Alternative Pathways to Community and Economic Development: The Latrobe Valley Community Partnering Project

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Abstract
Conventional approaches to development in areas that are experiencing economic decline invariably focus on business growth through interventions such as incentives, infrastructure development and job readiness training. This paper reports on a pilot project aimed at developing an alternative approach to community and economic development in the context of the Latrobe Valley, Victoria, a resource region that has experienced downsizing and privatisation of its major employer, the state-owned power industry. The project was shaped by a poststructuralist concern with the effects of representation. It sought to challenge familiar understandings of disadvantaged areas, the economy, community and the research process in order to open up new ways of addressing social and economic issues. The resulting four-stage research project was informed by the techniques of asset-based community development and action research, as well as discourses of the diverse economy and communities of difference. During the two-year span of the project, four community enterprises were developed. The varying degrees of success they have met with in the four years since the project concluded highlight the critical role of local agencies such as the council in providing ongoing support for such endeavours.

KEY WORDS *Economic development; community development; participatory action research; poststructuralism; community economy; diverse economies*

Introduction

The Latrobe Valley, a non-metropolitan region about two hours to the east of Melbourne, has undergone significant deindustrialisation over the last fifteen years. Since its development in the 1920s to service the electricity needs of the State of Victoria this has been a prosperous region accustomed to full employment and periods of rapid growth (Gibson, 2001; Fairbrother and Testi, 2002; Rainnie and Paulet, 2003). The 1970s saw the opening of new mines and power stations as well as the development of ancillary manufacturing and service industries. But in the 1980s, in line with neo-liberal agendas across the Western world, the decision was made to privatise the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (familiarly known as the SEC). Drastic downsizing preceded the sale of state mines and power stations to overseas corporations. In 1989/1990 there were 8,481 employees in the electricity industry in the region; by 1994/1995 this had decreased by over half to 3,661 (Kazakevitch and Stone, 1997), with some power stations losing up to 75% of their workforce (Fairbrother and Testi, 2002). Downstream industries closed and services were withdrawn (Rainnie and Paulet, 2003). The region is now characterised by population loss and some of the highest rates of unemployment in Australia, and an overarching sense of despair.

The prevailing economic development response by agencies such as the Latrobe City Council and the Latrobe Valley Ministerial Taskforce (State of Victoria, 2004, 49) has been to try and attract large-scale replacement industries from outside the region. As Beer *et al.* (2003, 14-22) highlight, this highly risky approach is favoured by development agencies across Australia, despite convincing evidence supporting endogenous development strategies to encourage existing businesses and new start-ups. The precarious nature of "chasing smokestakes" (Beer *et al.*, 2003, 159) is demonstrated by the case of National Foods, which opened a new dairy processing plant in the Latrobe Valley in 1996/7. As reported to us in 1997 by one local politician, the local Council provided financial sweeteners of around $1.5 million. Originally 700 new jobs had been touted, but the plant opened with the latest in technology and only 120 jobs (and many were filled by existing employees who transferred from plants that closed in other parts of Australia). This experience has not dampened enthusiasm for large-scale projects, with attempts subsequently being made to attract magnesium smelters, industry parks and call centres. Throughout the twentieth century, the SEC shaped the economic identity of the Latrobe Valley region and its residents (Gibson, 2001); despite the SEC's demise the region's vision of development remains steadfastly centred on the mass employment of labouring subjects.

In this context of economic decline and attempts at resuscitation we have been interested in a development pathway that builds on an expanded vision of the economy to incorporate the economic practices of those who are most marginalised. Such an approach has been recognised as having 'considerable potential … especially in communities that have lost services or are confronted by job losses, but to date governments appear to have been oblivious to this potential' (Beer *at al.*, 2003, 35[1]). In this paper we report on one small attempt to develop community-based enterprises as an economic intervention that might complement mainstream economic development strategies[2]. We start with a consideration of how the guiding theoretical ideas were made accessible to the target community, and then describe the four stages

of the project. We conclude by reflecting on the projects' outcomes in terms of the guiding ideas. Given the complex experience of an action research intervention this paper can only go part of the way towards describing the process and its outcomes[3].

Guiding ideas and project aims
The Latrobe Valley Community Partnering Project was designed as a poststructuralist action research intervention. The *poststructuralist* element meant that we were concerned with the effects of different representations, and particularly with the power of familiar representations to limit the possibilities for action (Gibson-Graham, 1996). We felt that challenging the most common views of the Latrobe Valley (and social and economic dynamics more generally) and disseminating alternative representations might open up new avenues for addressing the challenges facing the region[4]. The *action research* element meant we were working closely with members of the public who were unfamiliar with the contours of recent social thought. Thus the guiding theoretical ideas had to be translated into easily communicable "key ideas". In what follows we introduce these key ideas in terms of the four common representations with and against which we were working.

