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## **Settlements and sustainability: vulnerability, security, and populism**

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### **1. Settlements and sustainability: what agenda?**

Ideas matter. Urban settlements are shaped not by accident but by the history of big ideas and the political and policy manifestations of those ideas. Ideas leave their mark in the inertia and path dependence of the built environment, and shape our lives now and the lives of those in the future. Insightful scholars of the city, such as Patrick Troy, comprehend this and try to communicate to society both the gravity and excitement of that history and what it means for the present and future. They can forecast the regrets that follow simplistic ideas implemented unthinkingly into policy and action, because they know the mistakes of the past and the complex cause and effect linkages that policy interventions seek to influence.

The big ideas of today and their policy manifestations are variously the topic of debate, resignation, boosterism and analysis. These ideas include globalization, neoliberalism, deliberative democracy, the information age, and sustainability. Some, such as sustainability, have a strong empirical foundation, albeit with significant value elements. Other such as neoliberalism and deliberative democracy are much less empirically supported and are primarily ideological. Others are better understood as realities of modern times, to be embraced or managed as best we can. Sometimes these ideas and their advocates coincide in intent and effect, sometimes they are in tension. Researchers and others promote and question these ideas, and observe with approval or disapproval – delight and outrage even – the trajectories they are creating in the built form and structure of settlements, and the environmental, social and economic effects of these.

Thus we are now – whether wittingly or by turpitude – determining the constraints and opportunities that will define the lives and patterns of production and consumption of future generations. Which ideas will dominate in different policy areas and shape which aspects of cities? The outcomes will decide who will be vulnerable, what will be secure and sustained, who will access what services, what resources will be used or wasted, and who will have a say about what.

One big idea of today – sustainability, the least powerful it would seem – is inevitably about the options we create or foreclose for future generations. This paper is about the idea of sustainability generally, and less about its specific urban dimensions. However, we must acknowledge that, in a highly urbanized society, cities and other urban centres are where we by and large live, where more will live in the future, and where we create economic activity and use resources. Cities and sustainability are inseparable.

Sustainability is a big idea or, as Harrison put it at the time of the Rio Earth Summit, the universally agreed goal of human progress.<sup>1</sup> That may sound grandiose, but a close reading of international agreements such as the 1992 UN Rio Declaration supports the claim. It attempts to reconcile the environmental, social and economic over the long term, reducing vulnerability and increasing security in a democratic and equitable way as opposed to a selective or populist way.

The more common term sustainable development – or ecologically sustainable development (ESD) in Australia – has been described and avowed in countless international and national policies, thousands of policies at regional and local government level, and by a great many civil society and industry organizations.<sup>2</sup> The principles set out in these policies have been codified, however loosely, in law, including over 100 Australian statutes. So far, so good. But there is significant confusion over what sustainability means, and a large implementation deficit. The first half of this paper is about that confusion and that deficit.

The standard definition of sustainable development is that of the World Commission on Environment and Development in its landmark report *Our common future*, given here in the necessary full rather than the usual, truncated form:<sup>3</sup>

*Sustainable development is development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:*

- *the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and*
- *the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.*

*Even the 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.*

The oft-repeated first sentence by itself leads to claims of vagueness; the points it below it sharpen the meaning, and that meaning will be detailed more below. In implementation as opposed to rhetoric, the WCED's clear matching of ecological and equity imperatives has been lost or perverted over the past two decades. If the ideas and actions of today make people vulnerable or insecure, if they deny people now or in future the resources and environmental services they need for a decent existence, then we have not achieved sustainable development.

Despite sustained global attempts to link the environmental, social and economic via such exercises as the Millennium Development Goals (2000), World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) and Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), when it comes down to policy and institutional reform on the ground – or, given our topic here, on the streets – the three imperatives of environment, society and economy have not come together anywhere near sufficiently. We still have unproductive arguments between advocates of jobs versus environment, or economic growth versus social justice, and so on, rather than seeking ways of achieving a genuinely sustainable future.

This symposium honors the contributions of Patrick Troy to thinking about how we organize the tangible and intangible aspects of our urban settlements to achieve social goals. So let us hear from him:<sup>4</sup>

*The institutional structures we have created and the conventions and paradigms we have adopted seriously limit our capacity, or compromise our ability, to pursue the ends we*

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<sup>1</sup> Harrison 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Note that here sustainability refers to a system property or long term probably unattainable state, whereas sustainable development (or, in Australia ecologically sustainable development or ESD) is a variable policy agenda and process pursuing that property or state.

