'Branching scenarios' seeking articulated action for regional regeneration – a case study of limited success

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Abstract: In this article, we outline and discuss a novel augmentation of scenario method combined with Delphi analysis to engage multiple actors in analyzing complex and contested problems. In particular, we present 'branching scenarios' as an approach that breaks potential chains of perceived causality from the national/global level to drive local outcomes. The approach focuses on generating debate on local agency. The project discussed formed part of a larger research program in North West Tasmania to study the possible processes for economic and social regeneration. In engaging key stakeholders from public, private and non-governmental organizations, the team faced issues associated with participants' geographical dispersal and lack of time. In addition, the region may be considered as characterized by 'lock-in' to extant structures and, perhaps, resistant to the change necessary to achieve economic regeneration. For these reasons, our scenario intervention was deliberately designed to provide a cognitive 'jolt' to these senior, time-poor individuals - seeking to prompt their articulated action to achieve the jointly-held goal, regeneration. We document our approach and evaluate and analyze the degree to which we achieved this jointly-desired outcome. We present a new conceptual framework for broad social inquiry that will promote deep stakeholder engagement.

1. Introduction

In this article, we outline and discuss a novel augmentation of scenario method combined with Delphi analysis to engage multiple stakeholders in addressing the challenge of how to prompt and promote regeneration in a region of socio-political fragmentation and socio-economic disadvantage. The project discussed formed part of a larger Australian Research Council (ARC)-funded program to explore the potential role of unions in supporting economic regeneration in North West Tasmania. The region has been characterized in the recent past as one of low participation in education, rising unemployment and community fragmentation (ABC News, 2014; Walker & Fairbrother, 2015). The research aimed to engage senior decision makers from across the region and from across organizations – both public and private sectors as well as unions – in a structured debate of possible regional futures and potential responses. However, the engagement process was hindered both by issues of geographical distance and lack of time as well as by differences in viewpoints among key stakeholders.

The formal governance arrangements for the North West Tasmania region comprise; nine local government areas (LGAs), Tasmanian State agencies, Commonwealth agencies, as well as a local government economic development agency covering the nine LGAs (Cradle Coast Authority, hereafter, CCA). CCA's programmes are supported by funding from the Tasmania Government's Partnerships Agreement Program and the Commonwealth Government's Sustainable Regions Program (McDonald et al., 2013). The region has been subject to ongoing debate about its future, particularly during the 2000s.

The subject of the effectiveness or otherwise of scenario methods in prompting action in the sphere of public policy development has been subject to debate over recent years (cf. Bryant & Lempert, 2010; Bowman et al., 2013; Cairns et al., 2013; Nieto-Romero et al., 2016; Rickards et al., 2014a, 2014b; Volkery & Ribeiro, 2009), in particular when dealing with time-poor senior decision makers (Cairns et al, 2016; Pincombe et al., 2013). The question of the effectiveness of scenario methods as a means of engagement must be placed in the broader context of debate about both opportunities for leaders to facilitate interaction (Storper, 2013) and problems associated with inter-organizational collaboration (Vangen & Huxham, 2003, 2012; Vangen et al., 2015). In this project, we sought to engage senior decision makers from a broad range of organizations in a geographically dispersed and fragmented region (see Map 1) – with variable transport networks, diverse political and organizational perspectives, and with evidence of four distinct economic zones (DIER, 2013).

INSERT MAP 1 ABOUT HERE

The first aim of the overall research program was to determine whether there was some shared understanding of the critical issues facing the region (cf. Allison et al., 2013; Skills Tasmania, 2008; Stratford, 2006) on which to build so that a common basis for seeking regeneration could be identified and nurtured. The second aim was to question whether or not current barriers to collaboration were grounded in 'lock-in' (Grabher, 1993; Hassink, 2010) and, if so, could these be broken down. Broadly, lock-in refers to how a "combination of historical contingency and the emergence of self-reinforcing effects steers a technology, industry, or regional economy along one 'path', rather than another" (Martin, 2010, p. 3). Three forms of lock-in have been identified: *Functional* where close ties between businesses foster relationships that fulfill 'functional specialities' rather than firms developing their own capabilities; *Cognitive* where a common mind-set exists that might "confuse secular trends with cyclical downturns" (Hassink, 2016, p. 193); and *political*

where cooperative and symbiotic relationships between networks of organizations; such as trade unions, business and government; and patterns of behaviour can obstruct industrial reorganization and political innovation (Grabher, 1993). Extending the analysis, Hassink (2010) argues that even after deindustrialization, lock-in can remain because social and political milieus change more slowly than industries, and that the strength of lock-in thus impacts on industrial regeneration (see also Hudson, 2005). Here, we were particularly interested in; i) whether critical issues facing the region were seen as being locally or externally grounded, and ii) where barriers to collaboration, and the key to unlocking them, were perceived to lie.

