whereas capacity is not inherently good; it has to be used effectively to contribute to a higher order result (Sarriot et al., 2004, p. 12).

The objectives of participation and capacity building therefore, need to be understood in any policy and practice context for progress to sustainability (Lyons et al., 2001). In a

³⁷ On revisiting the Ottawa Charter, the first international conference held on health promotion in 1986 prior to the Brundtland Report of 1987, I am reminded of how influential it has been in setting the agenda for micro and macro policy directions in the health field and beyond. This included: identifying community participation as a primary strategy for reaching health and well-being goals through a *Health for All* agenda by 2000. In its list of conditions necessary for health and well-being of populations it included: peace, a stable eco-system, sustainable resources, social justice and equity.

commentary of early childhood community based programs, Orr identified instrumental factors of capacity building which include skills of co-ordination to share resources, engaging with families, organising and running meetings as contributing to developing participatory strategies. These skills can be seen more broadly as the social capital of the community by using and developing these skills, and that these skills develop broader assets for sustainability (Orr, 2004).

Stakeholder engagement

The theme of stakeholder engagement which is linked to the concepts of legitimacy, empowerment and participation has its roots in the world of business, management and organisational studies (Greenwood, 2007). However, stakeholder engagement is now generally an accepted metaphor in social work, public administration and human services activity³⁸. The term describes a sub-population of people who may have an interest either directly or indirectly from the implementation of a policy, reform or intervention (Collins et al., 2005). Stakeholder theory suggests that stakeholder engagement is important for sustainability as it builds legitimacy (Collins et al., 2005).

In organisational contexts, stakeholder engagement is identified as a characteristic of deliberative democracy. Stakeholders have a purpose of building legitimacy of organisations and therefore an assumption is made that stakeholders sustain organisations through their involvement (Collins et al., 2005). Sustainability inevitably raises questions for public sector and not-for-profit organisations and their decision making capabilities in the broadest sense of skills, structures and their human capital. For this reason the *intent*

³⁸ Stakeholder engagement in the human services domain is morally and ethically based that is, there is a purpose for involving people and it is for better outcomes for them. In the world of business and management, the link between stakeholder engagement and, for example corporate responsibility for better outcomes for the stakeholders is not assumed and is contested (Greenwood, 2007)

of an organisation is critical to its sustainability. That is, its legal and moral basis for existing; the sources of legitimacy that provides it with the authorisation to take action and to provide the resources necessary to continue its activity (*Moore, 2004*). Legitimacy is a characteristic of governance that is actualised through processes of stakeholder engagement and consensus, processes of deliberative democracy and society's key institutions (Cronin & De Greiff, 2000; Kearins & Gilson, 2005).

A 'legitimacy gap' or the lack of or diminishing of an authorising environment threatens sustainability, that is, it is an inhibitor of progress towards sustainability (Collins et al., 2005). One factor is the ability of stakeholders to be able to induce greater responsiveness in the system or organisation, playing roles of guardians of what is presumed to be public interest or public value (*Moore, 2004*; Collins et al., 2005). In human services organisations there is generally a less transparent activity of stakeholder engagement. The importance of identifying staff as stakeholders and their environments as motivators for organisational legitimacy and support, for example, becomes critical to this position. Critical also, are the hidden stakeholders, the voices of sub-populations who would be recipients of services for example, and the capacity of the organisation to provide opportunities for access to services. Rather than necessarily increasing the economic bottom line through stakeholder activity in the human services, engagement by a wide range of stakeholders including the participation of community groups and coalitions, provide a shift in focus towards development rather than growth, for example, and this includes the often compounded growth of professional services.

As it is rarely the case that there is time or resources to accommodate all potential groups who have an interest in the outcomes, the purposive identification of 'hidden'

stakeholders becomes a critical factor for organisations. The role of organisations in progressing towards sustainability can be better understood by exploring the way that stakeholders are identified and in their relationships with the organisation. Indeed, managers for example will respond to the demands of the most powerful stakeholders both internally and externally as ‘power, legitimacy and urgency combine to determine the salience of a particular stakeholder group’ (Collins et al., 2005, p. 5). If power and control are factors, then the question needs to be asked as to whether there is any capacity for greater equality of representation within human services organisations as a fundamental requisite for sustainability. The participatory, instrumental and normative elements of stakeholder engagement lead to a consideration of how the ‘gaps’ in stakeholder participation can be rectified in any given context. A ‘legitimacy gap’ is rarely transparent and managed through a moral and ethical base (Collins et al., 2005). It is argued that such a gap can threaten the sustainability of social institutions and organisations.

Collaborative practices

As discussed earlier in this chapter, it is important to understand the objectives of participation and building capacity in the context of community and organisational activity. It is equally important to understand the objectives and effects of collaboration. Collaboration as a mechanism of diffusion, transfers existing knowledge and facilitates the creation of new knowledge (Haslam et al., 2000; Hardy et al., 2003). In addition to the effects of collaboration on knowledge creation, it has effects generally on structural and functional aspects of human services management and policy decision making, and in particular can impact on strategic change and political effects, all of importance to sustainability outcomes (Hardy et al., 2003). A characteristic that emerges from the research has been the capacity of any activity that is directed at sustainability at any level

to be promoted into a larger system through collaborative processes. That is, to promote a *culture* of values and outcomes rather than one driven by regulation or competition (Blank et al., 2000; Cheney et al., 2004).

One way that participation increases the capacity of programs, for example, is through collaborative processes which actively support program goals with clear responsibilities (Mancini & Marek, 1998; Altman et al., 1995; Akerlund, 2000). This requires, as one determinant of inter-organisational relationships, giving up some autonomy and some independence that would reinforce the external boundaries and reduce the potential for collaboration to achieve long term ends (Suggs, 2000). If the need for boundaries is reduced, then collaboration is enhanced.

This direction reflects similar principles that underpin community development. As highlighted in the discussion on community development and sustainable development activity, and its relationship to the higher order concept of sustainability in Chapter 2, the purpose of community development is 'to re-establish the community as the location of significant human experiences and the meeting of human need' (Ife, 1995, p. 131). This objective is not mutually exclusive to the idea that sustainability necessitates both a focus on community as well as a focus on the larger system. As research on local partnerships has demonstrated, sustainability initiatives are best implemented through a collaborative approach at the local community level that involve local citizens working in partnerships at *all levels of government* but particularly with local government (Cuthill, 2002; Hardy et al., 2003; Crowley, 2008). The findings of these latter Australian studies suggest that collaborative action between local stakeholders will facilitate local development processes for a sustainable community.

Partnerships

Partnerships can be described as relationships that rely on collaboration between independent groups and organisations working for a common purpose (Lyons et al., 2001). A number of characteristics of partnerships have been identified and their role in providing a conduit for local transformation is highly supported by the research evidence (Crowley, 2008; Kernaghan, 2009). It is argued that a true partnership is recognisable for always promoting empowerment by sharing decision making. Partnerships therefore are important for sustainability.

Social partnerships are particularly pertinent to research in the area of sustainable development. The term ‘social partnership’ is used to convey ‘a collaborative action in which organisations from multiple sectors interact to achieve common ends (Lyons et al, 2001). It is argued that without these partnerships, sustainability cannot be reached as this would require a continual growth curve for the maintenance of funded programs or services, and growth has been described as the antithesis of sustainability (*Ife, 1995*). Partnerships are therefore necessary as a counter to growth and as a consequence for sustainability.

In an example from the field of juvenile justice and child protection, researchers developed a tool kit to build sustainability in community based programs through community partnerships (Blank et al., 2000). This study found that community partnerships formed around the problem of child abuse and neglect can build sustainability of service systems. This occurs as they aim to develop community based collaborative solutions in the area of prevention of social problems and by reforming service delivery systems through re-organisation and shift to a community base (Blank et

al., 2000). In other words, jurisdictional governments must do more than provide services and administer programs, but need to find better ways of working with local communities to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Other studies have focused on higher order social sustainability attainment *through* the formation of partnerships at a local level (Mancini & Marek, 1998; Johnson et al., 2004; Crowley & Cofey, 2007; Crowley, 2008). A United States study which addressed sustainability elements for multidisciplinary health professions' education in community development, found that the characteristics of partnerships, such as the formation of boards, strong leadership and accepting change from the outside in, were facilitators of sustainability (Harris et al., 2003). New forms of partnerships across state, market and community may challenge the short term service delivery paradigm and give rise to innovative policy initiatives as a 'touchstone for policy sustainability', in other words, the sustainability of policy is enhanced by community partnerships (Adams & Hess, 2001).

The building of partnerships as contributing to program and social sustainability has been identified in a commentary in the field of early childhood, where it is argued partnerships develop confidence and enhance the social capital (that is, the skills and other resources) of community members (Orr, 2004). Orr posits that:

Sustainability... takes a partnership at a higher level between policy makers, community members and researchers to reach a shared vision... involve more and more participants in that vision (and) recognise the meaning and value of local knowledge about community networks and processes (2004, p. 15).

A series of studies, on developing child health assessment models to achieve program sustainability, found that working through partnerships and building capacity are central strategies in child health (Sarriot et al., 2004). They consider three primary types of partners as facilitators of sustainability in the area of community based health programs.

These are partnerships involving macro structures at the government level, organisational structures and community based structures (Sarriot et al., 2004).

However, partnerships are tenuous institutions as issues shift and priorities change, and although their role in the progress of programs, communities and societies for sustainability is well supported, it is necessary to ask how their vulnerability can be reduced in order to enhance sustainability (Lyons et al., 2001; Sibthorpe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005). In a study of the sustainability of programs in primary health care, the formalising of relationships of networks and champions into partnerships and supported by good structures and processes is argued to increase the stability of co-operation and collaboration (Sibthorpe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005).

To draw further on Crowley's research in Tasmania which was discussed earlier, she defines participatory democracy in fact as a key 'formative aspiration of the partnership endeavor... which is readily constrained by too great an efficiency focus' (2008, p. 18). Sustainability needs more than functional processes such as project implementation based on sound efficiency and effectiveness criteria of good governance, for example. Additionally it needs aspirational goals and an empowerment of the communities at all levels. These deliberative practices need to be directed towards explicit community strengthening in the first instance and ultimately towards social transformation (Crowley, 2008; *Maton, 2000*). However, as stated by Ife in the context of community development, visionary ideals are not particularly fashionable for finding solutions to social problems but such thinking is essential:

The importance of a utopian vision or a 'light on the hill' is not necessarily that it will ever be achieved in full... rather it serves as a source of inspiration for change and as a framework for interpreting and seeking change from the perspective of medium and long term goals instead of being purely reactive (Ife, 1995, p. 99).

Sustainability thinking and action is visionary and transformative but grounded in the reality of finding solutions to environmental, economic and social problems.

Coalitions, alliances and networks

In the next section, I draw on the discussion on participation, collaboration and partnerships as discussed previously in this thesis. These are the elements in the formation of coalitions, alliances and networks. In addition to the role of individual agency, concepts of participation and collaboration give consideration to the institutional processes that are involved in maintaining successful programs, developing communities and influencing public policy. Coalitions, alliances and networks are therefore highly relevant as facilitators to form a broader consensus for policy change and reform (Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998; Suggs, 2000).

An example from the United States is of a ten year longitudinal study on the impact of coalitions following the cessation of funding for projects in the area of youth at risk (Lodl & Stevens, 2002). Some of the factors identified that facilitated sustainability through the building of coalitions in this research included education of the community, community participation and the sharing and spread of resources available through services. Other conditions were identified as the sharing of common goals, responsibility with the use of media for recognition, and the maximising of access to services through collaboration without duplication. All these activities, they concluded, are more easily achieved through coalitions (Lodl & Stevens, 2002). Similarly, other studies supported the development of collaboration through alliances and networks to achieve long term ends

(Suggs, 2000; Shannon & Young, 2004; Scheirer et al., 2008; Nordqvist et al., 2009).