Common representation 1: disadvantaged areas are characterised by needs
Disadvantaged areas are usually defined in terms of needs and problems such as the lack of jobs, skills, investment and opportunities for young people. In their pathbreaking book, *Building Communities From the Inside Out*, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) argue that a needs approach leads to solutions and resources being sought from outside the area, often in the form of programs and services designed and delivered by outside experts. In this process residents are positioned as powerless and dependent on outside help and assistance. The alternative is to identify and build on the assets that already exist in an area — the most important being the abilities and ideas of those groups who are usually positioned as marginalised and needy. Kretzmann and McKnight document a remarkable array of community initiatives resulting from this asset-based approach. Guided by this work, the Community Partnering Project aimed to create initiatives built on the skills, interests and ideas of people who had been marginalised through the restructuring process[5].

Common representation 2: the economy is made up of firms and markets
The economy is familiarly understood as being made up of capitalist firms employing workers who produce goods and services for the market. Local and regional economic development policy focuses on attracting and advancing these firms, employment opportunities and markets. Against the backdrop of the contemporary rethinking of economic identity and dynamics — particularly by economic geographers (e.g. Gibson-Graham, 1996; Williams and Windebank, 2001; Amin *et al.*, 2002; Curry, 2003; Leyshon *et al.*, 2003) — the Community Partnering Project used the representation of a diverse economy (Figure 1)[6]. The diverse economy includes the unpaid or alternatively "paid" work that people do to produce goods and services that are either sold on the market or used in non-market transactions. These diverse economic practices support and sustain our social and economic world, and many are guided by values and dynamics *other* than those associated with pure capitalist economic behaviour. In this representation the economy includes informal activities and more formal economic enterprises that are mutually constitutive. Capitalist firms, for example, rely on unpaid domestic work to sustain and nurture employees, just as unpaid domestic work relies on inputs produced by capitalist firms and transacted

through the market (as highlighted by feminist geographers such as McDowell (1983) and Mackenzie and Rose (1983)). In the context of an economically depressed region like the Latrobe Valley, the diverse economy framework recognises that people who are not in paid employment still participate in economic activities that contribute to their communities and economies.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Shifting the focus from the capitalist to the diverse economy has implications for economic development. Rather than only promoting business growth via incentives, infrastructure and job readiness training, interventions might focus on projects in the community economy (excluding the anti-social practices marked with an *), particularly those that contribute to social and economic well-being. Guided by the representation of a diverse economy, the Community Partnering Project aimed to generate community-based economic enterprises that address both social and economic goals.

Common representation 3: communities are comprised of people who share things in common
The familiar representation is that communities are made up of people with a common identity, interest or physical locale. As political theorists such as Bauman (2001), Cruikshank (1999) and Young (1990) have argued there is a dark side to this "feel good" term. The appeal to community as a safe grouping with shared values and norms frequently means that those who are different are excluded and feared. The term is, however, ubiquitous and one that is not easily dispensed with, particularly in a project situated between the fields of economic and community development (see also Gibson and Cameron, 2001; Ruming *et al.*, 2004). The challenge was to practice "community" in a way that acknowledged this critique. Our approach was to think of community as the call or appeal to become something new and different (Corlett, 1991; Gibson, 1999). Instead of drawing on common identities that were already present and known, community was thought of as bringing into being new and as yet unknown identities. The project sought to generate communities of difference by bringing people with diverse life experiences and backgrounds together to work with each other on community initiatives.

Common representation 4: research is the domain of academics and other experts
The model of research generally used to investigate a social problem involves experts describing and analysing people, places and practices. In their discussion of "critical" geographies, Kitchen and Hubbard (1999, 195) claim that:

> many social and cultural geographers are happy to survey (and "map") the exclusionary landscape, but rarely do much to change that landscape apart from the occasional token nod to "planning and policy recommendations".

Such research frequently has little impact on communities. Breitbart (2003, 162) describes the case of East St Louis where there were '60 reports sitting on the shelf that had not resulted in any improvements to the neighbourhood'. Not surprisingly researchers were viewed with considerable suspicion. The Latrobe Valley has also been subjected to numerous studies, with residents feeling that the benefits have flowed to researchers rather than "the researched". In a difficult meeting in the early

stages of the project one local politician railed against academics who he saw as 'poking and prodding' communities, treating people like 'lab rats' and writing reports that sat on shelves 'gathering dust' (while academics retreated to their 'ivory towers').

Starting with the Detroit Expedition in the 1970s human geography has had a strong tradition of praxis-oriented research which seeks to challenge *and change* social and economic inequalities (Fuller and Kitchen, 2004). Action research has been a key tool in this endeavour, with local people, academics and other professionally trained researchers working together. It relies on the belief that people with different knowledges and forms of expertise can jointly research and develop strategies for producing change in the world. Guided by an action research process, the Community Partnering Project involved collaboration between people with professional training and others in the community (particularly those who had been marginalised by economic and social changes), and was committed to producing tangible outcomes.

These guiding ideas that challenged familiar approaches to community and economic development came together in the four-stage research process outlined below.