<sup>3</sup> WCED 1987: 43.

<sup>4</sup> Troy, 2000: 12.

*desire... The relationship, or the interdependency, between equity, environment and efficiency is a dynamic one, or at least one which is shaped by political power and social change.*

This accords with the full WCED definition of sustainable development – it is a way of running our affairs, a direction society has largely not taken, a complex and iterative experiment not a definable state, where environment, equity and economy come together, never to be considered in isolation. And it sets the tone for the themes for this paper – unachieved aspirations, insufficient capacities in the face of complexity, inadequate institutions, and the limits of intellectual conventions.

Patrick Troy's enduring interest is cities. It is unfortunate that, in recent times in Australian politics, coherent attention paid to the sustainability of cities has been sparse. It is unfortunate because cities are big, important and complex, and sustainability as an idea is big, important and complex. Cities are every one's and no one's business and, some bright spots aside, the integrated agenda of ESD has failed to take purchase. As a result, although recognizable ideas and their policy manifestations are shaping our cities and our future, they are doing it too often amidst confusion, lack of clarity, and turpitude.

One confusion is over the meaning of sustainability or sustainable development, however while not providing a clear set of instructions, existing policy statements, and sometimes statutory objects, set out some very recognizable directions:<sup>5</sup>

- An overall objective of a pattern of economic and human development that does not damage the opportunities for future generations to use natural resources and enjoy a healthy environment, while ensuring human development goals, especially for the world's poor, are met in the near term.
- Recognition of major social and policy goals, generally including:
  - the importance of biodiversity and ecological life support systems;
  - the need to treat environment and development in an integrated way rather than as separate, competing considerations.
- Guiding principles for policy and decision making, generally including:
  - factoring in both short and long term considerations;
  - integrating environmental, social and economic concerns in policy making;
  - taking precautionary measures in the face of possible serious environmental degradation (the Precautionary Principle);
  - considering global implications of domestic policy directions;
  - utilizing innovative, new policy approaches, such as participation, institutional change and market mechanisms; and
  - involving communities in decisions and actions that affect them.

Via these principles, we know what being more sustainable is about – equity now and in future and protecting important environmental assets as priorities, exercising caution in the face of possible environmental degradation, constructing inclusive policy processes that integrate environmental, social and economic considerations, and taking seriously the long term consequences of decisions and patterns of production and consumption. What the thousands of policies say is that, if we made a proper fist of those things, we would be constructing a future more ecologically sustainable and humanly desirable. But, evidence suggests that, on the whole, we are not.

One issue is that important ideas, including the themes of this symposium – vulnerability, sustainability and security – are interrelated, and easily abused.

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<sup>5</sup> This iteration is from Dovers 2005a, and summarizes and is consistent with statements such as the Rio Declaration and Australia's 1992 National Strategy for ESD.

## 2. Vulnerability, sustainability and security: uses and abuses

To be vulnerable is not sustainable. To evidence the attribute opposite to vulnerable – to be resilient – gives you half a chance.<sup>6</sup> People and communities, and the human and natural infrastructure and capital on which they depend, are made vulnerable by natural disasters, by natural phenomena into the path of which their choices or lack of choices place them, by where they live and work or not, by their education and income, and by the decisions or oversight of others past and present.

To be insecure is not unsustainable. No city or society is “secure” – some parts and people may be more so, others less so, and this varies over time. Too often, the security and resilience of some is bought at the expense of the vulnerability and insecurity of others. To be not vulnerable, to have resilience, and to be secure in your livelihood, gets us someday toward sustainability, as long as everyone gets some.