In summary, this section discussed processes and conditions which give meaning to the construct of participatory democracy as imperative for sustainability. Examples of findings from the research sample reinforce broad bottom up stakeholder involvement, collaborative practices and the building of partnerships, alliances, coalitions and networks. This position reinforces the belief in the discourse of transformation, that any activity that is reinforcing capitalism (or growth), rather than development, is detrimental to sustainability (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). In summary, facilitators of sustainability include good governance through participatory democracy and inter-connectedness of government and community which affirms principles of social inclusion and quality of life (Hardy et al., 2003; McKenzie, 2004; Mancini & Marek, 2004; Kira et al., 2008).

The construct of human rights

In this section, a brief description of human rights is presented which is then followed by an analysis of the research data to identify the processes and conditions for sustainability. The field of human rights occupies a vast and contentious area of inquiry. Normatively, politically and in the rule of law, human rights is continuing to strengthen its relevance and momentum for present societies despite its intrinsic dilemmas and controversies. It is not my intention however to explore the many iterations and categorisations of human rights nor the dilemmas and controversies comprehensively. It is deemed sufficient for my purpose to limit discussion to an overview of human rights and explore the concepts identified in my research and that make up the construct of human rights. Nevertheless, the complexity and the dilemmas which are inherent in the discourse of human rights and their implementation are acknowledged. In this overview, I draw particularly on Ife's work whose analytical focus connects the discursive and reflexive interpretations of

human rights which sit well with the goal of sustainability. The corollary of this position, I argue, is the acceptance and implementation of human rights as critical for sustainability.

What are human rights?

Human rights are generally recognised as highly valuable objectives that *all* individuals are inherently entitled to as human beings which differ from the idea of rights constructed for specific groups and by specific groups who are usually in positions of power (Ife, 2001). While the idea of universal human rights of the 17th and 18th Century was about a defense against the excesses of monarchic rule, the systematic codification of such rights at the international level is largely, although not exclusively, a 20th Century development (Reus-Smit, 2001). The most accepted current statement on the idea of human rights lies in the *UN Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948³⁹. In this Declaration, the idea of human rights is based on the intrinsic rights that all persons possess independent of any social convention or social practice. Therefore, they are based on the Kantian view of treating persons as ends in themselves, of fundamental respect for humans (Caney, 2010). Rights defined as grounded in respect for a person's humanity designate the most basic moral standards such as the right to life, food, water, clothing and shelter. The significance of identifying a valuable objective as a human right is essentially about the corresponding enforcement of obligations (Sengupta, 2010). Although the UN Declaration for example, generates obligations to respect these minimum standards it leaves room for a relativist

³⁹ The Declaration was the first multi-national agreement specifying rights to which all people were entitled (Witkin, 1998). The preamble of the Declaration begins with '(the) recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world' (United Nations, 1948). The UN Declaration of Human Rights 1948, as a corollary of the holocaust (see Witkin, 1998), sees the modern beginnings of universal rights in 'an attempt to re-introduce morality and to make it the basis of international law' (Ife, 2010, p. 77). A recent comprehensive national consultation on human rights in Australia found that the vast majority of people consulted support the idea of a National Human Rights Act. A recent report on this vast consultation of almost 25,000 submissions, considered that in spite of popular support for an Act there remains a divergence of views about human rights in the community with a significant group against being politicians (Brennan, 2009).

position which may discriminate against specific groups, such as in capital punishment⁴⁰. At the same time however, these standards leave room for other positive moral ideals and values. For example, it may present ethical dilemmas but it is not mutually exclusive to have an individual's right to quality of life and at the same time to consider the interests of a community towards a common goal.

There is an implicit universalism in human rights and a strong link to sustainability exists because of this principle, whether it can be deemed to have been fully realised through modern conventions or not. This is so as sustainability can be seen as a shared claim for all people to lead worthwhile lives. The idea of universality can also broaden the scope of human rights from a purely legal perspective to give meaning, purpose and direction to many fields including the environment, social work, community development (*Ife & Tesoriero, 2006*), sustainable development and in policy and practice in human services generally (*McGoldrick, 1996*).

A reflexive dimension necessitates an active public sphere and by implication, its importance is on improving a society's negotiations in its own development and future (*Ife, 2010*). This position connects human rights to participation and adds support to a universalist approach as an ideal, whereby all individuals possess the inalienable right to exercise their capacity as agents of change for a better world⁴¹ (*Sen, 2003*). There are positive consequences for present and future generations by embracing a human rights agenda. Taking up the example of poverty, the consequences of anthropogenic climate

⁴⁰ See Article 11 which takes a relativist position through 'due process of law' (United Nations).

⁴¹ Sen's approach to human rights is about capabilities needed for human development and provides a basis for seeing participation as critical to freedom (2003).

change on poverty as a potential violation of human rights⁴² provides opportunities to identify human development indicators or capabilities which require preservation (Sen, 2003). This position taking a moral standards basis to human rights also condemns social and economic trade-offs which would leave many people below the moral threshold for example, of a right to shelter, clean water and food for the purpose of building capital and economic growth. These interpretations of human rights clearly break away from a modernist ideology of growth and development that is, rights as means for the building of human capital for productivity which pays little attention to diversity or a moral purpose. As Ife states in the conclusion of his work on the practice of human rights from below:

..there needs to be a break from the constraints of the enlightenment modernity towards an alternate world view that affirms diversity that transcends the tension between universal and contextual that seeks sustainability rather than increasing consumption and growth and that requires a new contract with the non-human world... the ecological crisis suggests that in the longer term there is probably no alternative to such a change if some form of 'human civilisation' that respects community and humanity is to survive (Ife, 2010, p. 232).

Human rights processes and conditions for sustainability

A moral purpose

When human rights are approached from the perspective of universal, desirable objectives⁴³ for individuals and its ensuing obligations through statutes, it raises the question of the institutions such as the state and other mechanisms which would potentially identify and realise these rights. The protection of basic human rights is integral to the moral purpose of the modern state which licenses the organisation of power

⁴² I am using the terminology as used in the climate change literature that is, it is *anthropogenic*, meaning influenced or caused by human activity.

⁴³ Sen's thesis provides another way of describing these objectives for human well-being, as 'capabilities' which focus on agency aspects of sustainability. He describes these as 'the freedom or ability to lead a life of value in terms of what a person chooses to be or to do' (Sen cited in Sengupta, 2010, p. 86).

and authority into territorially defined jurisdictions⁴⁴ (Reus-Smit, 2001). Seeing human rights from the view of institutional activity also raises the question of legitimacy and public value, values which are inherent in democracies in varying degrees. In the overview in Chapter 6, the idea of broadening the scope of human rights from the top down state directed to bottom up reflexive approach, enabling people to define their rights in order to have them realised and protected, was presented (Ife, 2010). This effectively means giving power to disadvantaged individuals, groups and communities, further raising another question about who it is who is giving power. Empowerment was discussed earlier in this chapter as a concept of the construct of participatory democracy and is realised through participatory democratic processes when the state and its governing institutions base their governance on a moral purpose for governing. That is, a concept and value which when articulated generates high acceptance to what is right and worthwhile.

In his research on sustainability in the field of education and human services generally, Fullan has identified moral purpose of public institutions as a key element of sustainability (2005). For sustainability, he argues, moral purpose transcends individual moral purpose to collectivities committed to three aspects of decision making and action in the human services:

...raising the bar of effort and quality; closing the gaps of access and equity; treating people with respect and altering the social environment for the better (Fullan, 2005, p. 15).

⁴⁴ Reus-Smit's thesis raises an important issue with regard to the sovereignty of the state and human rights. He argues that 'human rights and sovereignty can be seen as constructed institutions embedded also in other constitutive norms and values and not fixed where communicative processes continuously transform the two institutions' (2001, p. 538). He argues that human rights and sovereignty are components of a single discourse of legitimate statehood.

That is, of adaptive capacities for transformation. He suggests that what is different about these values and principles to those of current human services as institutions, is that all elements of sustainability have to be taken together and seriously and once pursued in combination compel all levels of the system to take moral purpose seriously (Fullan, 2005).

In reality however, the state system remains the primary source of power and obligations to ensure that directly or indirectly or through influencing other agents that human rights are promoted and fulfilled (*Sengupta, 2010; Brennan, 2009*). Human rights therefore remain predominantly about the dominant discourses reflected in government institutions and their formal documents which cover economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. These documents mostly reflect a state obligation tradition of human rights. As argued, however, covenants and statutes are not enough to ensure that human rights are realised and protected and therefore for sustainability. It is not possible to move substantially toward sustainability in the absence of a widely shared moral purpose at all levels of social organisation (Fullan, 2005).

The concept of universal equity

As seen in Chapter 2, sustainability should logically incorporate equity, inclusion and justice issues and its relevance to societies. These values are also intrinsic to a universalist understanding of human rights (*Ife, 2010*). As mentioned also in Chapter 2, sustainability originated through concern for environmental issues that were impacted upon by economic forces. However, the concept developed into dimensions for the improvement of the living and working conditions of developing countries (*WCED, 1987; Rio Summit 1997*). This has included the development of universal social equity as a goal of sustainability however, mainly as a means to realise social cohesion which makes for a

more sustainable resource management, rather than as an end in itself (WCED, 1987; Maloutas, 2003). Nevertheless, this development makes the concept of universal equity implementable through the development of indicators that facilitate equity and justice and therefore influence sustainability (Cheney et al., 2004). Sustainability requires equity and fairness as:

...ecological survival is only possible in social equity with participatory control and community involvement in establishing the criteria for indicators which would reflect the quality of life and sustainability of communities (Shannon & Young, 2004, p. 277).

The criteria would aim at increasing 'common good' resources. This means that a collective moral purpose would recognise planning for equitable distribution of public resources such as clean air and water so that ecosystem functions are maintained and a shared resource is available to all (Shannon & Young, 2004). The development of criteria from the principles of universal equity as a value based on a moral purpose is seen as a progressive step for sustainability (Pope et al., 2004). The development of sustainability assessments⁴⁵ as important tools for the shift to sustainability (Pope et al., 2004) involves building criteria that would encompass increases in access, equity and human rights in the provision of security, for example, and for effective choices (Pope et al., 2004). Some of the principles developed by the Western Australian Government in their sustainability strategy were the principles of equity and human rights. They have documented that:

Sustainability recognises that an environment needs to be created where all people can express their full potential and lead productive lives and that significant gaps in sufficiency, safety and opportunity endanger the earth (Pope et al., 2004, p. 612).

⁴⁵ With its origins in environmental assessments, Pope and colleagues describe sustainability assessments as processes by which the implications of an initiative for example, a program or policy or legislation on sustainability are evaluated. It is important to recognise that most current assessments fail to address sustainability as a societal goal (2004).

Other principles pertaining to human rights and reflected in the above strategy would recognise the significance and diversity of community and regions for the management of the earth and the critical importance of a 'sense of place' and heritage in any sustainability planning (Pope et al., 2004). These criteria aim to build up community and regions with the goal to minimise trade-offs through real integrative processes (George, 2001; Pope et al., 2004).

An Australian study of rural communities in Victoria constructed social indicators which were subsequently validated to reflect the key factors in the social dimensions of sustainability and in particular to assist in social planning in a rural context (Pepperdine, 2000). The findings on the elements that contribute to social sustainability versus social disintegration in rural communities included cohesion and community mindedness, inclusiveness and participation in employment, attachment to the local environment, economic viability and population stability (Pepperdine, 2000).