Stages of the project
Acknowledging existing representations
In the wake of the damage wrought by the restructuring process, the prevailing representation of the Latrobe Valley is as a decimated economy and a discouraged people — an industrial "basket-case". With an explicit interest in re-presenting the region from the diverse economy perspective, we worked with those who were most readily identified as marginal to the mainstream vision of an economically "developed" region — ex-SEC workers who have not been re-employed, the young people who have never had the chance of a job, and the sole parents heading families broken by the pressures of redundancy and unemployment. Job advertisements were placed in the local newspaper calling for people with first-hand experience of the restructuring process. Two women and two men were employed as community researchers — a 21-year old from a Work for the Dole project who found permanent full-time employment several months into the project and was replaced by another 21-year old who was working part-time in a video shop; a 34-year old single parent with two school-aged children; and two unemployed ex-SEC workers aged 40 and 54 years. None was aligned with the social welfare or social services industries — indeed, they were more likely to be the recipients of social services than the providers.

The community researchers' first task was to collaborate with friends to make photo-essays that told their story of the Latrobe Valley. In addition to providing a qualitative assessment of how life was seen by the community researchers at the beginning of the project, we felt that it was important to first acknowledge the power and negativity of dominant representations before sidestepping them and building more enabling images. "Jock's Story" (Figure 2) was produced by several ex-SEC workers and shows derelict industrial buildings, abandoned mining equipment, empty SEC carparks and vandalised SEC bus shelters. From the perspective of Jock and his mates, downsizing and privatisation had produced a boom in thrift shops, pawnbrokers and vacant stores. The photo-essay taps into the feelings of abandonment, loss and nostalgia for a secure past integrated into the mainstream, capitalist economy (the top cells of Figure 1). A similar story is told in "The Young Latrobe Valley" (Figures 3 and 4). It highlights everyday activities that engage many

young people — drinking, smoking, playing pool, going to the pub, visiting Centrelink and going to Court. Like "Jock's Story" there is a powerful sense of abandonment, with the young people depicting their lives in terms of lack — no jobs, no opportunities and no future. Both these photo-essays resonate with the predominant depiction of the Latrobe Valley as a blighted and desperate community (e.g. Tippett, 1997; Shaw and Munro, 2001). By contrast, the photo-essay that represents the life of a sole parent (Figure 5) is full of busy activity and juggled occupations — teacher, vet, mind reader, domestic director, entertainer, chef, nurse, referee. Here identification and value is connected with many of the unpaid, un-traded, un-recognised activities of the community economy (shown in the bottom cells of Figure 1).

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE
FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE
FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE
FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

The photo-essays were used by the community researchers to initiate conversations with other unemployed young people, ex-SEC workers and single parents as they visited neighbourhood houses, numeracy and literacy classes, men's violence management groups, Work for the Dole projects and other situations where they were likely to encounter marginalised groups. The photo-essays proved an invaluable tool for "breaking the ice" and triggering conversations that allowed people to express their frustration, anger and bitterness. One community researcher reflected on a conversation she had at a numeracy and literacy class:

> One particular gentleman [an ex-SEC worker] was quite obviously very frustrated and pessimistic. He was quite vocal and kept presenting me with stumbling blocks. 'Look what they have done? … What are they going to do about it? … What's the use … No-one is going to be bothered … People will want to be paid'.

> I tried to address his issues without being confrontational. I tried to be sympathetic and understanding. We talked a bit about the problems in our community. I agreed with what he had to say and used "Jock's Story" as an image to sum it all up. It was evident that we had to almost exhaust that line of thinking before moving on[7].

The feelings of frustration and powerlessness expressed by this ex-SEC worker (and many others) highlight the devastating impact of exclusion from the mainstream economy on once-labouring economic subjects. In the Community Partnering Project we were interested in repositioning these economic subjects as productive and contributing members of the diverse economy.

Generating new representations
Our poststructuralist interest in the power of different representations led to the practice of attempting to shift the focus from stories of lack and depletion to more enabling stories of fullness and capacity. In training workshops with the community researchers we discussed different ways of thinking about economies and introduced the representation of the diverse economy. For inspiration we also visited community-

based enterprises in the Valley. Gradually, the community researchers' perceptions of what might be possible began to change:

> Yvonne: I didn't realize there was such an extensive web of community groups, organisations and services operating in the Latrobe Shire. Woodworx [a not-for-profit woodworking business] for instance. There's almost a whole industry quietly working away and if you were an average worker or family person you might not even know they exist.

> Nicki: Working on the project has given me some hope that the valley will not become a ghost town. That it is possible for the valley to survive without all the emphasis on getting in business. That other forms of communities can and do work. I guess it is more of a personal discovery rather then a project discovery but if I had not been working here then it is a discovery that I know I would not have made[8].

As a way of bringing these different economic visions and valuations into conversations with community members we built on the approach of Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), as discussed in the previous section. This involved bringing to light the assets that people already had, as well as the diverse economic practices that they were already engaged in.