Vulnerability, resilience and sustainability are not stable states, they are dynamic and we make and unmake these states through our choices. As well, the forces that create vulnerability and insecurity change over time, and often become critical when acting in combination. To seek to make others less vulnerable is noble, or at least well-intentioned, as is to seek to make someone secure. To do the opposite is venal. Less obviously bad but subtly pervasive is to misuse such terms in ways that pervert their meaning. Sustainability is misused often enough, vulnerability and resilience less so, but security is misused abundantly.<sup>7</sup> Whether one believes that current, dominant uses and implications of the word “security” – usually prefixed by “national” – stem from real imperatives or a dishonorable populism, it is a politically loaded and powerful term. Security from the other, from real or imagined crime or terrorism, or from financial turbulence – these uses of “security” have become the feedstock of populist politics. Security of lives and livelihoods from the impacts of climate change, a more demonstrable threat than such others, or from the impacts of unplanned urban change, are not so attractive to populists.

I will return to populism, but the political uses of terms such as sustainable and security reminds us that big ideas are of course political – they are about how we live our lives and how we affect others. The policy manifestations of big ideas – whether a regulation, tax, privatization of a public good, or education campaign – are similarly political. Policy interventions seek to change the behavior of individuals, firms, households and communities, to force or persuade people to live differently.

Sustainability tells us to live differently. So does neoliberalism. The information age has made us adapt and live differently in large and small ways, as has the globalization of finance, laws, and media. These ideas have deep roots and take time to manifest in recognizable ways – they are higher-order social and political goals, and are generational tasks of policy and institutional adaptation and reform.<sup>8</sup> The intellectual and political roots of neoliberalism and its manifestation in policy go back many decades, as do those of sustainability. However, the thinking behind sustainability has been less well organized politically and has had less impact on policy.

## 3. Intellectual and institutional shortcomings

Why has the idea of sustainability failed to bite? The simplest answer is that, as a higher-order social goal, it lacks political and popular backing. Its time has not come (and perhaps may never come). That is true but insufficient, although we can note that the popular support is bigger than the political. Another simple answer is that it is too vague an idea to be implemented, but the policy agenda described above questions this as it certainly shows aspirational directions yet to be

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<sup>6</sup> See Conway 1987 for discussion of the set of concepts describing the ability to survive perturbations, and for discussions of the resilience of socio-economic systems, see the online journal *Ecology and Society*.

<sup>7</sup> For a thorough discussion of the power and/or perversity of “security” discourses in the environment domain, see Barnett 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Connor and Dovers 2004.

purposefully pursued. It is worth exploring other reasons under two heads: intellectual and institutional.

Let us first consider the intellectual. Disciplinary territoriality plays a role. Sustainability is at once every discipline's business and no one's. It has no home in the separate disciplinary dormitories that comprise the academy, or if it finds one then it must behave in a certain way to be allowed to stay, and disavow the norms and practices of other dorms. House prefects enforce these things, through promotion committees, journal editorial screening, peer review of funding, and allowable visibility at conferences.

Like poorly socialized children in the sand pit, disciplines squabble over space and toys, vying for ownership of what could be a shared interest, and refuse to incorporate other rules into their special game. Some are trying with mixed success but at times impressive intellectual agility to create different games or revise the rules of older games. Around sustainability hover a number of interdisciplinary endeavors, prominent among which are the oldest, human ecology, and ecological economics and environmental history.<sup>9</sup> They struggle to find a place in the academy, just as cross-sectoral agencies struggle for legitimacy in the fragmented landscape of government. Their parent disciplines often frown on them, as products of shadowy conceptions, offspring whose behaviour embarrasses.<sup>10</sup> Urban studies can find itself in this situation, as the certifiably inexplicable decision to discontinue the Urban Research Program at the ANU several years ago illustrates.

Sustainability is fundamentally integrative and therefore disrespectful of conventional intellectual boundaries. Embedded in disciplines very often are resilient and pervasive assumptions and norms of thought, concerning scales of time and space, necessary or sufficient burdens of proof, human motivation, the validity of claims to knowledge, whether there can be rigor without numbers, and much else.<sup>11</sup> Often, these assumptions are so embedded they are hard to discern even by members of the same dormitory. Sometimes, multiple assumptions combine in specific bits of work to the extent that a condition known as Cumulative Assumption Disorder (CAD) becomes evident from a resulting lack of purchase on reality. Thinking properly about sustainability demands letting go or at least critical questioning of the foundational assumptions of disciplines. Disciplines and individuals find this difficult. Different disciplines tend to adhere to or dislike different rationalities – ecological, communicative, political, economic, and so on.