Sustainability depends on the mechanisms developed for the realisation of the equitable distribution of resources. These include sub-political structures (*Beck, 1992*) such as consultative committees, citizen groups and as mentioned earlier in this chapter, coalitions, alliances and collaborative strategies at organisational and community levels of social organisation. These structures and processes of participation are a critical force because the closed, top down decision making of powerful bureaucracies and corporations are 'no longer effective, appropriate or acceptable to resolve the major emerging issues of sustainability (Benn & Dumphy, 2005).

Justice and dialogue for social change

One of the specific contributions that the social dimension brings to sustainability is the emphasis on the core values of justice and dialogue (Cheney et al., 2004). This latter study in the field of sustainable development ‘explicitly adopts justice as a normative value’ identifying those who are excluded and purposefully including them through enhancing participation and making power relations transparent (Cheney et al., 2004, p. 230). These authors have argued that the theoretical traditions concerned with justice and dialogue have been particularly valuable in extending the social change potential of the sustainability discourse. In practice, for example, this has meant the inclusion of poverty concerns into policy cycles in sustainable development activity (Cheney et al., 2004). They suggest that social research in the field of sustainability requires these kinds of approaches that are normative to ensure the quality of outcomes in human services through ethical processes.

It is difficult however to separate social goals from political goals in the field of sustainability. For example, in the field of the environment, sustainability can be seen as a political construct with resulting decision making taking a top down approach, aiming to legitimate policy with inherent social goals. In contesting environmental policy however, the political nature of sustainability becomes obvious with the inversion between society and nature occurring, where the social goals are reintroduced as dominant mainly for the purpose of preserving natural resources. Equity is in this context, ‘no longer an end in itself but only services to justify the good management of natural resources’ (Maloutas, 2003, p. 175). However, equity as an end in itself is what we want to sustain (McKinnon, 2008).

Decision makers from many disciplines are involved in the implementation of policies

related to equity and justice concerns. The sustainability of organised efforts to respond to people in need for example, will likely be influenced by the extent to which equity is in the foreground of national, state and local policy (Sibthorpe, Glasgow & Wells, 2005a, p. S79). It is argued that the integrative concept of sustainability may be a better paradigm than purely management frameworks through which to address justice principles as part of decision making (Syme & Nancarrow, 2002; *McKinnon, 2008*). This point will be taken up again when discussing the usefulness of sustainability in the human services in Chapter 7.

Restorative justice

In his study of restorative justice, Braithwaite develops a clear relationship between the micro local practices that can be restorative within a social justice framework and the higher objectives of achieving for example, peace, security, anti-oppression and sustainability (2002). It is argued that a consideration of restorative justice principles is highly relevant to the realisation of human rights and therefore to sustainability. Restorative justice as a value is most commonly defined as what it is an alternative to. For example, as an alternative to retributive forms or rehabilitative forms of justice and at its core is a less punitive justice system (Braithwaite, 2002). The processes of restorative justice are equally important to consider in bringing together all stakeholders in an *un-dominated* dialogue about the consequences of an injustice and what is to be done to put it right and to move forward. However, without the value base the process may be as retributive or punitive as other processes. Braithwaite focuses on restorative practices where the aim is to solve the problem and not to point the finger at what subjectively society believes people deserve.

A restorative justice approach taken by human services workers for example, would mean that policy and practice would be concerned with acknowledging any violation of human rights, rather than retribution for wrong doing to recompense the people affected. Based on Gandhian principles of non-violence, restorative justice would: ‘seek(s) to ‘restore’ dignity, property, peace, safety, community, respect or whatever else was violated...’ (Ife, 2001, p. 23). In another example, Rees takes a minimalist approach to human rights practice and argues for ‘a strategy of advocating human rights by beginning with an irrefutable claim, the abolition of cultures of fear’ (2003, p. 195). As we have seen in earlier in this chapter, removing fear as a barrier to learning enables empowerment, participation and the building of reflexive capacities. It is argued that deep learning enhances the potential for people to identify and realise their human rights. Restorative values and processes promote deep learning as they have the potential to reduce cultures of fear.

Another example of the meaningfulness of restorative justice in the context of human rights is demonstrated in the area of sustainable development. Braithwaite has described sustainable development as a condition for peace. He argues that:

Sustainable development is crucial to peace if we frame it as giving priority to those who have been left behind in the economic struggle - the poor of the developing world and just as... restorative practices and the values of restorative justice have a useful contribution to make to peace in the world, so they have something to offer sustainable development that is one of the conditions for that peace (2002, p. 211).

An important point about restorative practices in the context of sustainability is that without responsive regulation⁴⁶ and responsible regulation, development and

⁴⁶ I am using responsive regulation as defined by Braithwaite as the idea that governments and other institutions should be responsive to the conduct of those they seek to regulate in deciding whether a more or less interventionist response is needed. That is, regulating responsibly. A regulatory pyramid was conceived by Ayres and Braithwaite (1992) as commencing with persuasive and self regulating mechanisms escalating towards civil and criminal penalties (2002, p. 31).

sustainability may be irreconcilable. As Braithwaite explains, purely restorative justice without the backing of enforcement mechanisms is likely to result in a win for growth and economic development rather than for sustainable development (2002).

Inter-generational equity

As stated in Chapter 2, the concept of inter-generational equity was fundamental to the Brundtland Report's definition of sustainability and underpinned by theoretical and the philosophical concepts of justice and fairness. The value base of this concept is understood to be about an obligation to sustain quality of life for future generations (WCED, 1987; Thompson, 2003). In the context of human rights, the argument has involved over the past few decades, a temporal extension of human rights which implies a moral obligation on present generations to protect and respect the human rights of future ones (Ife, 2001, p. 35). Present generations can be held accountable for *past* violations of human rights and it follows that present generations can also be held accountable for their impact on future ones (Ife, 2010). This point is supported from the perspective of the future world that is grounded in universalism and human rights:

We cannot abuse and plunder our common stock of natural assets and resources leaving the future generations unable to enjoy the opportunities we take for granted today. We cannot use up or contaminate our environment as we wish violating the rights and the interests of the future generations. The demand for sustainability is in fact a particular reflection of universality of claims - applied to the future generations vis a vis us (Anand & Sen, 2000, p. 2029).

Inter-generational equity implies a moral purpose

In Chapter 5, taking a long view of history was presented as a key principle for sustainability. Human rights, as a key construct of sustainability should also be approached with a long view as explained earlier, connecting the past, present and the future.

Generally, inter-generational fiscal obligations including the preservation of natural resources have been a main focus of government policies nationally and internationally. These obligations have been related to other obligations including quality of life indicators such as social inclusion (Thompson, 2003). The principle of inter-generality is not simply restricted to the area of fiscal or environmental concerns however, such as climate change. Intractable social problems such as poverty, disadvantage and failure to thrive of the present generations can have long term negative effects on human, economic and natural capital, realisable in future generations. Thompson argues that the discourse of inter-generational equity and justice needs to go beyond the economic and capital stock, toward an integrated intergenerational social contract (2003). Under the principles and goals of sustainability, this contract could broaden the obligations of government and society toward that of futurity and the well-being of future generations beyond the fiscal (Thompson, 2003).

An example of inter-generational policy is the Commonwealth Government of Australia's intergenerational reporting that is based on the requirements of the *Charter of Budget Honesty Act* 1998. The Act requires intergenerational reports to assess the long term sustainability of current government policies over the 40 years following the release of the report. These reports, intended to be released every 5 years, are meant to play an ongoing role in providing policy settings and feedback into the future (Thompson, 2003). Discussion of intergenerational equity is often associated with deferred tax burdens and is framed in terms of 'fiscal sustainability'. In line with the accepted inclusion of inter-generational equity in the discourse and definition of sustainability as discussed in Chapter 2, this is about requiring that the present generation not impose budgetary burdens on future generations. This point could become a circular argument and dilemma

however, whereby the issues are around what should in fact be preserved and whether what is in the present is meaningful to the future. However as *Sengupta* states:

The moral value of sustaining what we now have depends on the quality of what we have and the entire approach to... sustainable development directs us as much (therefore) toward the present as toward the future (2010).

Thompson concludes in her analysis of the legislation on intergenerational reports that contested questions about intergenerational equity are then not fiscal or economic but philosophical and ethical ones which introduce issues of moral purpose and obligation intrinsically about the present and the future (2003).

Inter-generational equity and social sustainability

McKenzie, in writing about social sustainability as a high priority would see intergenerational equity become part of all human services policy making, in setting the objectives of programs and services and social sustainability (2004). Intergenerational equity as a focus of sustainability is of course a critical political issue as it involves the potential for the redistribution of resources (Warburton, 2003). With this approach to policy making, the consistent evaluation of critical ideas such as limits to resources and their redistribution and including intergenerational equity would be part of the operationalisation of the principles of sustainability (Warburton, 2003).

Much research has been directed since the WCED report, on identifying and finding strategies and processes to find measures of sustainability that are accessible to a wider variety of policy makers in what are essentially political and human rights notions of intergenerational equity (Schlossberg & Zimmerman, 2003). The incorporation of empirically based strategies and measures of equity and intergenerational equity in much human services activity underpinned by a moral purpose could see a narrowing of the gap

between objectives and outcomes for present and future generations and therefore for progress to sustainability (Thompson, 2003).

In summary, there is an acceptance of a nexus between human rights and sustainability. It is argued that this position directs policy and practice in human services to focus on a moral purpose, equity and intergenerational equity, justice, participation and decision making opportunities at individual, community and jurisdictional levels. Rees states that an understanding of human rights is accessible to all. With the potential for universal understanding comes the capacity to make a contribution to solving society's problems (2003).

Chapter summary

This chapter has explored four constructs of sustainability that are considered critical for progress to sustainability at all levels of social organisation. These constructs have been developed through a methodology of thematic synthesis as explained in Chapter 5. It is argued that the synthesis has provided a rich source of information about the state of public policy making and practice in human services domains that have a focus on sustainability. The research process has incorporated the findings of this research culminating in the identification of the four constructs of sustainability into the building of new model of sustainability. The four constructs are therefore part of the new model that connects sustainability to policy practice in human services. This is the subject of the next, concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 7: KEY FINDINGS: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF SUSTAINABILITY

Introduction

In this thesis I sought to understand the utility and value of the concept of sustainability in policy, reform and practice in human services. The main objectives of the research as introduced in Chapter 1 were twofold; first, to seek answers to the above research question and to the question of the sustainability of programs and projects. Secondly, to build a model of sustainability from the research that could be used in human services.

In order to answer the research questions it was critical to understand the nature of the concept, its history and particularly the ‘social’ in sustainability. Additionally, it was necessary to understand the key theories and policy processes that used in human services to address social problems. This body of knowledge was the subject of Chapters 2, 3 and 4 where I also sought to understand the strengths and limitations of current policy models in order to provide a foundation for the purpose of exploring alternatives.

The nature of the study of social problems and public policy necessitated a constructivist epistemology which was discussed in Chapter 5. The analysis of the research data sample of sixty-five studies of sustainability in human services and in related domains, demonstrated that the concept of sustainability was considered valuable for informing policy practice particularly in the area of program development. However, gaps were identified and this included a lack of both an accepted meaning of sustainability and a value based model of policy practice for sustainability in human services. The aim of a value based model would be to better integrate the economic, environmental and the

social dimensions of sustainability and to connect policy practice activity at all levels of social organisation to higher sustainability goals. In developing a policy for sustainability in human services, it was argued that it was necessary to identify levels of social organisation which are the focus of change, the organisations and programs which are the instruments of change and the outcomes sought (Swerisson & Crisp, 2004). It was argued that sustainability goals were imperative for human services and ultimately for societal health and well-being. Therefore, a model of sustainability that would assist in reaching these goals could be useful and valuable. A model emerged that viewed policy models as useful and valuable if they incorporated a number of different perspectives. These included a social constructionist approach that uses and mobilises knowledge in the process of governing as well as seeing the reality of policy as negotiation and contest within a political environment (Colebatch, 2006). A model of sustainability which is presented below is based on this approach and on the four constructs of sustainability which emerged from the analysis of the research data sample. These constructs were presented in Chapter 6.