The community researchers began a series of group interviews with people involved in various social service programs to record gifts of the head (learning skills that people could teach or learn); gifts of the hand (doing and making skills that people could teach or wanted to learn); and gifts of the heart (things that people cared passionately about). Unlike a regular survey, however, the aim was not to produce a complete inventory of skills but to shift the perception that people had of themselves as lacking and not up to the task of creating new futures. What was important was the *process* of people working together to complete a joint Portrait of Gifts. People invariably surprised themselves with the extent of their capacities, learned new things about each other and found common areas of interest. This exercise provided qualitative information for generating new representations of the Latrobe Valley as a caring, skilful and learning community. For example, in place of the depiction of the Valley as a dysfunctional community where child abuse and gang and drug activity are projected as unsurprising, a shared representation of the community as caring was produced (Figure 6). This representation also focused attention on the community economy and the range of unpaid and non-market economic practices, like gifting and voluntary work, that supposedly economically inactive people were engaged in. This and other portrayals of the Latrobe Valley as a learning place made up of skilful people were put together in a small brochure that was distributed widely. The intention was to revision the "economically marginalised" as being already economically active and as having the capacity to be involved in shaping the Valley's future development.

FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE

Creating spaces of identification
In Stage Three the community researchers continued working with people from the earlier stages to explore and act on the opportunities opened up by the shared

knowledge of their communities as comprised of skilful and capable people with many aspirations and passions. This meant helping people imagine ways in which they might act on their capacities and ideas. One strategy was conversation. To return to the earlier reflection from the community researcher on her conversation with the ex-SEC worker, she continues:

> [I found out that] he is very good with his hands and knows a bit about cars. I asked, hypothetically, if there were a group of single parents interested in learning about car maintenance, and if I could arrange a venue and possible tools, would he be interested in sharing his skills and knowledge? 'Yeah. I'd do that, no worries', he said. I asked him would he expect to be paid for his time. 'No. I wouldn't do it for money', he replied. I asked, 'So do you think you'd get anything out of it yourself?' 'Yeah. I suppose I'd get some satisfaction out of it [because] I like to help people like yourself'. So I really tried to turn it around and have him answer or resolve his own questions and issues.

In this discussion the ex-SEC worker comes to see himself as having skills and knowledge that could be shared. From focusing on the limitations and on people's unwillingness to act, he makes the shift to self-identify as a potential community resource. This conversation is representative of many that took place as people began to imagine the various ways in which they might act on their abilities and ideas.

A series of workshops were also held. Small workshops were run with people from the same program such as Work for the Dole, or numeracy and literary classes. The workshops were based around communally making and eating food like pizzas. The aim was to emphasise collective possibilities, and create an environment of fun and familiarity where people could take risks and "play together" with new ideas. These small workshops were followed by a larger, open invitation workshop designed as a collective brainstorm about how community assets could be directed towards new enterprises. Over 60 ideas for community projects were generated at this larger workshop (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE

In the smaller workshops people had expressed an interest in community gardens and community toolsheds, so two "How To" workshops on these topics were also held. Many who attended were intrigued by the presentation by Gil Freeman, a founding member of CERES. This community and environmental garden in inner Melbourne has 25 full-time equivalent positions and an annual budget of $1.6 million. So interested were people that a bus trip to CERES was organised. This event was an epiphany for many. Again it was the process as well as the content of the visit that was important in creating a space in which people could imagine themselves in new subject positions in a community enterprise. Jean, one local resident, related the experience of the bus trip in this way:

> It floored me, CERES, with their chickens and their bees and their recycled water, and the excitement and the fun of the group [on the bus]. I really enjoyed the bus tour. It was a long day … and I thought, 'Ah don't think I'll get involved in this'.

…
But what really got me was the crowd [on the bus] – it's a mixed group of people … they're trying so hard to do something and we're talking about for the whole community. You're talking about elderly citzs, street kids, your drug addicts, correctional services, Work for the Dole.
…
I sat up the back of the bus, knitting very quietly, trying to mind my own business, but Silvio kept yacking in my ear all day. *Laughs* … They're just a mixed group that if they're trying to do so much work, trying to do something you've got to find where you fit, what they're trying to do, if it's such a good cause. To me it's like a giant big social club. Forget the gardening![9]

Through the process of conversations, workshops and field trips people began to identify with the representation of themselves as active economic subjects and contributing citizens, and they began to imagine themselves working together and running their own community initiatives.