Adherence to a single rationality generally results in a form of determinism, be that social, economic or physical. Physical determinists can only think that water and energy use are defined by built form, and ignore income, location or other variables.<sup>12</sup> Economic determinists cannot believe that (irrational!) collectivists not obsessed with their immediate tangible utility actually exist. Social determinists ignore things like rocks and money, for they are mere social constructs. Taking all such positions into account is as obviously necessary as it is evidently difficult for many people to do.

On the institutional side, it is similarly a case of an integrated agenda finding ill-fit in a disintegrated, or in kinder terms a specialized and hierarchical, policy and institutional system. The benefits of agency specialization are clear, but also clear are the downsides of partitioned decision making, for tackling big sustainability problems or tackling in an integrated way the challenges of our complex cities. Once again, there is no home for cross-sectoral, long term, complex and uncertain meta-challenges or for those who make such challenges their core business. Four examples can serve to illustrate:

- First, many governments have attempted to create a whole-of-government sustainability capacity, in answer to the urgent need for policy integration and to embed sustainability across portfolios and sectors, to achieve better integration of the environmental, social

<sup>9</sup> And others, see Barnett et al 2003.

<sup>10</sup> And, to be fair, whose behaviour is at times not entirely amenable to logical interpretation.

<sup>11</sup> Or 'epistemological commitments', see Schoenberger 2001.

<sup>12</sup> See Troy et al 2005.

and economic. Yet few have found an effective location and even fewer demonstrate much impact. The current fluidity of sustainability offices in state and territory Australian jurisdictions reflects this ill-fit.

- Second, strategic environmental assessment (SEA) seeks to subject higher-order policy proposals arising from all relevant portfolios to the same scrutiny as discrete projects receive under standard environmental impact assessment regimes, to embed environmental and sustainability values earlier and more widely in the policy process. On the statute books in a number of jurisdictions for decades, it remains hardly implemented. It does not fit in the policy system.<sup>13</sup>
- Third, of all long-standing and widely catered for policy tools, strategic regional planning should be the prime mechanism whereby environmental, social and economic policy combine to drive more sustainable settlements, production and consumption. Yet effective cases of strategic planning, whether at local or regional scale, are far rarer than failed attempts or unfulfilled statutory provision.
- Fourth, while some seventy countries (but not Australia nationally) have created a multi-stakeholder National Council for Sustainable Development or equivalent, in accordance with international agreements, and many strive to influence to policy system, very few have demonstrated an impact.<sup>14</sup> While it is early days, the evidence does not bode well for success of these inclusive, cross-sectoral bodies.

The central problem in all the above is fragmentation and lack of integration, in the academy and in government, and across disciplines, industry and civil society. While there are many encouraging experiments and some noticeable gains, the negative portrayal I am giving holds when progress is compared against the scale of the challenge.

Most responses to sustainability over the past two decades have been piecemeal, having impact only at the margin. Intellectually and institutionally, with too strong a focus on single issues or cause-effect linkages, and a typical reliance on one institutional form or policy instrument, we are failing to do justice to a problem set characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and change. Surely, Australian researchers and policy makers can twiddle more than one knob at once? Certainly the current, fragmented institutional system does not encourage that, and perhaps the intellectual preparation people have limits capacities. But we know these intellectual and institutional barriers, or at least we can find out about them from available experience and literature.<sup>15</sup> There is something else.

Consider again the simple answer of political will. Compare the experience of two COAG-driven national policy experiments, the ESD and National Competition Policy processes of the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> ESD failed to have much impact, whereas NCP has been as still is powerful and pervasive. Certainly, NCP was consistent with the political preferences of the day and supported by powerful lobbies, whereas ESD was a more contested and deliberative process, argued across pro-sustainability and stronger anti-sustainability camps. Yet it should be recognized that NCP also had a strong intellectual set of capacities behind it (neoclassical economics and neoliberal political theory) and above all it had strong institutional locations in the policy landscape, such as Treasuries and think tanks. Powerful ways of thinking, the intellectual, co-evolved with strong institutional expressions, whereas in the case of sustainability there is much less existing capacity. Catch-22: which must come first for sustainability to have the might of neoliberalism, the intellectual or institutional capacity? But imagine a different history, where as well as a review of

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<sup>13</sup> See Marsden and Dovers 2002. It may be that the recent EU SEA directive, and the adding of an SEA protocol to the Espoo convention on transboundary EIA will drive a significant increase and understanding and practice of strategic assessment.