In this concluding chapter, the key findings from the research, including a model of sustainability for use in human services, are presented. As the concept of sustainability was found to be critical for good outcomes in policy, reform and practice, some potential applications of the model in specific functions and domains in human services are explored. Some limitations of the research are also discussed. Finally, I offer some concluding remarks with some ideas for further research.

Key findings

In this section, an overview of the four constructs as key outcomes of my research are presented. This is followed by a discussion of findings that emerged from my analysis across the four constructs as presented in Chapter 6. I have not however, organised this material strictly against each construct as these are integrative concepts that should be applied holistically.

The four constructs of sustainability

The key outcome of this research was the identification of four constructs of sustainability. They form the basis of the model of sustainability that is presented later in this chapter. It was argued that the constructs of adaptation, deep learning, participatory democracy and human rights can direct policy, reform and practice in human services. These constructs offer functional imperatives such as the importance of longevity in human services programs, and values such as a moral purpose that have been found to be essential for meeting the goals of sustainability. Each of the four constructs represents specific and critical aspects of sustainability that are interrelated and need to be understood *together* to fully understand sustainability. The constructs contain the essential meanings and implications of sustainability that are important for making good decisions for the well-being of societies. The constructs are useful and valuable conceptualisations for human services as they expand the purpose of human services *outwards* to a higher goal for societies. At the same time they reinforce and incorporate societal goals that already have legitimacy in their own right, such as human rights and broad participation of civil society. The constructs contain key principles to guide the scope, structure and function of human services. They can direct and potentially operationalise the shift to sustainability as they are based on fundamental principles for

socio-ecological change.

The constructs can therefore be seen as four interrelated, higher order principles of sustainability in their potential to influence socio-ecological processes. An assumption made in this research is that the current relationship between nature and society is not sustainable and therefore this requires a re-orientation of the economy, politics and cultural change. It is argued that the research findings of the four constructs point to this re-orientation that take account of both the social and natural systems. This necessitates a value system that takes into account the parallel care of both the natural and social systems and their subsystems. Socio-ecological systems are complex and not easily predicted. Therefore, there is not just one pathway to sustainability (Littig & Griebler, 2005), and the constructs that form the basis of the model assume that there can be a selection of paths to sustainability based on its principles.

A socio-ecological perspective

This thesis has argued that society's problems can best be understood through a socio-ecological paradigm. Furthermore, setting the theoretical basis for this research as systems based and constructivist has assumed that contexts of policy practice will always be unique. It was also assumed that the identification of principles of sustainability that emerged from the research provided the generalisability needed that is, the potential application of principles to processes in human services. Fundamental to this approach is seeing policy, reform and practice as processes that are examinable in order to identify conditions for sustainability in context. Additionally, as conveyed in Chapter 3, human services are important sites for social change and therefore for policy development and reform. Yet there is a general lack of understanding about how change occurs in human

services organisations, for example through the diffusion of ideas, and particularly how knowledge of social change can be channeled for sustainability.

The integration of social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability

An identified barrier from previous research was the effect of current political and bureaucratic environments within which most human services function. This has compartmentalised human services activity and reduced the capacity to address social problems holistically and to achieve the intended outcomes. Furthermore, at a higher level, the compartmentalisation of activity and resources influences the potential integration of the key dimensions of sustainability. Sustainability seeks to integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions for better outcomes for nature and society. As discussed in Chapter 2, the compartmentalisation of the economic, social and environmental dimensions that has generally been manifested in practice and in research is a feature of current sustainability thinking and policy practice. For sustainability however, the world needs to be seen as non-compartmentalised but integrated into a socio-ecological system. As King and colleagues have stated:

A common understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of biophysical and social sciences is the key to creating a joint platform for the sciences helping them to develop common objectives and a unified or at least a significantly overlapping world view (King et al., 2007 p. 88).

My research demonstrated that the three dimensional model has not been useful in reaching social goals. The rhetoric of integration has helped in fact to focus on environmental priorities as a means of realising economic outcomes of technology and profit. The three dimensional model is also limited in its usefulness as an organising framework for human services assessment and reporting activity on sustainability. One reason for this is that the social dimension is not well defined in sustainability research

and although there is agreement generally about the inclusion of the three dimensions⁴⁷ there is not such agreement on the social objectives for sustainability. In some ways, the social dimension overlaps with the economic, as social demands are the subject of economic restraints and because economic processes are linked to their social environments (Littig & Griebler, 2005). The social however, is much broader than this position and is concerned with a wide range of socio-cultural relationships. It can therefore be concluded that the three dimensions are not equal parts in the system and neither in their objectives.

It was argued that sustainability as a functional concept has failed to develop in the social sphere. One reason for this under development is the lack of social change theories generally that inform sustainability research and practice. Its main focus in research, policy and practice has remained on environmental and economic sustainability concerns. The research findings support Littig and Griebler who have expressed this limitation of the current three dimensional model of sustainability and consider that it does not capture the human-ecosystem relationship. A model that does capture this relationship in the context of human services, would translate into seeing human services as sub-systems of culture, values and capital that take account of *all* capital, human and natural (2005). Currently, research on *social* sustainability concentrates essentially on the social dimension without the necessary consideration for how to arrive at solutions through the socio-ecological relationship. It is my view that human service policy activity requires attention to integrating the three dimensions to meet their policy practice objectives,

⁴⁷ However, there continues to be disagreement about what other dimensions should be included in the integration model. For instance, it is about the inclusion of culture, spirituality and governance as dimensions. It is not necessary for my purpose however, to consider this type of inquiry on sustainability as there is no doubt that culture (and the spiritual) and governance must be taken into account as the context for sustainability.

rather than directing efforts, as research on social sustainability has shown, to a realignment of sustainability concerns and policies on the social dimension alone.

A rethinking of institutions and organisations

Societal organisations and institutions guide social interactions and reduce uncertainty by providing structure to everyday life. However, as Connor and Dovers have stated that for sustainability, it is not enough to build new types of organisations as generally they would reflect the *status quo* (2004). Organisations and institutions need to be built for sustainability based on rationality *and* the principles and goals of sustainability (Connor & Dovers, 2004). My research has demonstrated support for this idea, that a rethinking of institutions for sustainability is necessary for sustainability. It was found that this idea would see a shift from the dominance of bureaucratic processes of decision making towards building of communities through the collective experiences of alliances, networks and coalitions.

The key regulators of democratic institutions at all levels would be the inherent values in the constructs of sustainability such as seeing people not as consumers for example, but as present and future generations and seeing the unity of nature and society. Mechanisms for change would include programs, for example, as part of building communities through transformative social contracts, through partnerships and collaboration across sectors. Dominant policy instruments would shift from statutes and other regulatory mechanisms toward instruments such as collaborative processes, assessments and monitoring activities of human services that are reflexive and based on principles and values inherent in the constructs.

Interdisciplinary learning and working

A framework for policy development based on the four constructs of sustainability would influence shared knowledge and values across domains in human services. My research found that sustainability as a societal goal requires collaboration across sectors and disciplines at all levels. A key objective of cross-sectoral collaboration for sustainability is to gain a common understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of natural and social sciences (Wilson, 2005). There is nothing new about seeing society and its relationship with nature as fundamental to survival and for the well-being of populations. For example, an ‘ecological’ or socio-ecological’ model of human health has been conceptualised as a human-ecosystem interface such as in health promotion as discussed in Chapter 3. However, sustainability requires more than a systemic conceptualisation of nature and society, it also requires the building of opportunities and conditions that recognise and act upon this interface to improve the connection between objectives and outcomes. This involves the understanding and analysis of the social processes which shape a society’s interaction and relationships with nature. As Littig and Griebler have posited, it is necessary to discover how societies change and regulate their processes and structures so as to ensure the chances for development of present and future generations. Social processes are at the centre of sustainability (2004). For example, environmental sustainability is closely linked to the problems of social structure such as gender inequity and political participation. My research found that intra- and interdisciplinary learning and thinking that would cross the ‘divides’ in knowledge and function across the three dimensions of sustainability, is essential for sustainability. This would be demonstrated particularly in intra- and inter-sectoral collaboration and the development of unifying frameworks that are conceptual and value based for the integration of knowledge and function in human services.

Governance arrangements

My research demonstrated that the type of governance arrangements of any jurisdiction or country is a critical element of sustainability. Governance arrangements that are generally current in human services were discussed in the context of adaption in the previous chapter and in Chapter 4. It was argued that the new public management and its core product of managerialism have implications not only for organisations but also for individuals and communities. Although managerialism, as discussed in Chapter 4, has to some extent increased the transparency of public processes, it has also resulted in a de-humanisation of decision making in the public sphere and civil society. This has been manifested in the pervasiveness of contractual arrangements for the delivery of human services that essentially limit broad participation by, for example, not only excluding practitioners from policy processes but also of excluding other stakeholders such as community groups who are not part of the bureaucratic contractual arrangements. Managerialism manifests itself in other ways in organisations by limiting the use of intuitive learning and the use of knowledge and experience to make good decisions because of the over emphasis and over use of technology and algorithmic decision making⁴⁸.

As demonstrated in this research, broad participation and deep learning are essential for sustainability. This means that we need to change the way that we see public policy development. A shift to expanding the boundaries of decision making towards non-contracted stakeholders in human services programs, for example, would be a step forward to break down the bureaucratically constructed divisions that reduce

⁴⁸ Although technology is now critical to the functioning of human services and for improved access, it is argued that the use of judgment and local knowledge is compromised through technology. See for example, Watts and Marston for a discussion on the use of judgment and the meaning of evidence and how it is used in policy practice (2008).

participation. There are 'human costs of managerialism' (Rees & Rodley, 1995) that have also reduced the potential benefits of reflexive practices over a long period in human services policy, reform and practice. This is not an environment that is conducive to sustainability.

As Connor and Dovers have noted, patterns of unsustainable behaviour at all levels have emerged over a long time and are highly resistant to change (2004). The intention of any transformative change to structure and conditions of human services that is implied in progress to sustainability is to shift the focus of change to a value based, bottom up approach that would take account of all levels at which change occurs and that would be incorporated into governance arrangements. Sustainability has not been considered seriously so far in human services and is of low status in most domains and therefore it adds to the imperative that transformational change rather than incremental change is required.

Transformative objectives require reflexivity. This implies a questioning of the reasons why societies have become unsustainable. According to Noorgard, we can maximise only one objective at a time and in the context of sustainability and the three dimensions, trade-offs which result in the un-sustainability of systems cannot be avoided (1994). Furthermore, he suggests that it is: 'impossible to define sustainability in an operational manner in the detail and with the level of control presumed in the logic of modernity' (Noorgard, 1994, p. 6). Therefore other ways of *knowing* about what makes societies unsustainable must be found. This position leads to a requirement for normative change as well as the role played by formal institutional change.

Program sustainability

My research demonstrated that there was considerable interest in sustainability in some human services domains such as health and community services in local government contexts. However, the analysis showed that the main body of research on sustainability in a number of Western countries focused mainly on the interpretation of sustainability as longevity of human services programs. There was also limited inquiry into the effectiveness of programs. In other words, gaps in research into the connectivity of objectives to outcomes sought, and in linking program and policy sustainability to a higher goal of sustainability. I argued that sustainability could be conceptualised beyond longevity as a time dimension, towards building capacity measures for example. These included participatory processes and embedding the valuable gains realised from programs into social institutions for continuity of effect. To progress to sustainability, empowerment for participation becomes an objective of establishing routines and embedding them in organisations.