Acting on that identification
In the final and ongoing stage people acted on their new identification to build community initiatives. Four initiatives started during the funded stage:

1. Latrobe Valley Community Environmental Gardens was established in October 1999 as a not-for-profit incorporated association to transform an old caravan park into a community and environmental garden. Federal government and local council grants were used for site fencing, water reconnection, gardening equipment, and health, safety and leadership training. The group also secured planning permission and had the site cleared by Work for the Dole teams. A composting and worm farm system was started off-site and vegetable crops were planted.
2. Santa's Workshop opened in October 1999 as a workshop space where people could make large outdoor decorations under the tutelage of an ex-SEC worker who decorated his house each Christmas. For the past four years it has been open two days a week throughout the year. During the first part of the year a small group makes Christmas decorations that are sold to local businesses and residents. This raises money for the materials used by local residents to make their own decorations in the pre-Christmas period. The project is under the auspices of Latrobe City Council which provides a building (a disused pre-school), insurance cover and electricity.
3. Latrobe Community Workshed @ Newborough opened in 2000 as a woodworking workshop, and in 2003 it moved into a disused butcher's shop. A Federal Government Regional Solutions Grant provided funding for tools. Residents use the workshed to restore furniture and make wood products.
4. Latrobe Cyber Circus started with a one-day circus workshop in June 2000 for unemployed young people. Unexpectedly, one group who attended was already active in the local techno-electronica music scene, and interested in combining traditional and contemporary performance arts. A one-week circus camp (funded by VicHealth) was then held in 2001 to train young people in circus skills and to develop a performance based on a Dr Seuss story.

Approximately 80 people (including 30 in management committees) were involved in the projects. Since project funding ceased in 2000 the four initiatives have fared very differently. Latrobe Cyber Circus was disbanded in mid-2001 because of conflict between some of the young people (and despite the efforts of the local youth centre and Latrobe City Council's youth worker). The community and environmental gardens achieved a great deal in four years, before formally folding in November 2003. This ambitious initiative envisioned a range of activities including individual plots, group plots (for groups like schools, Work for the Dole programs and Community Service Workers), raised garden beds (for older people and those with physical disabilities), composting and worm farms. The group tried to develop all these activities in tandem, and as a result found it difficult to sustain the effort and attract new members to assist with preparatory activities.

Santa's Workshop and the Latrobe Community Workshed @ Newborough continue to operate. At present Santa's Workshop seems to be in the stronger position of the two, perhaps due to the auspicing arrangement with Latrobe City Council which means the group can focus on the things they love doing — making Christmas decorations. In contrast the workshed is located in commercial premises and has to raise funds to cover all expenses. This places considerable stress on the Committee of Management[10].

In retrospect, one crucial aspect of this approach to community and economic development that we had underestimated was the importance of building strong relationships with local institutions such as councils, churches and unions. When the original proposal was developed in partnership with the Council it was agreed that Council would provide ongoing support once funding finished in December 2000. Political changes and staff turnover during the project meant that this support was never forthcoming in the form originally envisaged. In hindsight we probably needed to put greater effort into finding other forms of institutional support for the initiatives. The experiences of the four initiatives, however, suggest that whatever support is secured, this should be strategically given, rather than delivered in blanket form as by a funding grant. For example, in the years since the funded stage was completed, the community and environmental gardens could have benefited from strategic advice and support to focus on one small gardening activity, attract new members and then start to implement their ambitious vision for the development of the entire site. Currently, the community workshed requires assistance to find alternative premises with lower overheads, or to increase activity in order to develop and market a product to cover these costs. The type of strategic support that is necessary will vary during the course of a project, and has to be given in such a way that it does not hinder a group's capacity to deal with challenges themselves (and even to learn from its mistakes). A research commitment of two years is insufficient to provide the ongoing strategic support that is needed for these types of community enterprises. In the absence of an institution committed to ongoing support for this alternative pathway we find it heartening that the initiatives lasted as long as they did[11].

Conclusion
This brief account of the Community Partnering Project shows that it achieved a considerable amount in two years of operation. Four very different community initiatives, based on the ideas and efforts of marginalised groups, were initiated. In terms of the guiding ideas and project aims, we believe that the project demonstrates

the community and economic development potential of building on unfamiliar representations of disadvantaged areas, the economy, communities and research. In what follows we briefly reflect on the project's processes and outcomes in terms of these unfamiliar representations.

Contrary to the widely held view of the Latrobe Valley as needy and depleted, the project revealed the richness and depth of skills and capacities, dreams and passions of those who had been marginalised by the SEC's restructuring. The project provided these groups with an opportunity to act on their assets in order to create community projects. It also provided an opportunity for further skills development. For example, members of the community and environmental gardens who ran fundraising sausage sizzles attended training sessions on the Goods and Services Tax (GST), Food Handling Skills, and Occupational Health and Safety. The sociable and meaningful context for this training contrasted with obligatory courses members were required to attend in order to receive unemployment benefits.

The four initiatives were all located within the community economy. They drew upon unpaid volunteer labour as well as alternatively paid labour (such as Work for the Dole) and non-market exchanges like donations of waste timber and paint. The initiatives were nevertheless strongly interconnected with the formal economy. Santa's Workshop, for example, sold decorations to local businesses who made payment into an account with a large hardware firm. Through this account, timber and other materials were then purchased by Santa's Workshop at cost-price. The other initiatives used grant funding to purchase various goods and services from fencing contractors, circus trainers, plumbers and woodworking equipment suppliers to name a few. Each of the initiatives had the potential to consolidate its economic practices and develop into a more fully-fledged economic enterprise. The intention of Latrobe Cyber Circus, for example, was to generate income by performing at festivals, dance parties and schools. The Latrobe Valley Environmental Gardens was aiming to sell some produce while still donating to the local food bank. The experience of exemplary community enterprises like CERES (discussed above) is that this more formal economic development takes time and needs to be initially underwritten by volunteer labour and grant-funding.