<sup>14</sup> Connor and Dovers 2004.

<sup>15</sup> For overviews, see Berkhout et al 2002; Page and Proops 2004; Connor and Dovers 2004.

<sup>16</sup> For discussions, see Hamilton and Throsby 1998; Dovers 2003, 2006; Curran and Hollander 2002.

thousands of Australian statutes for anti-competitive elements, as occurred under NCP, there had also been a broad legislative review of legislation for anti-sustainability elements.

Those intellectual and institutional bases of NCP were not invented overnight, but like most powerful features of institutional systems are products of past thinking and past development of human capacities, stemming from research and education over time.

#### 4. Research, education and sustainability

There are many reforms required to address the problems of intellectual and institutional fragmentation. Here, I will only comment on the style of scholarship I believe would help, a style of scholarship that, if more commonly expressed in research and education, would serve to equip people better to imagine, design and implement societal reforms to further the goal of sustainability. For brevity, I will simply identify the main features:<sup>17</sup>

- First, a scholarship that is integrative or interdisciplinary, that in research and education does not separately deal with the environmental, social and economic, but brings them together and holds them there, confronting the tensions. Such a scholarship would understand ecological processes and limits, beyond recitation of simple ideas from pop ecology. It would understand the dynamics of social equity, beyond simple value positions. And it would understand economic efficiency, beyond the anti-economic rhetoric or the converse cornucopian dreaming of much sustainability discourse, and the proper role of economics and economic policy.<sup>18</sup> And it would understand the interactions between the three.
- Second, a scholarship that seeks a systems understanding of interdependent natural and human systems, both within cities and between cities and their hinterlands and non-urban regions. Such an understanding may be expressed quantitatively and/or qualitatively. (Note: one, overlooked aspect of the much talked-about rural-urban divide is that existing in environment-related research.)
- Third, a scholarship that matches historical understanding with current situations and future possibilities, understanding the path-dependence of cities and the inertia and long lead times of institutional change.<sup>19</sup>
- Fourth, a scholarship that is rigorous and empirical, seeking to know what really is rather than only what theory suggests should be, and which subjects all statements of the situation and policy prescriptions to testing against sustainability principles. However, lest an emphasis on empiricism and rigor gets lost in its own data, it will be a critical scholarship, probing disciplinary and ideological assumptions.
- Fifth, a scholarship that is policy-oriented, not in being tied to the often short lived fixations of the government of the day, but relevant to policy problems that matter in the long term to people and the environment they depend on.
- Sixth, a scholarship that is collaborative, not in the sense of the partnerships, leverage, expedient focus and external earning targets that are driving research ever closer to the consultocracy, but genuinely collaborative in the sense that Patrick Troy would term “federated”. Such collaboration allows more-than-the-sum-of-parts approaches to knowledge generation in the service of society.

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<sup>17</sup> Further explanation of these characteristics, in the context of sustainability, see Barnett et al 2003; Dovers 2005b.

<sup>18</sup> For a rigorous and fair treatment of the limits and strengths of economics with respect to social goals and environmental limits, see Common 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Historical studies which can inform current policy debates must progress far beyond the antiquarian: for discussions see Dovers 2000; Pawson and Dovers 2003.

- Seventh, and drawing these attributes together, a scholarship that accepts, seeks to comprehend and respond to complexity and uncertainty. Multiple understandings of uncertainty will be brought together, openly and constructively. It will know simple, easy answers to complex problems for what they usually are – wrong.

Such a scholarship is not easy, and it is not the only answer. I am not questioning the importance of disciplinary expertise or pure research, both of which are crucial. But complex, urgent and contested problems require, in addition not substitution, integrated, policy-oriented and critical understanding, and through research and education we can build that capacity. This integrated, policy-oriented and critical scholarship matches with the reason we are here – Patrick Troy has been a leading practitioner of this kind of approach for decades. He focused on the integration of environmental, social and economic policy over the long term well before the words sustainability or vulnerability became common.