Despite these limitations, it has been argued that research into program sustainability has made a significant contribution to the development of indicators for building, enhancing and monitoring the effectiveness of programs in human services. Most importantly, this area of inquiry has highlighted that governments, government and non-government organisations and institutions should take more responsibility for the longevity and effectiveness of all activity. Furthermore, all human services activity in the form of programs, other initiatives and policies needed to be linked to higher order sustainability goals. This implies that the responsibilities of policy practitioners, organisations and government should extend to broader effects of programs on the health and well-being of communities and societies in the present and future. My analysis found that human

services generally operated programs as separate units of activity and as a consequence there were limited opportunities for reflexivity, deep learning and for increasing the whole system's capacity through broad participation and therefore, for sustainability. Event focused policy practice significantly limited the sustainability of policy and programs and ultimately of sustainability. Instead, one condition necessary for good policy, reform and practice was to take a long view of the human condition.

A multi-level approach

The idea of a multilevel approach to policy practice is that the macro, the government and political level and its institutions, the meso level of organisations and communities and the micro level of individuals and groups can be brought closer together in human services for the purpose of making good decisions. It was also argued that the use and value of sustainability is realised by taking a multilevel approach in human services. This would mean at a macro level, consideration of governance arrangements that would offer processes and opportunities for a common purpose and sound analysis and understanding of social problems. At an organisational, meso level, the focus would be on a re-examination of the policy processes and the ideologies and other influences that drive them and a re-consideration of the policy instruments that are used to address social problems. At a community and individual level, human activity should be understood in the context of the importance of broad participation and decision making that links and interrelates the activity and purpose of individuals and groups to the other levels of social organisation, as sustainability requires collective experiences.

Sustainability as government policy

In Chapter 4, sustainability was contextualised in its core modality, as a mega policy of governments worldwide and as a political imperative. Most Western industrialised

countries now have documented sustainability plans that include social, economic and environmental indicators of sustainability that are meant to guide policy making and legislation (Strange & Bayley, 2008). At an operational level, this requirement is considered a highly useful dimension in the field of sustainability research. However, this has not necessarily translated into a transformation of institutions or objectives for sustainability. My research sought to better understand the potential for the concept of sustainability to inform policy practice as a *transformative* tool. This means that a technical measurement of progress to sustainability such as the use of performance indicators of sustainability as a key policy instrument of current governments and their institutions, although important and useful, is not enough. This is so as these mechanisms effectively maintain the *status quo* through current structures and institutions. A broader vision of sustainability was presented as an imperative requiring attention to the values that underpin indicators of sustainability. In progressing towards a more sustainable society, value shifts are required for better outcomes for people's safety, health and well-being to be achieved (Douglas, 2005; Goldie et al., 2005). These value shifts are incorporated in the constructs of sustainability that have emerged from this thesis.

The importance of community for sustainability

In Chapter 6, it was argued that all domains of human services functions, scope and responsibilities needed to be embedded into community settings to take into account the different institutions that need to be built and maybe reinvented, to achieve sustainability. In policy, reform and practice, all involved have an obligation for sustainability. A fundamental element of adaptive systems that is required for sustainability is that policy, reform and practice should be considered a work in progress and transformational as a reflection of the socio-ecological system. The unequal power distributions of our present systems of governance effectively mean that no matter what importance is placed in

participatory processes for sustainability, participation needs to be institutionalised at local and regional levels. This provides legitimacy to reduce the inequalities in the distribution of power for decision making. As discussed in Chapter 6, institutional embeddedness was viewed as a pre-condition to the legitimacy and credibility of policy. These latter elements in turn can be viewed as pre-conditions when trying to enhance the influence of information and knowledge in decision making.

These findings suggest that participation activity of communities are as institutionalised as other decision making sites of power, such as in government and in sites of expert knowledge, such as in bureaucracies. Participation is fundamental to sustainability however it needs to be realised through the legitimisation and integration of other sites of decision making. This includes the use of participatory mechanisms such as alliances and networks to effectively mediate and potentially reduce the inequalities that exist in societies. This position is essentially about processes and arrangements that allow or encourage community participation in policy debate, policy formulation and in public administration generally. This point leads to viewing policy processes as major conduits for change, reform, learning and development. The corollary of this position leads to a conceptual model of sustainability that reflects the importance of policy processes as sites for change and development.

A conceptual model of sustainability

The above findings from my research suggest that good policy processes are necessary to achieve good outcomes. Consequently, it also suggests that policy models can assist in understanding and organising knowledge to make good decisions. Undoubtedly, processes alone cannot guarantee good outcomes, however as argued in Chapter 3, good outcomes are more likely if attention is paid to process. Models are organised

descriptions of activities presented in a structured form that take account of different conceptualisations of the subject in question. However, models cannot replace good judgment and good decisions in human services require that an essential principle of sustainability be realised, that of good judgment for making good decisions for present and future generations. As Watts and Marston have stated in the context of policy making:

Good judgment involves an orientation or disposition to act truthfully and with reason in the practice of deliberation and is oriented to practical action in which some conception of the good is at stake (2008, p. 42).

Some examples of conceptual models of policy development were presented in Chapter 3 and it was argued that for sustainability, it was necessary for human services to incorporate a model that could shift and direct the processes of policy to more collaborative and participatory ones. However, it was demonstrated that although staged processes in policy cycle models were highly critiqued for their perceived inability to reflect the reality of experiences of policy actors, the policy cycle is considered as a template for directing priorities. A value base is also required and an acceptance that it is the *shift* to bottom up approaches that is critical rather than the replacement of one power structure with another. It was argued that sustainability required an adjusted model which could incorporate both top down and bottom up approaches to policy, reform and practice in human services. It is the merging of the two approaches that can provide a more realistic and reflexive framework to guide policy practice. I argue that a readjustment of a staged policy cycle approach as discussed in Chapter 4 is necessary to reflect the research findings. This approach takes account of people's need to organise knowledge and processes whilst acknowledging the need for people to have flexibility and continuity of experiences. A model emerges that identifies key processes of good policy making but

uses these as key signposts for the identification, interpretation and monitoring of progress against the four constructs of sustainability within a socio-ecological system.

As with all meta-concepts, sustainability is linked to multi-disciplinary bodies of knowledge and therefore a model that is built on qualitative conceptual frameworks to reflect this reality is required. The model needs to satisfy researchers and policy practitioners that it represents a reasonable, sensible theory of sustainability. It is proposed that a model needs to be dynamic for testing and revision and to expand and clarify the theoretical perspectives of many disciplines and sectors involved in human services.

The model builds *intention* to achieve the goals and outcomes sought through processes and values. The model of sustainability takes into account ethical / moral, normative, historical and social dimensions that have influenced and are influencing the context of policy and administration in human services systems. To take the view that sustainability is not just desirable but an essential goal for humanity, these dimensions need to be understood and reframed into an intergenerational perspective. This leads to a perspective whereby permanent solutions are the goal, regardless of the attention paid at any point in time to any aspect of a social problem. In building a conceptual model of sustainability however, it is not the intention of this thesis to provide a *predictive* tool for outcomes of policy and reform impacts. The intention is to bring together characteristics based on the available research that could describe and explain issues and problems for improved understanding and action to lead to better decisions and outcomes.

Description of the model

In this section the model is described in stages for clarity and then it is presented as a complete model. Firstly, the model depicts the relationship of nature and society, and sustainability is seen as the point of interface in this relationship (see for example, Littig & Griebler, 2005). It is depicted as circular, as sustainability is multidimensional and relies on socio-ecological diversity. It situates policy processes in human services as subsystems of a broad, adaptive socio-ecological system. Rather than representing the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability, the model subsumes all potential dimensions into one socio-ecological system. The key value of this schema is that there is no division of domains as is conceptually the case at present. It is replaced by a socio-ecological focus that is only separated by the pragmatic activity that is required around each domain, such as in environmental impact studies or studies in community development. Universal social goals for the well-being of nature and society should drive the economic and environmental concerns and therefore, society is placed at the centre of the model. It is assumed that a focus on the social would lead to economic and environmental sustainability.

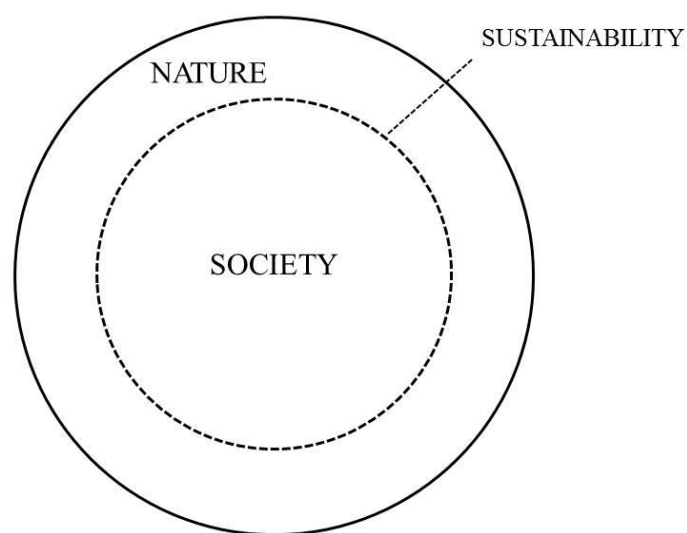


Figure 1: Sustainability as the interface between nature and society (see for example, Littig & Griebler, 2005).

The four constructs of sustainability, adaptation, deep learning, participatory democracy and human rights contain the key principles and core values of sustainability and give direction and meaning to policy activity.

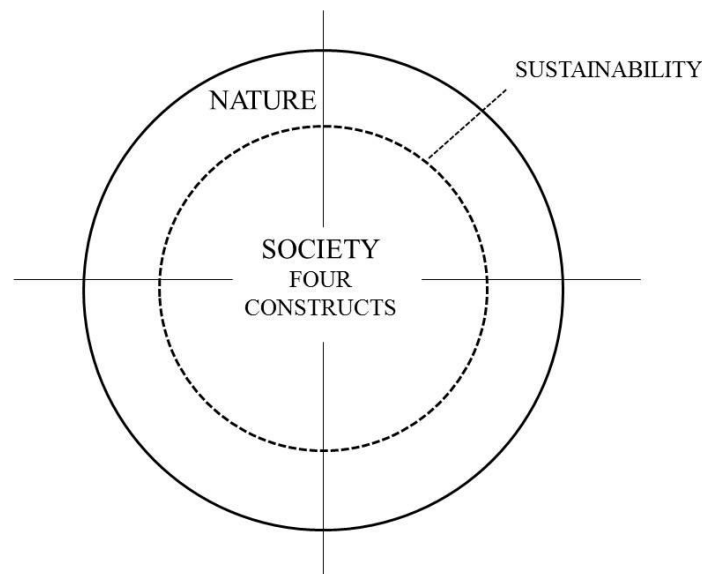


Figure 2: Four constructs to guide policy practice.

Policy processes as illustrated below in Figure 3, are strengthened by policy feedback loops rather than a sequence of staged activity, to demonstrate that decision making processes are not linear but rely on time, conditions and diversity for good decisions. My research found that sustainability requires overt dialogue, planning and setting objectives for sustainability *from the outset* of any problem or issue identification or program activity. With a focus on policy practice, the public activity around identified issues would necessitate broad participation through public debates and political engagement, the evolving of an authorising environment through community development for example, and other opportunities and the building of public awareness and capacities for finding solutions to problems.

The policy processes in Figure 3 below have been identified as facilitators of sustainability and are processes which are informed by the four constructs to guide good decision making at the macro, meso and micro levels of social organisation. These processes are: the development of issues / opinions (identification and dialogue); the exploration of issues, priorities and problems through information, ideas, knowledge, experience and research through broad participation (participation); the political engagement and involvement of government institutions such as cabinet and public administration that includes the use of policy instruments for analysis and setting priorities (political engagement); co-ordination and collaboration (collaboration); ongoing monitoring of policies and their implementation either for example, through programs, projects or legislation (quality and effectiveness activity). The monitoring process is viewed as critical for sustainability. It would be ongoing and assessed against indicators that are developed from the four constructs.

