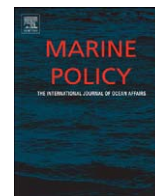




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Sustainable development: Social outcomes of structural adjustments in a South Australian fishery

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ABSTRACT

The assessment of sustainable development is a relatively recent advent in policy and the evaluation of industry structural adjustments. Although the elements of economic and environmental assessment have been relatively well developed and accepted, the effective inclusion of 'social' aspects in assessments of sustainable development are still being grappled with.

This paper, which discusses a project that investigated the sustainable development of the Marine Scalefish Fishery in South Australia, was focused on providing a combined assessment of the interrelationships between the environmental, economic and social aspects of the industry and the effect of its restructure in 2005. The findings highlight the complexities of developing effective policies to address all three aspects of sustainable development, rather than trading off one outcome against another. In the case of the fishery at hand, while the environmental and economic objectives of the adjustment appear to have achieved, the social objectives may well have not. In this circumstance, the findings raise the possibility that the social impacts of the restructure may in fact, alone, compromise the long term future of the industry, despite the economic success of the restructure.

This paper addresses the results of the research and presents some salient social issues that policy makers and industry should be aware of, when considering industry structure and futures in a changing economic and climatic environment.

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1. Introduction

There is a long history of industry economic assessment. However, it is only recently that the focus of assessment has broadened to incorporate other perspectives. Initially these were environmental, and in the last 10 years these are now more often attempting to incorporate the social implications as well.

In 2007, South Australia's fisheries management took the step of undertaking a comprehensive assessment (ecological, economic, and social) of the effects of an industry restructure which occurred in 2005. The review was in line with the current Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) thinking of the Australian Government [1]. Specifically, the Australian Government identifies ESD as 'using, conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained, and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased' [1]. This paper discusses the background and the theoretical methodology of the social aspects of the review of the restructure; the findings from it, and the lessons learnt for both undertaking ESD assessments and for natural resource industry participants and managers.

2. ESD and triple bottom line assessments

In 1987 the Brundtland Report¹ was released and became the global benchmark for a growing awareness of the impact of environmental change and degradation. The Australian response to this was the EPBC Act,² from which the drive to undertake ESD (otherwise referred to as Triple Bottom Line or 'TBL') assessments has evolved. It was identified in the Allen Consulting Group report [2], and subsequently accepted by government that the social aspect of assessing businesses or industries incorporated, not only ethical behaviours, but also those 'other' factors which contributed to the economic development of the industry—social factors. These social factors were those behaviours that support the quality of life for employees, their families, and the communities

¹ 'Our Common Future' is the report that was made by the World Commission on Environment and Development, and it is most often referred to as the 'Brundtland Report' after Ms Gro Harlem Brundtland who was the Chairperson of the Commission.

² 'The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (the EPBC Act) is the Australian Government's central piece of environmental legislation. It provides a legal framework to protect and manage nationally and internationally important flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places—defined in the Act as matters of national environmental significance.' <<http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/index.html>>

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in which industries operate. However, indicators of these that have variously been used to date largely encompassed demographic, economic income and employment data, only. Although the Allen Consulting report noted that TBL was not intended to provide specific quantitative measures but rather was a 'way of thinking about the integrated nature of business planning and performance across environmental, social and economic dimensions' [2], methods of TBL assessments in Australia have tended to pursue quantitative approaches, which the dominant indicators lent themselves to. While this is useful to compare a number (or in the case of Nelson et al. [3], a diagram) at different points in time, purely quantitative measures cannot capture the qualitative nature of many of the social dimensions and underpinnings of industry and community economic and environmental interactions. As underlined by Bass [4] 'we do not [as yet] have truly integrated research approaches'. This is commonly due to the fact that the social component of triple bottom line assessments is dynamic, not lending itself to the reductionist approaches devised to date. Different frameworks are needed to identify and assess the attitudes, experience, expectations and abilities of individuals to engage with the economic and environmental opportunities and challenges of industries and the communities in which they operate, as has been raised by Adger [5], Cocklin and Dibden [6] and Marshall et al. [7].