Recall the quotes from Troy and the World Commission on Environment and Development given above. To understand and pursue sustainability is a choice that we make, a mixture of intellectual, technical, economic and ethical choices. While too many actors in research and policy fail or refuse to accept that, or limit focus to subsets of the problem only, insufficient progress will be made. Having identified many responses to the problems we face as variously misleading, simplistic or inadequate, I will now put a name to a particular barrier – populism – but in manner different to the usual use of the term.

## 5. Policy populism: an inconclusion

We usually think of populism as populist politics, the use of simplistic ideas, appealing to a significant subset of the population, utilising ignorance and to the less appealing beliefs, biases and fears in society to gain political advantage.<sup>20</sup> Modern political environments, globalization, information availability, higher levels of education and mass media both help and hinder populism, and it has always been with us, but it would seem that it has become more professionalized and mainstreamed in modern Australia and elsewhere. Security debates see populism in full flight. That usual meaning is important, but I wish to propose another, not unrelated form of populism that exists beneath the political realm in the more tangible world of policy debate – *policy populism* – that is gaining a baleful influence in debates about sustainability and cities. Policy populism has some key features:

- Easily comprehended, simple policy proposals, often based on simplified cause and effect relationships, but with some grain of truth or relevance and bearing on a topical policy issue.
- Generally proposing a single policy option or instrument, a single organizational or institutional answer, a single all-important issue, or a single method, rather than recognizing complex causes or promoting well-designed multiple strategies.
- More often than not unsupported by adequate empirical evidence or sophisticated policy analysis, but rather by appealing analogies, metaphors, limited pair-wise comparisons or “just so stories”.
- Implementation tasks are glossed over or ignored, as are historical context, institutional settings, and the slow processes of societal problem construction and consensus building.
- Relatedly, the propositions of the policy populist are most often about a singular policy outcomes or a desired societal condition, rarely about robust and trustworthy policy processes through which society can reach durable and effective policy outcomes.

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<sup>20</sup> I am ignoring the different and interesting historical roots of populism here.

- Proposals and arguments reliant for their resonance and acceptance on audience ignorance, confusion or uncertainty over the details of the substantive issue or policy problem at hand.<sup>21</sup>

Examples of the proposals of the policy populist abound. Some are glaringly obvious: madcap schemes to turn rivers backwards or pipe water in economically insane and environmentally outrageous ways over long distances, or the simplistic tap-turning off idea that capping Australia's population will solve all environmental ills. Promotion of one geographical or social space as paramount over others, be that space the rural sector, coastal communities or the CDBs of cities, are simplistic.<sup>22</sup> Similarly simplistic are prescriptions for urban form to address water and energy issues, without much empirical evidence or consideration of the complexities of environmental, social and economic implications and interactions. Silver-bullet market mechanisms are very often populist – assign property rights and trade it and everything will be alright. And lest I appear to single out economics, equally populist are proposals that strict regulation alone is enough.<sup>23</sup> Other cure-all proposals include reliance on a Commonwealth head of environmental power in the Constitution, or that devolution of everything to regional or local level will work magic. Indeed, claims that Australia is over-governed, that government is too powerful, or that removal of a tier of government will produce greater efficiency and effectiveness in public policy are neither supported by analysis or by international comparison. A final example is wrongful attribution of responsibility, such as blaming the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative for the failings of state governments.

No great break through, this characterisation of policy populism or the examples given, and most people involved in political and policy debates would recognise what is being described (even if it would be others and not themselves deemed guilty). To give some more shape to it, we can consider the beginnings of a typology of policy populism, a delineation of some key dimensions. Like any typology, the aim is to understand the suite of phenomena in question and to help recognise different forms. The table below seeks to clarify key forms and intents of policy populism, all recognizable in the examples above and similar cases:

**Table 1: a draft typology (dimensions) of policy populism**

<b>1 Main forms</b>	<p>1a. <i>Organisational populism</i>: a single organisational answer to complex failures of fragmentation. <i>One fix is never enough.</i></p> <p>1b. <i>Instrument populism</i>: single policy instruments as magic bullets to solve complex problems. <i>None are.</i></p> <p>1c. <i>Issue populism</i>: that one issue – water, salinity, population growth, whatever – is all-important. <i>No issue is singly crucial.</i></p> <p>1d. <i>Methodological populism</i>: that one analytical or prescriptive method or model is all-superior, be it systems modeling, multi-criteria analysis, deliberative designs, cost-benefit analysis, scenario planning, etc. <i>All have their uses.</i></p>
<b>2 Root cause</b>	2a. <i>Populism through ignorance (error)</i> : wrong understanding of cause-effect