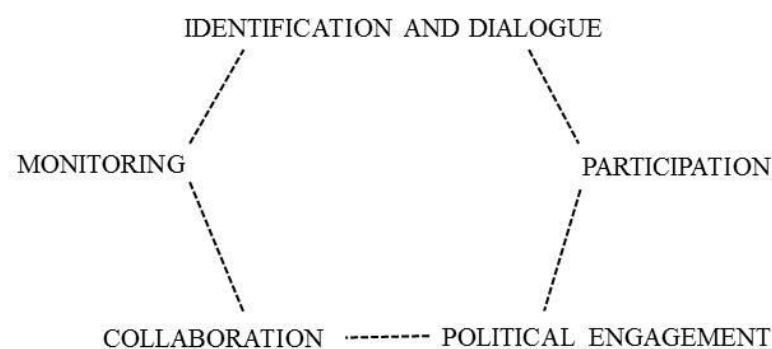


Figure 3: Policy processes that are facilitators of sustainability.

These processes are conceptualised as providing a shift of focus to the importance of taking account people's broad knowledge and experience in decision making rather than a reliance on inputs and outputs and 'evidence based' knowledge alone. It is therefore usable as a guide to good policy practice inside and outside bureaucracies and extends the focus of policy activity towards emancipatory goals. One of the reasons for a re-working

of a typical staged model of policy practice as discussed in Chapter 4, is that generally, models have been developed for use by bureaucracies, whereas this model is viewed as useable and valuable at each level of social organisation (macro, meso and micro levels). This conceptual model is also valuable for connecting objectives to outcomes at all levels, as it suggests that at any stage, policy content, actors and context can be identified, interrogated and analysed based not simply on an 'auditing' process, but through participatory and collaborative processes for dialogue and action. It is argued that the model would potentially build a more rigorous theoretical base and value base for making good decisions.

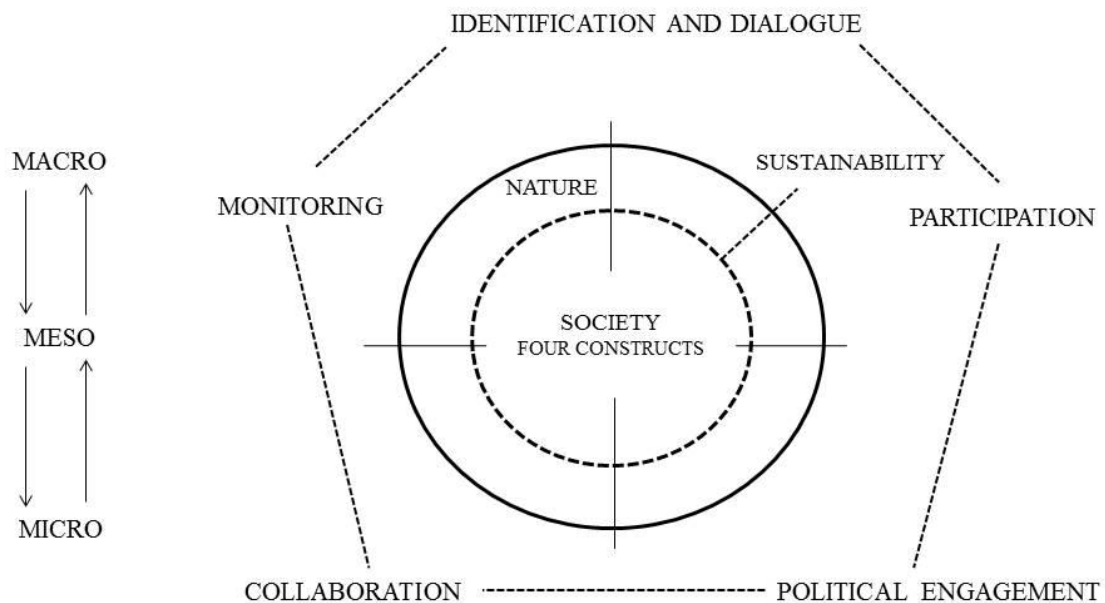


Figure 4: A conceptual model of sustainability for human services.

In the next section some examples of the potential applications of the model in human services functions and domains of policy practice are presented.

Applications of the model in human services

The model may have variable acceptance in diverse settings and processes in human services. A question therefore for this research, is how the model of sustainability can be

applied. That is, who is going to use the model, why and how? The following examples are considered to be illustrative and not exhaustive of the potential for the use and value of a model of sustainability in human services.

Crossing the boundaries of disciplines and sectors

As discussed earlier in this chapter, institutional and organisational change for sustainability necessitates that attention is paid to the potential integration of disciplines and sectors for sustainability. The model could be used as a tool for inter-professional learning and development. Crossing the boundaries that exist between the three dimensions as well as inter- and intra-disciplinary barriers within the dimensions, would require that in various settings this would necessitate a focus on interdisciplinary thinking and learning that goes beyond a sharing of information and knowledge across disciplines and working collaboratively. As critical as these strategies are for good outcomes generally and for sustainability, the emphasis of using the model would be to identify and enlarge the disciplines theoretical perspectives for finding solutions to social problems. This would mean a greater emphasis on the use of integration tools such as the setting up of consortiums or the development of inter-sector policy based on the principles and values of sustainability.

Practitioners, for example, working in the area of housing, would purposefully seek to expand and appropriately invert the concerns of clients into inter-sector policy relevant to other sectors such as town planning. Enhancing gender equity through interdisciplinary learning and action would see gender equity as both a social goal of human services realised through its policies of income distribution for example *and* a goal of sustainability and would pay attention to the resulting theoretical implications (WCED, 1987).

A facilitator of sustainability was found to be the building of networks, alliances and coalitions. Rarely however are alliances or other participatory mechanisms developed that take seriously the hierarchical distribution of power and authority across disciplines and sectors in human services domains. Yet broad participation, equity of opportunity and social inclusion as we have seen, are essential for sustainability and apply at all levels of organisation. The model could be used by programs and organisations to share data on their respective common evaluation dimensions that would make it more likely to include other dimensions such as the environment and culture, to capture all the processes that may be relevant to sustainability interventions and outcomes (Sarriot et al., 2004). This application is linked to a reorganisation of institutions for sustainability and to integrate the concerns of all stakeholders.

Policy making in organisations

Human services organisations behave differently when they are in crisis mode such as when there is a death of a child from child abuse who was known to authorities or when there is a system failure in delivering social security payments. As a consequence they tend to develop or review operational policies urgently and ‘on the run’ that reinforce regulatory and prescriptive control of situations. This is exacerbated by the prevailing condition of policy making whereby most areas that provide human services are often not the ones who are engaged in finding solutions to social problems, but are funded to alleviate and reduce the effects and impacts of social problems. A model that seeks broader participation and reflexivity of stakeholders could assist in shifting these institutional arrangements. As demonstrated in the research, a long view of the human condition and of social problems is imperative for sustainability. It was also concluded that it *is* possible to take short and long term priorities into consideration without compromising the long term outcomes. This was reliant on a value base that conveyed

among other things, a moral purpose and deep learning. The model identifies a monitoring function and reinforces links for policy development at all levels. It places the responsibility for developing opportunities and mechanisms for broad participation on government, administration and the frontline of human services.

General performance auditing practices in human services

General performance audits of government and non-government agencies in human services in most Western industrialised countries are essentially regulatory practices to check for efficiency against targets set by external bodies. Their purpose is usually regarded as the improvement of services. However, while it is not my intention to argue against auditing processes *per se*, generally; auditing does not result in the improvement of services, as improvements and maintaining gains rely on efficiency *and effectiveness* of interventions.

The inevitable alignment which has occurred in human services of managerial goals with organisational ones (rather than with practice) assumes that human services are inherently inefficient. Auditing is a process based on the use of performance indicators which effectively reflect the introduction of practices from the private sector to copy some of the efficiencies of the market (Munro, 2004). The point here is that audits are an area where management, administration and practice, not just of bureaucracies but also on contracted organisations, are involved in meeting efficiency goals in the development of policy. This is now an embedded process in human services. Furthermore, the *internal* audits of policy documents for example, also reflect a ‘risk averse’ system. Rarely is the effectiveness of policy evaluated. The application of the model of sustainability could purposefully introduce to internal and external auditing of policy documents the development of indicators of effectiveness based on sustainability principles and values.

For example, currently many sustainability strategies link human services policies and performance to the process of government Estimates Committees where the auditing of general performance of tax-funded services is conducted mainly based on economic outcomes. However, the performance indicators of social sustainability which are included in such sustainability plans generally do not reflect the enormity or the urgency for the eradication of any social problem. To continue with a child protection example, the social indicators of sustainability in many sustainability plans internationally and nationally, include child protection targets that seek to measure the number of reports, investigations of child abuse and placement numbers of children in care (see for example, ACT Government, 2004). The point here is that performance assessment communicates the intention of policy (Tilbury, 2004) and is therefore an important area of concern for policy practice. As Tilbury suggested in the context of child protection, performance measurement with the objective of accountability, conceptualises child protection as investigation and how many children are in out-of-home-care at a snapshot of time. This position reinforces the view of child abuse as a private problem versus structural accounts of child abuse (2004). This means that the immensity of the impact of child abuse on societies is not reflected in the policies developed to address the problem. Consequently, any auditing process that does not take account of at least an estimate of what would be required to eradicate child abuse enhances the un-sustainability of the system of child protection and ultimately of society.

The area of auditing and performance assessments in human services is a vast and critical area of concern. Human services generally have failed to develop frameworks for the assessment and monitoring of policy beyond accountability. It is argued that a different perspective is required and possible through performance auditing and assessments that

embeds broader societal goals. My model of sustainability links policy activity to broader societal goals through the identification of the four constructs of sustainability. Performance indicators could be developed from the principles and values embedded in the constructs that would have a high level of trustworthiness for maintaining gains for sustainability in human services.

Assessment, evaluation and the use of indicators for sustainability

Whilst it is not my intention to attempt a comprehensive discussion on the potential use of the model in assessments and evaluations in human services, it suffices to identify some key ways that could be valuable for human services policy practice in this area. Generally, assessment processes in human services are defined by the gathering of information and data to determine whether or not intended outcomes are being achieved. Evaluations of policy or programs generally use this information collected from the assessment processes to support or not decisions about maintaining or changing practices. Therefore assessments and evaluations can inform the nature and the extent of learning and development in organisations and also as a consequence, in institutional groups and communities. Assessments also contribute to judgments about the effectiveness of interventions, knowledge creation and provide a moral purpose to ensure that what is being done is based on knowledge and available evidence and a responsibility to address societal problems.

As sustainability is about constant change and maintaining the gains that are needed to endure, it goes contrary to the idea of assessments and evaluations that are restricted to snapshots in time. This finding from my research would suggest that ongoing monitoring processes such as action research would be a preferred strategy for sustainability. This finding also suggests that although quality assessments which are particularly embedded

in human services fields such as health and education are critical to reducing risk and enhancing outcomes, I argue that they could be developed further for sustainability by ensuring that quality assurance frameworks are developed from a systems and socio-ecological perspective. Context is critical and an understanding of how human services can innovate and learn in context. Any assessment or evaluation process of human services efficiency and effectiveness should be embedded within larger human services perspectives and be multidimensional and value based.