The final aim was to apply some form of scenario intervention method based upon intuitive logics. Here, the procedural objective was to explore scenario methods' effectiveness (cf. Wright et al., 2013) in a public policy development context through deep engagement with time-poor key decision-making stakeholders in the region, with the intent of prompting articulated action to initiate a process of regeneration. To this end, rather than applying the 'basic' and widely used business model of scenario construction (e.g. van der Heijden et al, 2002; Wright & Cairns, 2011), we responded to emergent issues of concern and potential perceptions of causality by developing an augmented application of scenario and Delphi methods. The focus of this article is on the development and documentation of our second scenario intervention – specifically, the form we term 'branching scenarios' – from the Delphi inquiry, and analysis of its outcomes.

We detail our context-sensitive methods and present our stage-by-stage outcomes in Sections 3 and 4 of this article. As a prelude to our discussion and analysis, we note that the various data sets that we collected during our scenario intervention process indicated that there was considerable shared understanding of the critical issues facing the region. The outcomes of the second scenario workshop revealed commonality on the general need for actions to bring about change to foster regeneration and, also, commonly-held views on whether or not these actions would be undertaken. Based upon our analysis of the second scenario workshop and the interviews, we believe that our innovative use of 'branching scenarios' did direct thinking towards local agency and action, rather than maintaining a legacy approach of seeking State and/or Commonwealth level resources. Nonetheless, as our conclusions will outline, our results also indicate that without further intervention to elicit individual and group commitment to specific actions, embedded beliefs and values are likely to impede action to achieve jointly-hoped-for economic regeneration.

2. Conceptual framework – research context and approach

2.1 The North West Tasmania regional context for collaboration

The site of the research, the State of Tasmania, is an island territory on the edge of the Australian continent. This sub-national jurisdiction has been the focus of debate about economic and social development, considering the choice between 'economic globalization' and 'localised endeavours' (Stratford, 2006, p. 273). The island is divided into three main regions, with approximately a third of the population living and working in the North West region. While the region shares features of other areas that seek to regenerate, with closure and loss of major manufacturing/processing facilities (e.g. Pape et al., 2015), it has specific problems related to its demographic profile. The age profile of the North West Tasmania population shows a lower proportion of residents aged between 20-39 years than the rest of Australia (ABS, 2011). A portion of residents in this age group have moved to live (and presumably work) elsewhere, perhaps seeking education, employment, or lifestyle opportunities not available in the region. Data for the State of

Tasmania as a whole indicate that this age cohort has consistently experienced a net loss to interstate migration since at least the late 1990s (ABS, 2013). The State's total population growth was the lowest or equal lowest of any Australian state or territory throughout the twentieth century (BITRE, 2008, p. 63). In addition to this demographic profile, accounts from within the region point to further broader cultural and social impediments to regeneration.

In a contested step, in 2002 the then Labor government presented a plan for sustainable development of the island economy, titled *Tasmania Together*. Central to this plan was a commitment to 'communicative rationality' (Stratford, 2006). This initiative was "meant to take public participation beyond mere consultation, and enable the constitution of shared and reflexive construction of consensus around agreed meanings and understandings" (p. 276, see also Stratford, et al., 2003). But, in the following decade, little has changed within Tasmania. One assessment is that this approach misunderstood the extent of divisions within the society and the question of the exercise of power – who has resources and capacity to do what (Stratford, 2006; see also Eversole, 2016). A related observation is that such engagements should consider the 'agonistic' relations that underpin policy formulation and implementation, following Mouffe's (2000, p. 13) insights "that a rationalist approach to politics ignores (is even blind to) the antagonism that 'constitutes an ever-present possibility in politics'". In turn, this step requires recognition, and thus accommodation, of those involved in debates about resource allocation and processes of engagement (McGuirk, 2001). The problems associated with such inter-organizational collaborations have been recognized (Vangen & Huxham, 2013, 2012). As such, the problem may remain one of vested and closed interests in worlds characterized by scarcity and inequality. One central challenge in the region is restricted educational prospects, contributing to poor educational outcomes. Of note, there is limited opportunity to complete the final years – 11 and 12 – of Australian secondary education. Indeed, there is a perception within the general population of Tasmania that schooling normally finishes in year 10 (cf. Department of Education, 2013; Wisbey, 2015). An analysis assessing the prospects for innovation in Tasmania (West, 2013, p. 71) explained, "Tasmania has developed a way of life, a mode of doing things, a demographic, a culture and associated economy that reproduces under-achievement generation after generation". Other considerations influencing the economy include low levels of human capital and isolated economies (BITRE, 2008).

An appreciation of the wider economic context enhances our understanding of how regeneration is played out within the region. There has been a longstanding concern by Australian policy makers about Tasmania's economy (cf. Callaghan, 1977; Lockyer, 1926; Nixon 1997). Analysis of Tasmania's economic performance compared to other Australian states between 1861-1990/91 shows not only slower growth but also the lowest per capita GDP (Cashin, 1995). Within Tasmania, Burnie and Devonport; large population centres in our focal region; took longer to recover from the most recent recession compared with the southern state capital, Hobart (BITRE, 2008: 55). In recent times, the core of the economy has shifted from resource extraction, agriculture and hydro-industrialization (Stratford, 2008) to "niche and value-added produce, advanced manufacturing and service sectors" (Walker & Fairbrother, 2015, p. 29).