The aim of generating communities of difference was foregrounded throughout the the project, as people with very different life experiences and backgrounds came together to build community projects. Food preparation and eating played an important role with activities like barbeques and on-site "smokos" being used to give people time and space to build connections. Surprising friendships resulted, such as the ones between a young woman working through drug addiction and an older woman with a life-threatening illness; and a retired professional man and a young intellectually disabled woman. Participants often made unexpected contributions that surpassed others' expectations of them. This is not to say that these communities of difference were without conflict. At times there were difficult clashes that resulted in people deciding to leave the projects.

Finally, this project highlights that an action research approach based on collaboration between people with professional training and others who have been marginalised can produce tangible outcomes. We also found that broader theoretical commitments, in this case poststructuralist attention to the effects of representation, can be translated

into communicable ideas that have the power to inform practical research actions and to reach a non-specialist audience further afield than the Latrobe Valley (e.g. Cameron and Gibson, 2001; *It's in our hands*). Of course, the outcomes of the project have, in turn, informed our theoretical concerns, and this project has led to further exploration of those processes of subject formation and forms of governmentality that are likely to sustain community-based economic enterprises (e.g. Gibson-Graham, 2006).

NOTES
1. Two exceptions are the Local Employment Initiatives project of the late-1980s (Fagan, 1987) and the Community-Based Initiatives project of the mid-1990s (Smith and Herbert, 1997).
2. Total funding for this pilot project was $115,000. This is an extremely modest budget when compared to international community economic development projects. For example, Armstrong *et al.* (2002) discuss the challenges of evaluating community economic development in the context of a £36 million project conducted from 1994 to 1996 in the Yorkshire and Humber region of the UK. Beer *et al.* (2003, 30) note that in Ireland, with a population of 3 million, the Community Support Framework Programs received £4.6 billion funding between 1994 and 1999.
3. Specific aspects of the project are discussed in more detail in Cameron and Gibson (2001; 2005a, b), and in the video *It's in Our Hands* (see also Gibson-Graham, 2002; 2003).
4. In Cameron and Gibson (2005a) we discuss the research approach in more detail.
5. Kretzmann and McKnight's approach is generating interest in Australia, but in terms of projects that have been implemented we only know of the Shared Action project in Bendigo (Beilharz, 2002).
6. Figure 1 is meant to be read in terms of the columns; economic activities are not necessarily aligned across each row. In previous work we have employed the diverse economy framework as a way of helping organise our thoughts about economic identity (Community Economies Collective, 2001; Gibson, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 2003) and economic practices (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003).
7. As part of the research process, the community researchers regularly wrote up their reflections on the progress of the project. This extract is from a written reflection, 28 July, 1999.
8. These two statements are from written reflections, 28 July, 1999.
9. This extract is from a taped interview with a community participant, 10 May, 2000. This was one of a series of semi-structured interviews with community researchers and other participants discussing their involvement in the project and their perceptions of the project's strengths and weaknesses.
10. We have prepared a more detailed report for Latrobe City Council on how each of the enterprises has fared and the key lessons that can be drawn (Cameron and Gibson, 2003).
11. Along with the project outcomes, it is important to note how the community researchers have fared since the project concluded. One is working with indigenous communities in Central Australia, one has recently completed an Honours degree (First Class); and two are working full-time, one as a youth worker.

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	TRANSACTIONS	LABOUR	ORGANISATIONAL FORM
	MARKET	*WAGE*	*CAPITALIST*
C O M M U N I T Y	*ALTERNATIVE MARKET* *Local trading systems* *Alternative currencies* *Underground market* *Co-op exchange* *Barter* *Alternative credit*	*ALTERNATIVE PAID* *Cooperative* *Self-employed* *In kind* *Indentured**	*ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST* *Environmental ethic* *Social ethic* *State capitalist*
E C O N O M Y	*NON-MARKET* *Household flows* *Gifts* *Indigenous exchange* *Gleaning* *Theft**	*UNPAID* *Volunteer* *Housework* *Family care*	*NON-CAPITALIST* *Communal* *Self-employed* *Feudal/ Peasant* *Slave**