This point has implications for the development of indicators of sustainability. In addition to current quantitative measures such as the number of child abuse reports or the number of people who experience homelessness, there would be a focus on the societal gains and on tracking progress. In other words, to understand changes that push beyond an emphasis on economic signals for example, to include a more complete picture of societal well-being. Indicators are currently used by policy makers to get a sense of social development, such as in measuring poverty rates. The idea is to integrate quantitative data such as poverty rates into an index of indicators that are consistent with sustainability principles (see for example, Pepperdine, 2000). Often however, the sustainability principles are not well defined. Nevertheless, potentially benchmarks could be developed from the four constructs that measure the progress of different conditions within human services such as staff capacity, participation and political priorities to explore different conditions over time. The important point to make is that although progress has been made in standards development and performance measurement in the human services over the past three decades, these are no longer enough to *maintain* gains made in human services systems (Fullan, 2005).

As an alternative or in addition to standard assessment and evaluation processes, the model could be used retrospectively as a stand-alone process to evaluate existing practices that are not sustainable and applied broadly to both proposed and existing practices and to all levels of decision making. The model could provide a guide to good practice as mentioned earlier, for organisations to group indicators and related assessments. For example, grouping validated indicators of social sustainability such as increasing the capacity of people to participate in community networks or meaningful employment, or the amount invested in health and education (see for example, McKenzie, 2004). However, rather than including these elements as purely social they can be re-thought as elements that are part of progress to sustainability.

The majority of work thus far on social sustainability, for example, has focused on generating such indicator sets (see for example, the Oregon Benchmarks, Schlossberg & Zimmerman, 2003). Currently, indicator sets are mostly used to compare countries or jurisdictions and within jurisdictions on how they are progressing to sustainability. However, as McKenzie has found in his research on social sustainability, there is a dearth of literature on ways in which social sustainability may be implemented and the precise causal relationships between its various aspects (2004).

Sustainability ultimately comes down to the ability to adapt, so the task of assessment would need to take into account the likelihood that a policy or reform agenda or new program has the capacity to adapt to current and foreseeable conditions. This has implications for such evaluation mechanisms as public inquiries into the failures of systems to meet intended objectives. As was argued in this thesis, learning lessons from such an assessment process requires more than the implementation of the

recommendations from the inquiry. Using a model, such as the one developed in this research that connects policy and practice, facilitated by a bottom up approach to learning and development, places more emphasis on deep learning and participation rather than just the reinforcement of existing conditions. The model directs attention to understanding the human interactions and behaviour through a focus on the micro level of policy activity, and through this interaction with other levels by exploring collectively the gains that are worthwhile keeping and how to hold on to a particular policy direction. Essentially the four constructs encapsulate a potential set of indicators of sustainability and any indicator development should rely on broad participatory processes in research, policy and practice.

The model is compatible with the research on the development of assessment tools for sustainability which suggest that it is necessary to take an ecological approach to understand how and why programs survive and thrive (see for example, Mancini & Marek, 1998). My research findings suggest that there needs to be a connection between the assessments for quality, efficiency and effectiveness for program survival and development at an organisational and jurisdictional level to assessments at a community level. Broad participatory processes and conditions as imperative for sustainability resonate throughout the body of research and point essentially to a *community based* framework for planning and assessing progress to sustainability.

Social work

In Chapter 3, I stated that social work theory and practice is highly relevant to understand sustainability in human services, as social work theory sets the core values for individual and societal well-being and development in the context of socio-ecological systems in which people function and develop. In Chapter 3, I argued that the way that social work

conceptualises policy practice provides a unique focus for a shift to sustainability thinking and practice. Social work is potentially aligned to sustainability generally because of its core values. It also provides a framework and an ethical foundation for policy practice that *enables and gives authority* to all policy actors to influence policy objectives and outcomes by closer connection for example, not only with the frontline experiences of practitioners but also of the community. The identification of stakeholders is a part of accepted policy practice in human services, however, current models do not provide a process by which the breadth and level of participation is assessed and monitored. Political agendas and power structures that include the managerial levels of human services also need to be understood. However, my research has demonstrated that very little attention is paid in the human services to maximise the potential for policy practice to address the barriers to broader participation and reflexive practice and therefore for sustainability.

Social work and the environment

The model reflects the interconnectedness of nature and society and this research has argued for human services to be directed not only by social imperatives for a better society but also to integrate economic and environmental concerns. So far, social sustainability research as demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 6 has taken some aspects of the concept of sustainability and its goals but it has not resulted in a more integrated and holistic view of sustainability. This point reinforces McKinnon's statement about the future of social work and its relationship with the environment. She states that;

Social work is cast as a profession that needs to become more aware of the ways in which society is embedded in the natural world and our physical environment as a whole (2008, p. 256).

Furthermore, McKinnon argues that:

...this does not call for a shift in the axis upon which social work rotates... (but)... for careful consideration of how social workers can incorporate ecological concerns into their practice at micro, meso and macro levels (2008, p. 266).

My research has made links for example between social justice and environmental justice as conveyed in Chapter 6, and between social and environmental problems. The model takes this position a step further and as argued earlier in this chapter, it is the conceptual integration of the three dimensions into the socio-ecological one that is required rather than the focus on social sustainability alone.

Most recently, southern Anglophone countries such as Australia have caught up to some extent with the Northern research on social work and the environment and have begun to take seriously the integration of environmental issues into social work practice. This brings in critical issues for the well-being of nature and society such as for example, climate change and the use of energy related to housing stress and for social and emotional well-being (Borrell et al., 2010). Although ecological awareness and practice has been very much included as part of community development (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006) generally, social work has been slow to respond to this critical relationship and to see it manifested in policy and practice domains in human services (Borrell et al., 2010).

However, this is changing. The Australian Association of Social Workers' new Code of Ethics state that:

The social work profession also recognises that social work takes place in a context whereby social systems have a mutually interdependent relationship with the natural environment (my emphasis) (AASW, 2010).

Influence on social work teaching and learning

This changing focus on the integration of natural and social systems for the purpose of ethical practice can inform a broader societal agenda that takes more account of the structural causes of disadvantage, for example, and to align social work and other social change supporting disciplines towards a more global awareness of the implications of current limitations of policy practice. This position has implications for teaching and learning and I argue needs to be the basis of a change agenda for curricula in these fields. One reason for this position is that sustainability thinking can influence the way that individuals, communities and organisations can become less vulnerable to moral panics, the effects of a 'risk averse' system, and the event focused response of many human services. This has implications for how social work is taught and particularly for how policy practice is taught.

It has been noted in the literature that the teaching of policy has remained peripheral to social work education (Ife, 1997; Mendes, 2003). Ife suggests that the powerlessness that is experienced by social workers in influencing the political and economic environments is a result of the 'problematic relationship between practice and policy' (Ife, 1997, p. 153). Indeed, policy has not only been marginalised but it has evolved negative connotations for students and for many 'practice' oriented practitioners alike. For sustainability, it is impossible to maintain such a division of content and purpose as has been demonstrated in the field of policy practice in social work to date. Research into the teaching of policy practice supports this integration. It has argued for the re-conceptualisation of policy teaching in universities and how it needs to be transformed from a knowledge area to integration into practice (Zubrzycki & McArthur, 2004).

The integration of the understanding and use of policy processes in the context of sustainability could potentially assist further the integration of policy as knowledge to its integration into practice. This would be achieved for example by identifying and developing the knowledge and skills necessary to reduce the barriers that exist for connecting policy practice activity at all levels of organisation which would necessitate the linking of policy practice to other social work skills. As the majority of practitioners work in bureaucratic contexts where hierarchical structures and managerialist principles and methods have been institutionalised, this becomes a major barrier to policy practice that in effect, further separates practice from public administration. One objective of teaching policy practice would be to integrate practice and public administration through the building of trust and common values. It is argued that this requires a framework that focuses on cultural change while able to consider realistic processes for human services operating in real political contexts.

In the context of training *in situ*, using a sustainability framework also has implications for staff development and training. I argue that too much emphasis is placed on training which can be more a mimicry of organisational / managerial priorities than improving understanding of social problems and how to solve them. The use of resources for training, which is of course also an important consideration for achieving good outcomes, generally takes over from knowledge and how to access it. Principles are needed to be able to use knowledge. The model could assist in reinforcing the need to define the objects of learning to achieve deep learning that in effect necessitates an understanding of core principles and values that link human services activity to higher societal and sustainability goals.

Limitations of the research

An obvious limitation of this research is the dissonance that exists in presenting a holistic socio-ecological system as the basis for sustainability whilst limiting the research to a Western Anglophone context. It has not been my intention however, to reinforce the domination of the West. The idea of sustainability on the contrary, is about diversity and multidimensionality as a basis for a vision of survival and well-being of all humanity. The restrictions however, for this project, is to contain a piece of research that would have generalisability as far as possible but that has practical applications in relevant contexts. For example, the principles of participation that underpin the model are contextualised for Western and hierarchical systems but the inherent values are nonetheless relevant universally and translate for instance, into bottom up approaches to development.

Another limitation of this research is related to the methodology used. Models provide an interpretive approach to social reality rather than a causal analytical one. Although, as I have demonstrated, a major strength in this approach is that it provides flexible, theoretical variables with a capacity for conceptual evolution. However, it can lead to concepts that are expanded to such an extent that there are many interpretations possible. I have attempted to reduce this effect through a rigorous methodology.

Recommendations for further research

In addition to the research potential of the model as presented earlier in this chapter, there are some specific recommendations to be made. This research has not tested any aspect of the model and this would be an obvious next step. For example, questions could be tested about the types of possible learning strategies that could be implemented in human services to achieve deep learning outcomes. It raises questions about how policy practitioners interpret policy and how feedback is provided to other levels. The

continuum of learning as argued in this thesis can be seen as a sustainability continuum. Reactive engagement alone would be considered to have low sustainability potential to the other end of the continuum which would consider deep learning, as explored in Chapter 6, to have attributes of high sustainability. Different groups that are identified as powerful and important in the human services could be studied for their engagement and learning across this continuum.

The model could contribute to the investigation of public administration's place in society, its value base and its interface with other disciplines. For example, it could assist in the analysis of research studies, documents and archival sources in organisations and in analysing public documents for substance and process against the model. Sustainability as a political movement has been kept *within* existing administrative and political structures to address existing policy priorities and therefore with the consequence that it has reinforced existing structures. This point directs attention to how human services can look outwards for solutions such as in the building of partnerships and alliances and to use sustainability indicators to test the capacity of partnerships for survival and endurance in community settings.

As I conveyed in the introductory chapter to this thesis and again in this chapter, the political and managerial environments are not currently conducive to sustainability thinking and action in human services. However, further research generally should build on the advances made in research in human services on program sustainability and social sustainability that have taken account of this difficult environment and to explore questions of sustainability that arise from consultative and collaborative processes.

Exploratory research into what sustainability means particularly to civil society and to organisations could uncover the most pressing questions for further research.

Concluding thoughts

This thesis has presented a model of sustainability that could be useful and valuable in policy, reform and practice in human services. In summary, a model of sustainability should view policy as a pluralist, dynamic and participatory. Social and political processes are understood and enhanced through the development of theorised and value based tools and strategies for organising knowledge and experience. This thesis makes a contribution to how policy is conceptualised in human services. It argues for changes to the approaches to policy development in government, organisational and community settings that have the potential to influence the effectiveness of human services to meet their stated objectives. The potential of the concept is explored to redirect human services toward a greater connectivity of their policies and programs with higher societal goals. This research also argues for re-direction in social change professions, in particular, social workers, to embrace the importance of sustainability as a core value and policy domain. This necessitates that decision making and policy processes specifically in human services contexts must place value in integrating all levels and domains of social organisation.

Rather than considering whether some fields of human services may or may not benefit from the use of the model, I have considered it more meaningful to focus on identifying certain conditions and processes generally in human services that would be conducive to the use of the model. These included changing administrative and institutional arrangements such as developing flatter structures of management and public administration and enhancing opportunities for participation of all stakeholders.