Federal Australian regional development policy stresses regional-scale governance and place-based solutions (Eversole, 2016), outlined with reference to local institutions, networks and social capital (McDonald et al, 2013). Nonetheless, progress has been limited by a lack of effective coordination and cooperation between the three tiers of government and resourcing regional agencies (Beer et al., 2005). This lack of progress is compounded by "the general unwillingness of central governments (either state or commonwealth) to devolve real responsibility for regional development to regions themselves" (Collits, 2015,

p. 31). Moreover, in North West Tasmania, the local government areas that make up the region range from just over 1,500 persons to over 24,000, with the resource and capacity implications indicated by such disparity. Issues of the role of and reliance upon central government influenced our scenario development approach, as outlined before and detailed below.

While the focus of the main ARC research program – within which the focal scenario activities were embedded – is on enabling collaborative regeneration within NW Tasmania in the aftermath of industrial decline, historical evidence and current data indicates a legacy of fragmentation and inter-community competition for limited resources along with a general sense of 'universal helplessness' (Pecukonis & Wenocur, 1994) induced through deindustrialization and job losses across the region. These fragmented communities impede collaborative innovation and development, although as Storper (2013) and others argue, some leaders may be in a position to facilitate the construction of networks and the engagement in debate to promote regeneration. In our analysis, the NW Tasmania region exhibits symptoms of 'lock-in' (Grabher, 1993; Hassink, 2010), where factors that were strengths in the past can turn into obstacles to innovation. However, while we are aware that, in the face of economic or other crises, individuals and communities may fall into a state of 'universal helplessness' (Pecukonis & Wenocur, 1994), there are counter-examples of how, when faced with such economic crisis, communities may instead initiate articulated action at the local level to bring about positive change (cf. Smith, 2011; Taylor, 2012).

2.2 Research framework – scenarios as narratives of regional futures

In this study, we sought to engage a broad range of stakeholders with a common interest in the region's future, although with diverse values and priorities. Additionally, they were geographically dispersed and relatively time-poor. Within the overall research program, this use of scenario methods was specifically intended to prompt critical debate among these stakeholders about alternative possible and plausible futures for the region. While the term 'scenario planning' has been widely used and recognized in the business context over decades (e.g. Schoemaker, 1995; Wilkinson & Kupers, 2013), it has been argued that scenarios themselves are not 'plans' per se (Tapinos, 2011; Wright et al., 2013). Here, we were cognizant of this and viewed the development of scenarios as a tool to promote further discussion, to inform policy and planning, and, importantly, to prompt articulated actions by powerful stakeholders. However, we also saw the need to ensure that the scenario narratives were themselves fully informed by appropriate knowledge and understanding of the region – its political, economic, social, technological, ecological and legal (PESTEL) environment. As such, the scenario project that is the focus of our discussion here sat within a broader framework, informed by prior extensive desk research (e.g. DIER, 2013; Walker & Fairbrother, 2015) and a series of exploratory semi-structured interviews with senior regional respondents, some of whom participated in later research activities (see Table 1 in Appendix).

The use of narrative in organization studies is well established (e.g. Barry & Elmes, 1997; Czarniawska, 1997, 2004) and the nature of scenario narratives and their impact has been discussed (e.g. Bowman et al., 2013; Rasmussen, 2005). According to Gabriel (2000), highly-charged narratives move beyond recounting events, to enhance and enrich them, endowing them with meaning for the listener/reader. Where scenario method offers multiple views of the future, it engages Boje's (2001, p. 3) notion of the 'antenarrative' – giving "attention to the speculative, the ambiguity of sensemaking and guessing as to what is happening in the flow of experience". Such antenarratives provide "sensemaking that is coming into being, but not finished or concluded, in narrative retrospection" (p. 4). Hence,

we designed the form of our scenario intervention to seek maximum engagement with the largest possible number of stakeholders and to facilitate dialogic exchange among them. Our approach was grounded in the intent to stimulate this conversation by challenging extant values and beliefs. Even so, we also sought to minimize the commitment required of time-poor senior stakeholders (cf. Cairns et al, 2016; Pincombe et al., 2013). To initiate this challenge, the research team first constructed a pair of 'extreme scenarios' (Wright & Cairns, 2011) for the future of the region in 2025 as stimuli (see Figure 1, below). These scenarios were grounded in the initial desk research and interview analyses, and provided alternative speculations on possible futures.