Figure 1   Diverse economy framework.
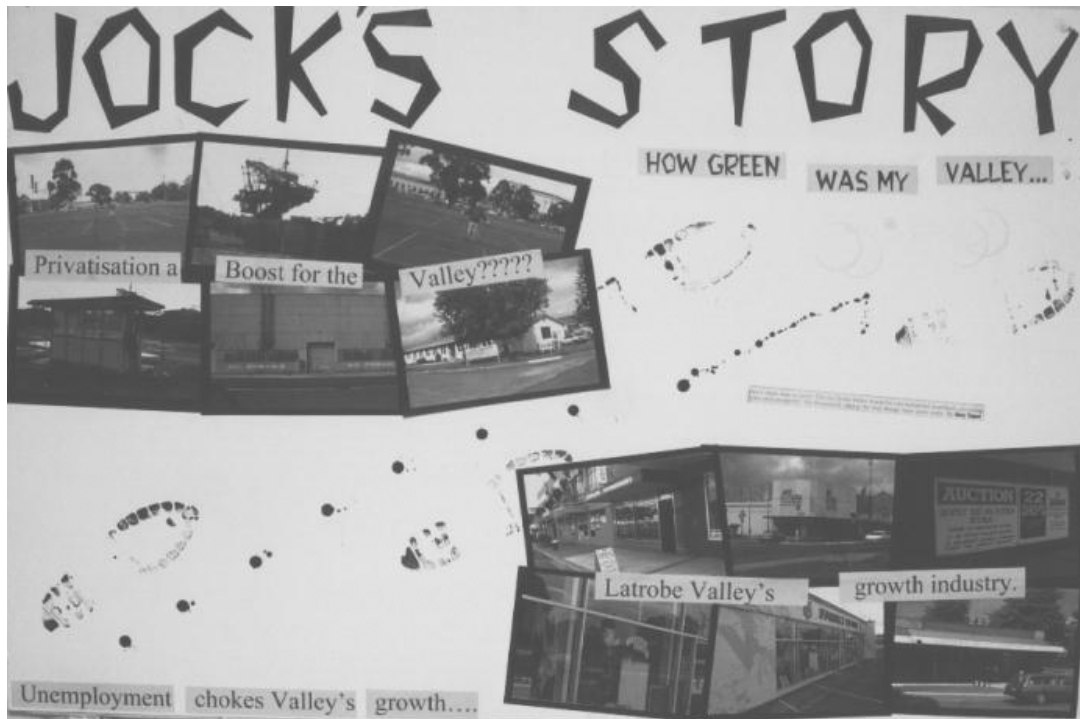Note: Anti-social practices are marked with an *.

Figure 2 "Jock's Story", photo-essay produced by ex-SEC workers.
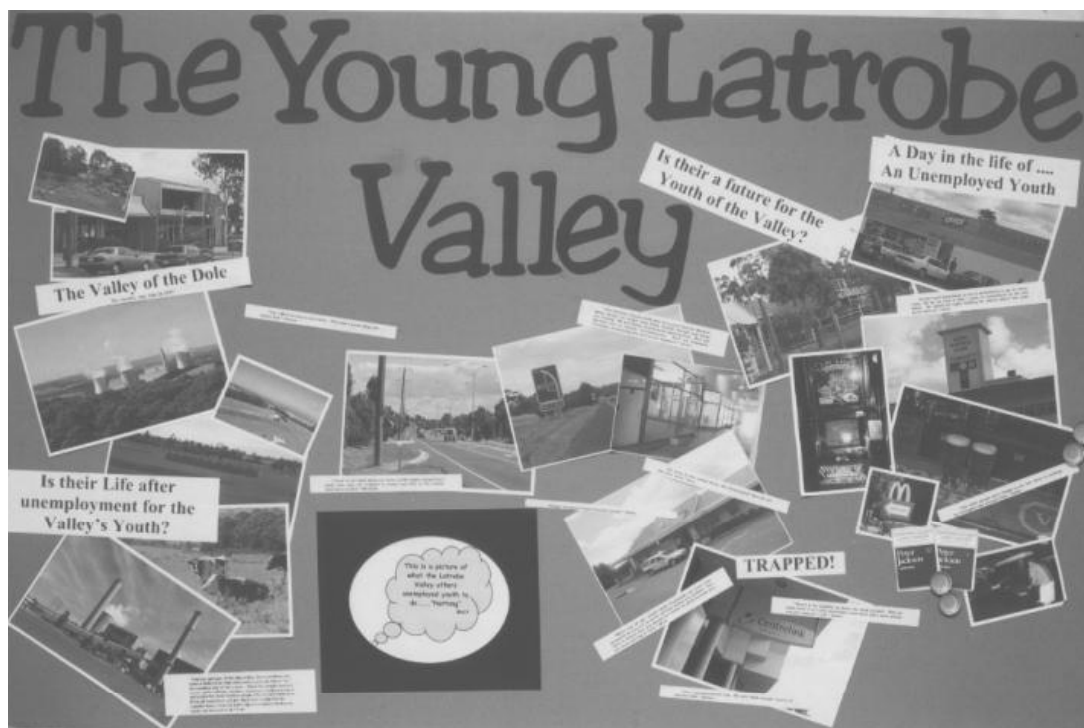