A central premise of this research is that human services generally do not have a recognisable sustainability framework upon which to plan, monitor or change their functions and services against identified facilitators of sustainability. It is argued that this is desirable as it would assist human services organisations for example, to build and monitor sustainability and to link their functions and purpose to the wider social and natural systems. The use of the model in the examples that were presented earlier in this chapter could influence analytical, normative and political processes to achieve sustainability. For example, analytically, indicators could be developed from the constructs to assess specific functions and processes within human services organisations such as the scope and quality of participation. Most importantly, normatively, the model presents the constructs that guide progress to sustainability and how society *should* develop such as the achievement of gender equality in work and family life. The model also assumes that all human services operate and develop within political as well as societal and cultural realities and therefore they are context dependent. Therefore, it is imperative that the model of sustainability takes account of the policy context and processes of any setting.

The concept of sustainability has its problems as a concept mainly due to its many interpretations. However, it possesses visionary strength. Milbrath's vision of sustainability reflects this strength, the present human condition and provides hope for the future:

A sustainable society affirms love as a core value. It extends love and compassion not only to those near and dear but to people in other lands, future generations and other species. It recognises the intricate web of relationships that bind all living creatures into a common destiny. Life is not mainly conflict and competition between creatures, rather a sustainable society emphasises partnership rather

than domination, co-operation more than competition, love more than power
(Milbrath, 1984, p. 121).

The above sentiment allows visions for the future.

In conclusion, the principle maxim of this thesis is that institutions, organisations and communities need to develop the ability through good processes to make good decisions for now and the future. In the context of human services there is generally little attention paid and certainly no serious dialogue about what responses are needed to solve the social problem of un-sustainability and find solutions to other complex social problems. The development of the model is a possible step in this direction.

APPENDIX A

Taxonomy of studies

A taxonomy of sixty-five research studies on sustainability that make up the research data sample showing criteria (Ottman, et.al., 2009) for the inclusion of studies in the sample.

Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of sample of studies against design, evidence and process criteria

*Q1- Quantitative Study; Q2 - Qualitative Study; MM - Mixed Methods / Multi-method; R - Review / Commentary.

Scale 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

-/+ ++ +++ ++++ +++++

Author, Year, Country, Type*	Field of Study	Conclusions Justified by Data / Findings	Research Design and Process Reported	Conceptual Strength	Recommendations Provided for Policy and Practice
1. McKenzie, S. (2004) Australia (R)	Social Justice Studies	++	+	++++	++
2. Sarriot E.G. et al., (2004). United States (MM)	Child Health	+++++	+++++	++++	++++
3. Collins, E. et Al., (2005) New Zealand (R)	Communications & Management	-	-	+++	++
4. Nordqvist, C. et al., (2009) Sweden (Q2)	Safety Promotion	++++	++++	+++	++++
5. Curran, G. (2003) Australia (Q2)	Sustainable Development	+++	++	+++	++
6. Thorpe, R. (2008) Australia (R)	Child Protection	-	-	+++	+++
7. Kira, M & van Eijnatten, F. (2008) (Q2).	Organisational Studies	++++	++++	+++	++++

8. Scheirer, M. (2005) United States (Q1)	Community Health	+++	+++	++++	++
9. Shannon, P. & Young, S. (2004) New Zealand & Australia (R)	Sustainable Development & Human Services	-	-	++++	++
10. Lodl & Stevens (2002) United States (Q2)	Youth & Family Services	++++	++++	+++	++++
11. Hanson, D. et al., (2003) Australia (Q2)	Community Safety - Health Promotion	++++	+++	+++	++++
12. Johnson, G. (2000) United States (Q2)	Child Welfare Programs	++++	+++	++++	++++
13. Hawe, P. et al., (1997) Australia (Q2)	Community Health	+++	++	++	++
14. Sauvage, J. & Smith (2004) Australia (R)	Public Sector HR Management	+++	++++	+++	+++
15. Cuthill, M. (2002) Australia (Q2)	Local Government Programs- Sustainable Development	+++	+++	++	+++
16. Shediak-Rizkallah, & Bone, L. R. (1998) United States (Q2)	Community Health	+++++	++++	++++	+++++
17. Bauler, T. (2004) Belgium (R)	Sustainable Development	++++	+++	++++	++
18. Mancini, J.A. et al., (1998) United States (Q2)	Youth Programs	++++	++++	+++	++
19. Mancini, J.A. et al., (2004) United States (MM)	Family Programs	++++	++++	++++	+++
20. Schlossberg, M. & 21. Zimmerman, A. (2003) United States (Q1)	Public Policy and Sustainable Development	+++	+++	++	++
22. Hayes, A. (2006) Australia (R)	Child health & Welfare	-	-	+++	++++

23. Harris, D. et al., (2003) United States (MM)	Allied Health Interdisciplinary Education	++++	++++	++	+++
24. Rogers, P. & Kimberley, S. (2005) Australia (Q2)	Child, Family & Community Programs	+++	+++	+++	+++
25. Akerlund, K.M. (2000) United States (R)	Drug & Alcohol Community Programs	++++	++++	++	+++
26. Warburton, K. (2003) Australia (Q2)	Education	+++	+++	+++	+++
27. Pluye, P. et al., (2004) Canada (Q2)	Public Health and Health Promotion	++++	++++	++++	++++
28. Yencken, D. (2002) Australia (R)	Governance and Public Policy	-	-	++++	++
29. Johnson, K. et al., (2004) United States (Q2)	Community Programs and Health Promotion	++++	+++	++++	++++
30. Patashnik, E. (2003) United States (R)	Public Policy	-	-	++++	+++
31. Lyons, M. et al., (2001) South Africa (Q2)	Community Services	+++	+++	+++	++
32. Cheney, H. et al., (2004) Australia (Q2)	Sustainable Development	+++	+++	++++	+++
33. Sanders, K.E. et al., (2004) United States (MM)	Youth Justice and Education	+++	+++	++	++
34. Stoecker, R. et al., (2009) United States (Q2)	Education	+++++	+++++	++++	++++
35. Baines, J. & Morgan, B. (2004) New Zealand (R)	Governance and Public Policy	-	-	++	++
36. Farmer, J et al., (2003) United Kingdom (Q2)	Community Health	++	++	+++	++
37. Waterston, T. et al., (2004) United Kingdom (R)	Child Health and Well-being	-	-	++	++

38. Pepperdine, S. (2000) Australia (MM)	Community Development	+++	+++	+++	+++
39. Baum, F. et al., (2006) Australia (MM)	Health Promotion	+++	+++	++++	+++
40. Mansuri, G. (2004) United Kingdom (R)	Community Development	-	-	+++	++
41. Crowley, K. (2008) Australia (Q2)	Community Development	++++	++++	+++	++++
42. Syme, G.J. & Nancarrow, B.E. (2002) Australia (R)	Social Justice Studies	-	-	+++	+++
43. Pluye, P. et al., (2004) Canada (Q2)	Public Health	++++	++++	+++	+++
44. Sibthorpe, B. et al., (2005) Australia (Q2)	Primary Health Care	++++	+++	++++	+++
45. Hardy, C. et. al., (2003) United Kingdom & Australia (Q2)	Non-Government Organisations	+++	+++	++++	++
46. Pal, M. (1998) United Kingdom (R)	Social Justice Studies	-	-	+++	++
47. Benn, S & Dumphy, D. (2005) Australia (Q2)	Governance and Public Policy	++++	++++	++++	+++
48. Pierson, P. (2005) United States (R)	Governance and Public Policy	-	-	+++++	+++
49. Hodge, T. (1997) Netherlands (Q2)	Sustainable Development	+++	+++	++++	+++
50. Chibulka, J.G. & Derlin, R.L. (1998) United States (Q2)	Education	+++	+++	+++	++
51. Haslam, S.A. et al., (2000) Australia (Q2)	Organisational Studies	+++	+++	++++	+++
52. Spall, P. & Zetlin, D. (2004) Australia (Q2)	Non-Government Organisations	++++	++++	+++	+++

53. Blank, M.J. et al., (2000) United States (R)	Child & Family Welfare	-	-	+++	+++
54. Suggs, J.W. (2000) United States (Q2)	Child & Youth Non-Government Organisations	+++++	+++++	++++	++++
54. Fullan, M. (2005) United States (Q2)	Education	+++	+++	+++++	+++++
55. Orr, L. (2004) Australia (R)	Early Childhood Studies	-	-	+++	++
56. Packer, J. et al., (2002) Australia (Q2)	Community Development	+++	+++	+++	++
57. Meagher, G. (2000) Australia (R)	Social Justice Studies	-	-	+++	++
58. Fraser, E.D.G. et al., (2005) United Kingdom (Q2)	Community Development	+++	+++	+++	+++
59. Swerisson, H. & Crisp, B. (2004) Australia (?)	Health Promotion	+++	+++	++++	++++
60. Hunter, D. (2003) Australia (Q2)	Organisational Studies	+++	+++	++	++
61. Adams, D & Hess, M. (2001) Australia (R)	Community Development	-	-	++++	+++
62. Littig, B & Griebler, E. (2005) Austria (Q2)	Sustainable Development	+++	+++	+++	++
63. Koning, J. (2001) Netherlands (R)	Social Justice Studies	-	-	+++	+++
64. Savaya, R. et al., (2009) Australia (Q2)	Community Based Social Programs	+++	+++	+++	++
65. Braithwaite, J. (2002) Australia (Q2) (R)	Social Justice Studies / Sustainable Development	++++	++++	+++++	+++++

APPENDIX B

List of concepts

List of analytical concepts as Tree Nodes from Nvivo, developed as a hierarchy from basic level concepts.

Type	Name			
Tree Node	adaptation			
	nature			
Tree Node	society	diversity	risk effects	
	unity of knowledge	embeddedness	diffusion & penetration	
	Complexity	deep ecology	disasters	
	ecological framework	resilience (to disturbance)	equilibrium	
	continuity and change	prevention	social capital	
	multidimensionality	complexity	nature	
		reflexivity	organisations	
		social action	communication	
	transformation systems transformation			
	Systems	outcomes	continuous improvement	
Tree Node	participation	vertical integration	citizenship	
	networking & coalitions	horizontal integration	social capital	
	empowerment (2)		power	
	Collaboration		civil society	
Tree Node	Community	planning		
	social capital	power		
	Partnerships			
	local effects			
	Development			
Tree Node	human rights	moral purpose	law	
	intergenerational equity	values	ethics	
	Universality	anti-oppression	development	
Tree Node	Equity	gender	accountability	
	social justice	distribution	peace	
	emancipatory	environment		

	practice			
	social inclusion	capacity		
		restoration		
	Environment			
Tree Node	deep learning	knowledge creation	unity of knowledge	
	deep ecology	leadership	inter-disciplinary	
	learning in organisations	reflexive practices		
	Quality	ecological framework	assessments reflexivity	
	capacity building			
Tree Node	deliberative democracy	stakeholder engagement	legitimacy	
		participation	advocacy	
	Diversity	participation		
	Citizen	accountability		
	Power			
	Empowerment	fairness		
	social identity	social inclusion		
	political effects			
Tree Node	Temporality	space		
	Connectivity	local and regional		
	Futurity	endurance		
	short and long term results	capacity building		
	Political	populations		
Tree Node	governance processes	organisations		
	Organisations	contracts	advocacy	
	reconciling dilemmas	funding		
	Advocacy	representation		
	Prevention	legitimacy		
Tree Node	management & administration			
	Workforce			
	Implementation	evaluations		
	inter organisational practices	indicators		
	funding practices	outcomes		
	Leadership			
	planning & evaluation			
	Collaboration			
	capacity building			
	Trust			

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