<sup>21</sup> The term “ignorance” is used here in the neutral sense as per Smithson’s (1989) detailed typology of ignorance, which includes scientific uncertainty and quantitative risk as subsets of the larger categories of error and irrelevance, and which informs some of the terminology in Table 1. Highly recommended.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the implications of such geographical and social fixations, and the blind spots they produce, such as the overlooked suburbs, see Gleeson 2006.

<sup>23</sup> However, there are policy interventions that have systemic potential for cross-sectoral impacts and deserve close consideration for their pervasive potential, such as a carbon tax, or strong statement of sustainability principles in statute law.

	<p>linkages, incomplete knowledge of policy instruments and processes or legal settings, and “Ortism” – an Australian favourite, commencing with “the government orta”. <i>Honest mistakes?</i></p> <p>2b. <i>Populism through intent (distortion)</i>: deliberate, to further an ideological agenda or promote disciplinary supremacy. <i>Not honest mistakes?</i></p>
<b>3 Kinds of ignorance</b>	<p>3a. <i>Forgivable ignorance</i>: what a policy populist (eg. a natural scientist) might reasonably be not expected to know about policy. <i>Understandable, and addressable.</i></p> <p>3b. <i>Unforgivable ignorance</i>: what a policy populist should know or should reasonably be expected to find out from recognizable bodies of expertise and knowledge. <i>Unforgivable.</i></p>
<b>4 Kinds of simplification</b>	<p>4a. <i>Forgivable simplification</i>: communicating important and complex ideas in a digestible and comprehensible form to others outside a specialist area. <i>Effective communication.</i></p> <p>4b. <i>Unforgivable simplification</i>: misleading or wrong metaphors and analogies, intended to conceal true meaning or implications. <i>Sly trickery.</i></p>

While there is to an extent a sense of fun about this exercise, and the typology is less than logically constructed, beneath it lies something important, where simplistically framed problems are answered by simplistic responses, debate gets diverted and confused, and less than well-understood policies are put in place. Most people could add examples of policy populism, or improve on the typology.

What can be done about policy populisms? To conclude, I will nominate three related antidotes. The first is simply to name and describe policy populism, to make it more apparent, so that more people are aware of and ready to counter misleading proposals. The intent is not to dismiss big, simple answers out of hand – they just might be right! – but to subject them better to scrutiny and encourage consideration of alternatives.

The second is aimed at enabling better scrutiny and might be termed an “environmental civics”. Standard environmental education is more about education for or in the environment, not about the dry detail of policy. A civics education prepares the citizen for understanding and engaging knowledgably with the political, institutional and policy system. It imparts policy knowledge necessary for informed and wide policy debate. Policy populists are soon spotted by the policy-literate citizen or disciplinary researchers who understand the complexity of both the problems faced and the policy system in which responses must be evolved. An environmental civics, or a civics for sustainability, seems an appropriate project for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development which began in 2005.

A sobering finding on this front. If the content of environmental programs in Australian universities is matched against what an interdisciplinary survey group nominates as the required content of a liberal education for sustainability, the biggest shortfall between required and actual content is policy.<sup>24</sup> Thus, graduates entering the bureaucracy and environmental scientists entering research careers are likely to have difficulty comprehending policy, and that is not a good thing. This suggests an agenda of finer scale review and subsequent enhancement of content and program structure.

The third and final antidote continues the education and research theme. An obvious, medium to long term antidote to policy populism is what I have described above as the necessary scholarship: integrative, policy-oriented, empirical and critical. This is the scholarship that Patrick

<sup>24</sup> Sherren 2005.

Troy has both practiced and championed in the urban domain and for which he is being honoured today. Patrick has never been a populist – an iconoclast perhaps, a critical irritant to some, but never a populist – but knows one when he sees one. With more people like that, in policy, in research and in the community, it would be harder to peddle and implement simplistic ideas, and it might be a little easier to gain a sympathetic hearing for more complex but ultimately more effective policy proposals.

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