As we state, scenarios are not plans, but are merely a tool – albeit, we would assert, a powerful one – to inform subsequent policy and planning. As such, the scenario methods described here sit within the broader research program. Following the first scenario workshop, we undertook analysis, as outlined in Section 3, to identify key factors of impact for the region. We then implemented a Delphi study (see Rowe & Wright, 2001 for an introduction to the Delphi method) to seek a shared stakeholder assessment of the relative importance and likely impact of these over the next decade. Based upon the findings of the Delphi study, a second set of scenario workshops was held. Here, rather than following either the 'normal' method of scenario development using a 2x2 matrix to generate four scenarios (cf. van der Heijden et al., 2002) or revisiting and refining the two extreme scenarios from the first round, a novel application of tiered 'branching scenarios' was introduced. In simple terms, these outlined *both* a positive and a negative future for the region; grounded in local agency, decision-making and action (or lack thereof); in the face of positive *and* negative futures at global and Australian national levels. The central intent in introducing branching scenarios was to ensure that the potential for local agency under all global/national conditions was made explicit and brought into the discourse. The challenge, however, is that external factors are part of the policy terrain, as noted by Head (2011). Hence, regional leaders may be justified in attributing part of the difficulties in achieving policy initiatives to factors beyond their personal agency, such as demographics, economic relations, educational attainment and so forth. In the face of potential displacement activity of blaming others for the lack of action, the question arises regarding how partnerships and networks committed to regeneration might be constructed? The set of four branching scenario narratives formed the agenda for a second scenario workshop at which a set of key questions was intended to direct participants' thinking towards identifying critical actions in the present and immediate future.

Subsequent to the second scenario workshop, further sets of interviews were held with stakeholders to ascertain their responses to the research program and to gain insights into actions to date and intended courses of follow up activity. These have been subject to analysis to evaluate the impact, if any, of the research interventions and of subsequent decisions and actions by senior regional actors.

We present our research methods below, followed by an overview of the findings from the scenario and Delphi inquiries. We then discuss these findings in the context of the follow up interviews and offer a critical appraisal of what we see as a limited success, but with implications for future research design using scenario analysis in combination with Delphi method as a means of collaborative inquiry.

3   Research methods

The focus of this article is on the implementation of scenario analysis – specifically, 'branching scenarios' – in combination with Delphi inquiry so as to identify potential outturns. This process involved engagement with a diverse set of senior stakeholders from a

range of institutions with multiple priorities and targets over time, although all with an explicit common interest in regeneration of the region. The scenario workshops were preceded by a set of semi-structured interviews with 81 key actors from across the region, including; employers, state officials, local government elected members and officers, union leaders and others. These interviews provided varied perspectives on economic change and development in the region. The transcripts of these interviews were checked by at least two members of the team for accuracy, and then subjected to 'close reading' to provide a grounded analysis and identification of emergent issues raised by respondents.

Based upon this initial set of interviews, extensive desk research and prior analysis of regional (e.g. Walker & Fairbrother, 2015), national and global factors that may drive the future, the research team developed two initial 'extreme scenarios' (Wright & Cairns, 2011) for the region. These scenarios – set out in terms of 'best' and 'worst' case outcomes from the global to the local (outlined in Figure 1) – formed the agenda for a first scenario workshop with major stakeholders. Briefing material was prepared in advance for use at all the workshop sessions. These outlined how participants were deliberately asked to come prepared to engage in open, critical, constructive debate on the issues highlighted in and raised by the documentation issued in advance. In addition, within the documents and at the start of each session, they were reminded of the ground rules that applied to all discussions. These stipulated that others' ideas could not be confronted as being 'wrong' or as talking 'rubbish'. Rather, only questions of clarification could be asked, such as, 'Why do you think…?', 'Who might do…?' and similar. Thus, the challenge for participants throughout the engagement process was to question their own and their organizations' role in initiating economic regeneration.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

This scenario workshop was split into two sessions. The first involved 15 participants, representing a mix of senior union officials, senior officers from local government and State and Commonwealth government agencies, along with CEOs from non-governmental bodies (see Table 1 in Appendix). The second was held as part of the quarterly meeting of Mayors and Chief Executives from the nine local governments that cover the region – albeit several were unable to attend due to bad weather. In these first workshops, participants initially were asked if both scenario futures seemed possible and plausible, which was confirmed without question. Participants were then asked to discuss each of the scenarios in small groups and, based upon the end states indicated by each narrative, to consider and identify the major 'driving forces' (Wright and Cairns, 2011), the PESTEL factors. These drivers were to be located in the broad environment of the present that might drive the region towards one or other of these futures. One major intent from our perspective was that the discussion would bring about buy-in to the scenario narratives from these regional actors – transferring 'ownership' from the research team authors to them.

The transcripts of this first workshop were again subject to close reading and grounded analysis. From an initial reading, text extracts were first labelled by identifying issues that emerged from the transcripts through inductive categorization (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1984). Thereafter, using NVivo software, the array of issues raised was subjected to further iterative analysis by multiple team members. The aim here was to move from the specifics of individual issues raised by respondents to cluster these and encapsulate them under a smaller number of abstracted conceptual themes (cf. Spiggle, 1994). Accepting that such coding is subjective and that there will be options for naming themes, our focus was on identifying conceptual themes that would be both theoretically relevant in relation to the literature and practically relevant to the participants. The team analysis and categorization of issues was

collated into an anonymized report format that placed individual statements under the relevant theme/issue heading/sub-heading. The report was circulated to all participants to open our analysis to refutation, (1994), through inviting participants to identify any error of fact in the recording of their own statements and to offer critical comment on the factor/issue structure presented by the research team. Similar forms of initial grounded analysis, structured presentation and playback to participants were adopted for all subsequent stages of the research engagement.