The key feature of TBL assessment that has been lost in recent years is the qualitative nature of social relationships and interactions affecting the ability of individuals (and therefore industries) to engage with and utilise, economic and environmental resources [8,9]. A useful framework to integrate the social aspects of industry with the economic and ecological components, is social capital. As discussed by Selman [10] 'Where stocks of social capital are buoyant and high levels of trust exist between individuals, favourable conditions exist for co-operation and participation in the pursuit of local sustainability.' The social aspect of sustainability, such as the community's capacity to engage with change to sustainable practices was however, one that has in the past, proven slippery due to the lack of consensus over definition and boundaries. Consequently, a means to usefully employ frameworks (such as social capital) in a holistic industry assessment which could be used as a benchmark would be useful to both industry and management.

2.1. Project background

It is generally accepted that, in the long run, a profitable fishery will only be sustained if the ecosystem is also healthy. Far less understood is the relationship between social, ecological and economic factors in the long term sustainability and profitability of a fishery. Consequently, a comprehensive ESD assessment of a fishery was proposed. The proposal primarily sought to establish the feasibility of bringing ecological, economic and social data together in a form useful to regulator and political decision making. Secondly, it was to provide a template of how such integrated assessments could be approached. At the prompting of the South Australian Government and the support of the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, the project 'A comprehensive ESD analysis of a fishery: the incorporation of regulatory, ecological, economic and sociological aspects', was funded.

3. Theoretical integration of the 'Social' into ESD assessments

A variety of institutional arrangements need to be in place if an economy is to be responsive and healthy. However, that 'economy', or in this case 'industry' is, in addition to natural resources, also made up of people with expectations; weaknesses;

aspirations and desires that will affect industry viability. Consequently, it is important to understand the 'social capital' that keeps a group of potentially quite diverse individuals on the same path and acting in concert to achieve similar or aligned goals, and which makes an industry, effective and profitable [6,11]. As a result, the concept of social capital is one useful way in which to qualitatively assess the social environment of a fishery (or any industry group), and was proposed for the research in this case. Social 'capital' consists of the relationship networks that provide feelings of belonging and access to information, knowledge and decision making, which provide a sense of control, security and purpose in people's lives. Without the social capital developed through networks with others, individuals are disconnected from not only social, but often their economic environment as well, unable to use their human capital (skills and knowledge) or apply any physical or financial capital they may have to improve their economic situation. Consequently, understanding the makeup of a community's social capital is fundamental to understanding their capacities to, not only absorb change but, potentially, also grow and prosper as a result of it [12].

The elements that comprise both social and human capital intimately interact to provide a 'package' of capacity that dictates a community's ability to adapt to changing circumstances. This can be demonstrated as follows (Fig. 1).

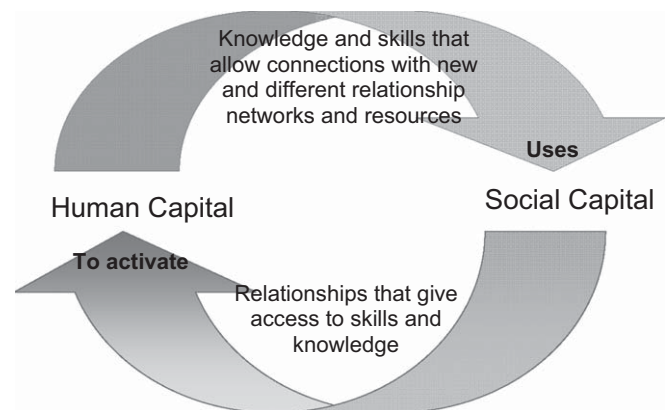


Fig. 1. The interaction of human and social capital.

A community's human capital is comprised of the depth and diversity of skills existing in a community. To be able to use those skills however, we need social networks to connect us with those who need our skills, or government representatives to lead us through the bureaucracy. As a result, both human and social capitals need to be considered in the process of assessing the social component of sustainability [13–15].

3.1. Social capital—more than just 'ties that bind'

In Australia, 'social capital' was brought to the fore by Cox, in her call for the consideration of the social dimension in the policy domain (the Boyer lectures [16–20]). Since that time the definition of social capital has evolved to move beyond the one dimension of 'ties that bind', or 'bonding' social capital as it was termed by Putnam at that time [21,22], to include 'bridging' and more recently 'linking' social capital. A focus on 'ties that bind' or bonding social capital, was criticised as too narrow [23–26], as it refers only to homogenous relationships. Levi [25], Portes and Landholt [27], and Woolcock [28], amongst others, have since identified that 'bridging' social capital in the form of relationship networks between heterogeneous groups are required to mitigate

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