Figure 3 "The Young Latrobe Valley", photo-essay produced by unemployed young people.
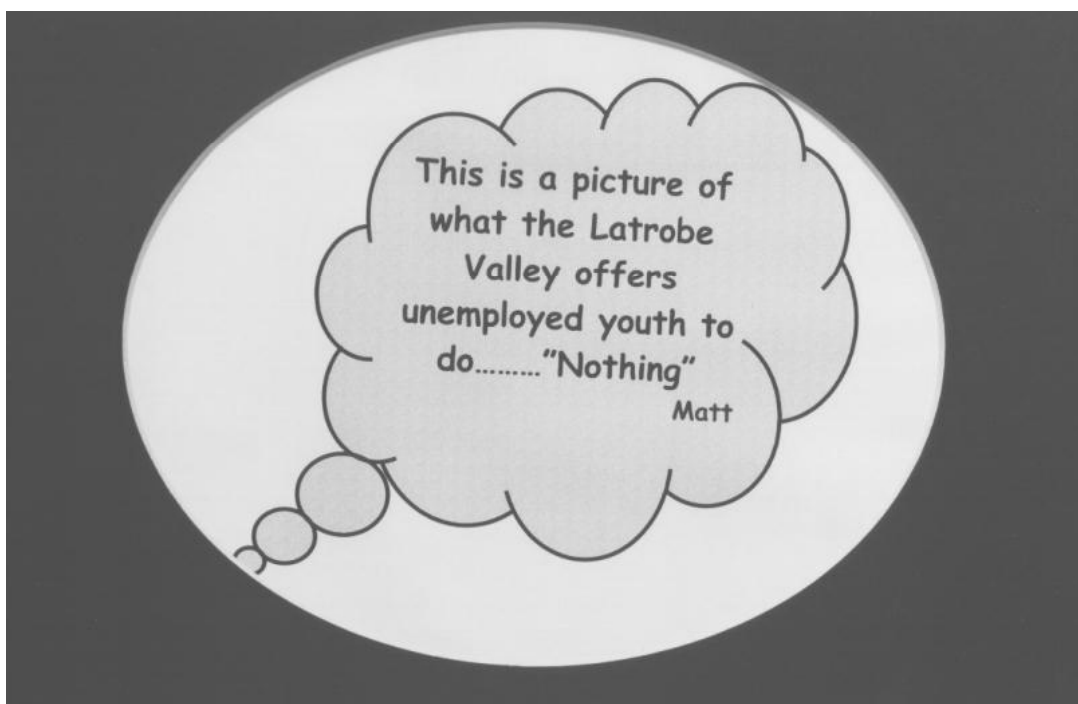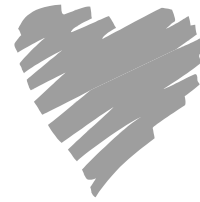
Figure 4 Detail from "The Young Latrobe Valley".

Figure 5 Life in the Valley for a sole parent.

GIFTS OF THE HEART

- over ½ the people who filled in a Portrait of Gifts give food, money or household items to families in need.

- over ½ run errands, shop or drive for people who need transportation.

- nearly ½ help with children's sports teams.

- over ¼ help out in school classrooms.

- nearly ¾ listen or give support to people who need help.

- nearly ½ have first aid skills.

- some of the things that people care deeply about are:
  the environment   family histories
  care of the elderly   recycling
  opportunities for young people

The Latrobe Valley - A Caring Community

Figure 6 A portrayal of the Latrobe Valley as a caring community. Detail from brochure.

MAKING AND EXCHANGING PROJECTS

- Fixing old bikes
- Tool recycling and lending library
- Making wooden furniture without power tools (bodging)
- Lawn mowing for elderly people
- Learning exchange that uses "grey power"
- Furniture exchange
- Half-used paint bank and exchange
- Dress pattern exchange
- Fibre and fabric bank
- Sharing garden tools
- Book binding
- Handyman assistance for the aged
- Inventors' resource centre
- Community wood workshop
- Inventory of skills
- Fixing broken furniture

CULTURAL PROJECTS

- Community film making workshop
- Photographic developing room
- Youth newspaper
- Matching social dancers with learners
- Music workshops and festivals
- Communal cooking kitchen
- SEC recognition day
- Community bush dances
- Documenting family histories and personal stories
- Music jam sessions
- Sheet music and/or musical instrument exchange
- Book reading
- Matching people who play musical instruments with those who want to learn
- Street parties
- Collectors' directory
- Christmas street decorations
- Murals and painting spaces

ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS

- Fixing gardens for elderly or others in need of assistance
- Cleaning up waterways for children's play
- Backyard seed banks for native plants
- Water recycling off roofs
- Backyard tank yabbie and fish farming
- Recycling demolition materials
- Community chook yard
- Garden produce exchange
- Community gardens
- Teaching young people bush appreciation
- Collection point for sawdust and manure for community composting
- Recycling centre for clean industrial waste to be used by pre-schools, primary schools, etc., for art activities

IDEAS FOR SPECIFIC WORKSHOPS

- How to set up a community garden
- How to set up a community toolshed
- Cooperatives — how do they work?
- Management options for community projects

Figure 7 Workshop ideas for community and economic projects.