A total of ten factors (see Table 2 in Appendix) were identified from this first scenario workshop. They included: attitudes towards education and training, managing expectations and resources, leadership for the future, and value-adding from natural and human resources. A summary of these factors, and of the encapsulated issues, was then circulated via e-mail to the participants for comment, correction if necessary, and confirmation. In the event, confirmation was received without any correction.

Following this scenario workshop, the next stage of the research involved three rounds of Delphi inquiry (see Rowe & Wright, 2001 for an introduction to the Delphi method) where the participants were asked in each round to rank each of the ten factors on scales of 1-10 for, a) degree of impact each would have on the region, and b) degree of certainty as to what that impact might be (c.f., Wright and Cairns, 2011, p.37 on the fifth stage of the Intuitive Logics scenario development method). Participants were asked to give a brief justification in support of each of their rankings. After each of the first two Delphi rounds of assessment, a summary of the rankings made for each individual factor was collated and displayed visually, shaded to show low/medium/high numbers of responses, also providing an indication of the modal ranking. Individual comments for each factor were collated randomly and set out adjacent to the ranking visualization. In the second and third Delphi rounds, individual participants were asked to consider their previous assessment and, if they wished, revise it in light of the group-based feedback. Following the final round of Delphi inquiry, a report was developed, containing the graphic summary of all three rounds, although only with the comments/justifications from the final round. This report was circulated to all participants for information, feedback and subsequent reference both in the research program and their own organizational activities. Here, we must note that only 13 individuals participated in the Delphi process, of which only 4 engaged in all three rounds and 8 in the third and final round. However, the reports were again circulated to all parties on the project database for consideration and comment.

Following reflection on the outcomes and implications from the Delphi inquiry, we developed a further set of four methodologically novel scenarios. Here, we did not follow stage 5 of the standard 'intuitive logics' scenario development process (c.f., Wright and Cairns, 2011, p. 38) where the two high-impact/high-uncertainty driving force clusters (here, factors) are used to generate four scenario outlines across a 2x2 matrix – in simple terms, 'best/best', 'best/worst', 'worst/best' and 'worst/worst' case scenarios across all levels of activity, from global to local. In line with norms of scenario method grounded in the Shell model (cf. Wilkinson & Kupers, 2013) the product is a set of diverging scenario narratives, where each is internally consistent over the timeframe. Here, we adopted a different and novel approach to scenario generation which we term 'branching scenarios'.

In taking this step, decisions and actions at the specific North West Tasmania regional level were considered separately from, but in light, of different conditions that might exist at the levels of global influence and the general national/federal Australian contexts. In conceptualizing branching scenarios, we developed a framework that provided for two lower-level regional futures to be nested within *each* of the more general, global/Australian higher-level scenarios. As such, the two global/Australian scenarios – 'best' and 'worst' case – for the next decade each led into two possible Tasmania regional futures. For the

best-case higher-level scenario, NW Tasmania outcomes derived either from taking advantage of opportunities offered, or from missing out on these due to ongoing fragmentation and diverse vested interests. Similarly, for the worst case higher-level scenario, NW Tasmania futures were shown to either decline into (expected?) negativity and despair, or to prompt a developing culture of 'making do' and building local resilience in spite of global and Federal adversity. The principles of branching scenario development and the prompt questions that they were designed to stimulate are outlined in Figure 2. (A summary overview of the full set of the four scenario narratives is given in Table 3 in Appendix).

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

As illustrated, the primary function of these branching scenarios was to stimulate the notion that what happens in the region in future is not necessarily predicated on what happens elsewhere. The primary purpose was to stimulate critical reflection, thought and action by these North West Tasmania-based decision makers who were to be part of our second scenario workshop. The conversation at the second scenario workshop was designed to be structured around a set of prompt questions that were issued to participants prior to the workshop in a briefing document that also included the full texts of the four branched scenario outlines. The prompt questions were focused on actions that could be taken by members of the participant grouping:

- What are the decisions and actions that are *not* taken that could have averted a worst-case outcome?
- What must you – individually and in your organization – do in the very near future to maximize the chances of a best-case future?
- What must you do to build resilience to enable the region to flourish no matter what the global scenario outcome may be?

As in the first round scenario workshop, participants were first asked to consider and confirm the plausibility and possibility of the scenarios, which they duly did.

After both scenario workshops had been completed, we conducted seven semi-structured interviews with senior stakeholders who had participated in the workshops and who could give us their views on the outcomes of the process that we had instigated. Our focus in these final interviews was on: i) whether the economic regeneration process had been supported by our scenario-based intervention, and ii), if not, what were the countervailing influences.

4   Key findings

4.1 Interviews and first round scenario workshop

Our research data is substantial and covers both substantive – regional regeneration and related social, political, economic factors – and process issues. We must necessarily be selective, but do so seeking to present illustrative examples of the diversity of both regional perspectives and responses to process. Our initial round of interviews indicated that, while there was an expressed desire by stakeholders to engage in collaborative inquiry and dialogue, there were factors pointing to both cognitive and political lock-in as critical issues to be overcome at the regional level. Some of these factors were clearly expressed at the first scenario workshop. In direct response to the negative scenario, one member

commented, "When you look at it for each of the pieces they were all… They weren't big changes from where we were now" (Scen.W/S 1 [Open] Male). Another talked of the regional economy being stifled by, "instability, uncertainty and lack of leadership" (Scen.W/S 1 [Open] Female). One participant expressed cynicism with regard to the potential for bottom-up action in the positive scenario, saying, "I thought there were elements of this that were less likely to happen, like the beautiful synergy between top-down strategies and initiatives being taken up by people from the ground level up and it all working well" (Scen.W/S 1 [Open] Male).

There were specific indications of lock-in in relation to education where, as one actor stated:

> What you've had in the last 30 or 40 years where people don't expect to have to get an education to get a job. Well, my granddad never had it, why should I, and my dad never had it, why should I and now all of a sudden you have no choice. You have to get an education in order to actually be able to participate in the workforce that we have. So I think a cultural bias, that's got to be removed too. (Scen.W/S 1 [Open] Male)

In response to a press report of the Tasmania State seeking inward investment from China to seed regeneration, a participant commented, "There's this perception around that Chinese or Asian investment is bad and we don't want it, whereas European and New Zealand investment is okay" (Scen.W/S 1 [Open] Male. Here, reference is made to economic factors expressed in terms of discriminatory sentiments, with the suggestion that these are relatively common views.

This view was reinforced in the second session with Mayors, where one person stated:

> So our fear of foreign investment is the fear of being taken over by another country within the world, which I don't think we sell very well. But I'll put it out there as a real plausible thing to have happen to keep us sustainable because unfortunately we don't have the investment available inside our own country or people prepared to invest inside our own country or institutions to invest money inside our own country. (Scen. W/S 1 [Mayors] Male)

But these cognitive forms of lock-in were also expressed and explained with reference to state practice. To illustrate, on the potential for changing fundamental attitudes, one participant stated a wish – "I'll try and phrase it in the nicest way possible, I don't want to think about a hand-out mentality, but perhaps Tasmania becoming a little bit more resilient to not having to be reliant on Federal dollars that come in" (Scen. W/S 1 [Mayors] Female).

Some participants did express more positive and proactive views, making reference to a range of political and economic relationships that have to be overcome:

> I think we've got to learn to accept the fact that we are an export nation to a certain degree but we've got to find out what the rest of the world wants. We've got to learn how to build a sustainable transport network without relying on the Federal Government's funds. (Scen. W/S 1 [Mayors] Male)

This first workshop opened up debate on the breadth of views on the region, both positive and negative, locked in and open to change, and fearful and embracing of broad internationalization. In closing, the lead facilitator posed the challenge that, "If these are the futures that we can envisage, how do we personally take responsibility for doing over the

next six months, a year, to be resilient or avoid the worst case and to promote and head towards the best case?" This question was intended to set the scene for the following elements of the research program. Structured analysis of the transcripts, as outlined above, elicited a set of themes that encapsulated the discussion. After confirmation of the analysis by participants, these themes formed the subject of the following Delphi inquiry.

4.2 The Delphi assessment task

The results of the Delphi analysis involving 13 participants in total from public and private sectors (see Table 1) showed a degree of convergence in scores over the three rounds, with some movement in modal scores. In the third round, participants ranked all 10 factors as having a modal impact score greater than 5 and a modal uncertainty score of less than 5 – indicating acknowledgment of the likely impacts but with a degree of confidence as to what these might be. The three highest impact factors were:

1. value adding from natural and human resources
2. leadership for the future
3. attitudes towards education, training and employment

The first of these was ranked as having the least uncertainty – i.e. greatest certainty – as to its impact, with attitudes to education, training and employment next. In the meantime, the three factors having the greatest uncertainty – or, as implied by the modal scores <5, least certainty – as to their impacts were:

1.   global conflict and instability
2.   attitudes to health and ecology
3.   attitudes to foreign investment

While the scores given by participants for all factors showed a fair degree of consensus, the free comments given in justification of scores showed some interesting divergence. For example, in relation to the highest impact/least uncertainty scored factor of 'value adding from natural and human resources', some participants called for building value from large-scale, price-driven international manufacturing, with comments that the region should develop, "a platform that entices larger global organizations", that it should, "focus on down- stream processing and innovative value add", and see that, "manufacturing is still an opportunity for Tasmania so long as pricing remains competitive". However, others promoted an alternative view, with a focus on, "ability to produce high quality, low volume produce" that is, "aimed at the higher end of the socio-economic base" and to, "produce beautiful things with passion and backed by a narrative". Similar differences were identified in relation to individual expectations of impacts and outcomes from other factors.

In constructing the scenario narratives for the second round of scenario workshops, we considered this issue of apparent shared certainty on impacts, yet underpinned by individual differences of opinion as to what these impacts might be. We also pondered the implications of the most uncertain factor being 'global conflict and instability', and the possibilities this offered for attributing blame for any negative outcomes on external factors and agents.

4.3 Second round scenario workshop

As outlined above, the scenario narratives for the second workshop followed our innovative 'branching scenarios' format, enabling us to present different polar regional

outcomes while global/national factors were either at their 'best' or 'worst'. The narratives deliberately pointed to local agency, or lack thereof. They drew upon the preliminary desk research, transcripts to date, and the team's knowledge of understanding of regional change across the globe (see, for example, the UK emergence of the 'transition town' movement). From the transcripts of this workshop, a range of attitudes and responses emerged. Some of the comments indicated an ongoing acceptance of a status quo in line with forms of cognitive lock-in. With reference to 'Tassie' (Tasmania) as being long-known as a "welfare dependent state", one participant said that this is, "almost like a culturally entrenched sort of thing; we assume that it is actually the norm" (Scen. W/S 2 [Open] Male). In a similar vein, another participant noted that:

> I think the other thing that struck us when we first came here [participant had relocated from another Australian State, Queensland], which needs addressing, and it's a cultural thing so it will take time to change, is the lack of any sense of urgency in this place. Trying to get people to make a decision and get things done oh yeah, we could probably get out there around the end of the week. They just don't tell you which week. It's this laissez faire, 'she'll be right'. (Scen. W/S 2 [Open] Male

Nonetheless, such reflections were qualified by understandings that some actors are committed to change, partly because of their own specific experiences, and the sheer difficulty of achieving change.

> The fact is that there are people who are coming from the mainland, or there are Tasmanians who are actually interested in doing something. It's just about translating that into action. That's a lot harder at the moment (Scen. W/S 2 [Open] Female)

One structural factor noted by many involved the truncated educational arrangements that define schooling in the region, and the State as a whole. For one actor there are opportunities:

> I honestly believe there is a real ground swell at the moment - not just in the North West, but pretty much right around the State - the whole education side of things. Obviously that's where I'm focusing my attention, but there are some growth industries and what have you. So depending on what you want to do, there are positions available in Tasmania. It's just a matter of - it may not be your dream job. Luckily you did find it, but it's letting people know what Tasmania's looking for. (Scen. W/S 2 [Open] Male)

Another participant spoke of population loss: "You don't want to be growing your next generation always with the position of they're going to leave" (Scen. W/S 2 [Open] Male). Talking of innovation and the possibilities for local initiatives, despite higher-level political inertia, one stated, "There's enough resource and capability to say, well irrespective of political support, there must be some things that we could do that we could become responsible for" (Scen. W/S 2 [Open] Male). This and similar comments arose in response to the scenario in which the region had to build resilience and make the most of things in response to negative higher-level contexts.

In the end, while there remained degrees of negative thinking, and discussion of 'crisis' but not yet addressing the situation, important positive comments were also made. One said, "You've got a good set of people who got together and said, righto, we've now got to put our shoulders to the wheel here and see what we can do" (Scen. W/S 2 [Open] Male). Various comments around what could be done and what should be done raised issues of needing things to be "done differently", "use different approaches", to employ "a

networked approach to something – not a hierarchical command and control". Some current positive initiatives were discussed, with comments on how these involved "collaboration between industry, education and community", "born out of a real sense of concern and sense of urgency", and where "local Council wants to turn it round as well, but don't want to control it" (Scen. W/S 2 [Open] Various female/male).

In summary, the discussions in the second scenario workshop highlighted ongoing issues of lock-in to negative mind sets and lack of proactive change. These were to a fair extent balanced by positive and active discussions of the need for change, for taking hold of issues at the local level and for adopting new approaches and ways of working. However, it was noted from the content analysis they were free of decisive statements on what should be done, in terms of specific actions to be taken by named individuals in response to specific problem factors. Specifically, there were no substantive comments that directly addressed the prompt questions outlined above and circulated in advance as briefing tools.

4.4 Follow-up interviews

Three months after completion of the second workshop, we returned to North West Tasmania to undertake a set of extended semi-structured interviews with senior regional stakeholders who had participated in some or all of the scenario and Delphi inquiries. While these engaged only 7 participants, they were selected to reflect the broad range of organizations represented in the scenario workshops. They included; CEOs from business and local government, a federal agency official, senior local government officers and one elected Mayor (see Table 1). The interviews were introduced using the following schedule:

> *As an active participant in the stages of refinement of the scenarios for the future of NW Tasmania, we would now like to interview you to gain your insights into the value and use of the outputs from the exercise. Using the final scenario report (copy attached) as the basis, we would like first to discuss your reflections on the process by which regional stakeholders' views on key issues for the future were identified. Then, since these scenarios were agreed as possible and plausible, we would like to know what decisions and actions you consider essential (both from yourself and others) to guide the future of NW Tasmania towards securing the best-case outcomes. We would also like to know your own thoughts and understanding of how these goals align with current policies, plans, etc. for the region.*

Our analysis of the 48 pages of interview transcripts identified a major theme- the need for articulated action to secure a positive future, thereby moving beyond cognitive lock-in. This appreciation was qualified by political forms of lock-in. Specifically, some of the major players from the public sector are caught in a continual cycle of strategic planning, with changes of government and actors that militate against continuity of the process and purpose, and against achieving coordinated actions to achieve the common good. One interviewee summed up in fairly negative terms stating:

> (P)eople are sick to death of hearing new government policies and strategies and all that sort of stuff. This one's going to fix it. This one's going to fix it. After 20 years of that probably four or five reports into any given issue…[] four or five reports and nothing has changed. (LGA 7, Economic Development, follow-up)

Another was equally forthright about lack of action, but more upbeat about the impacts, saying:

> The majority of us are quite comfortable, we're doing okay. So what would be the reason for us to actually do something different when for the last 20 years what we've been doing, we haven't really changed. (LGA 2, Economic Development, follow-up)

One potential cause of inertia and resultant lack of necessary action was summarized by another, stating:

> A lot of people have got used to a certain standard of living which is sort of like a welfare dependent living. So change to them probably - they may not think there is much you can do about it. Then there are the people who could make a difference but they're either directly employed by the public sector or they derive their income from working with the people who are potentially welfare dependent. (LGA 2, Economic Development, follow-up)

Of note, there was a clear recognition that many lacked agency in relation to the exercise of power when addressing regeneration:

> The most that we can do is lobby the state government and federal government to say, what about putting some money into this project. So we know that that would help our region and it would help not just [name of place] but the whole region. So we do what we can to do that lobbying. Is that enough? No. But we don't control the spending that happens in our region. So I'd say that we're doing what we can to be good regional members. (LGA 5, Mayor, follow-up)

For this local leader, the challenge was to persuade decision-makers outside the region to support place-based initiatives.

Thus, for one participant, the major challenge was to break down the fragmentation of regional governance through reorganization and consolidation:

> I have a personal view that local government amalgamation will help support it. You would do more things as a region. We've got too many resources at the local level and too many people who are elected and it just encourages that limited thinking. (Industry Organization (a), follow-up)

As local government was seen to be going through these fragmented, cyclical discussions on policy and planning, small and large private-sector organizations (the latter including those who might be attracted to establish themselves in Tasmania) were clearly on the periphery.

The importance of business as contributor to the conversation was articulated by one interviewee:

> (I)t's taken us a long time to realize that small business is actually the fundamental driver of our economy. That's where the stimulus has to occur. But on the other side of that there's not a lot of money in this community especially for large-scale projects. So maybe it requires a big outside company to come in and make the investment. (LGA 7, Economic Development, follow-up)

As one public sector interviewee stated:

> (W)e haven't really been able to engage the right people in the conversation yet. I think if we'd have actually had the right people engaged in the conversation about where the region needs to go and then run your process in that context, then I reckon we would have got a lot better result. (LGA 2, Economic Development, follow-up)

Thus, the problem was defined as the lack of the 'right' people in the 'right' place.

The results of the Delphi inquiry had indicated that attitudes to education were a high impact factor, with a fairly low level of uncertainty as to its impact. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed residual concerns about this topic. As one respondent put it:

> (T)here is still a cultural fear about education. Families still see - and it's been entrenched for a number of years - if you get educated you're not going to relate to the people you live with and at the same time you're going to leave…[] Half the state can't read and write. So we need to lift our game a bit if we're going to be competing on a global stage. (Federal Dept, follow-up)

These regional leaders were skeptical about the prospects of change and development in the region. They attributed this lack of action to complacent outlooks within the region and to external relationships and arrangements.

While the above statements are generally fairly negative, there were almost equal numbers of statements in the interviews that could be described as positive. There were indications of recognition and acceptance that the stimulus for articulated action must come from the regional level. As one participant stated, "(most) don't any longer feel that we can or should rely on the government to fix everything; that in fact we have to do it ourselves" (LGA 7, Economic Development, follow-up), while another said, "We have to get people to be in a position that they recognized that we have to change" (LGA 2, Economic Development, follow-up). The benefits of the various exercises within our project were highlighted, as illustrations of how regional actors can come together and can discuss shared issues:

> Having them all in the group on the one day was good. If anything, it's probably reminding of what our priorities are for our region on the basis of how things may eventuate. So if we're talking about a change in the economy, we're talking about a change in employment which we are seeing. State of the state reports and things like that which is suggesting Tasmania is starting to move in the right direction there. (Federal Dept, follow-up)

And:

> Although, I must say that it was quite a surprise when we were at the Cradle Coast meeting, and then all of a sudden we were in the amidst of this discussion without any sort of forewarning or whatever. I wasn't sure where it'd come from, to tell you the truth. (LGA 5, Mayor, follow-up)

Some twelve months after the interviews, it is still not clear what actions, if any, will follow to further promote regeneration within the region, although strategic and economic planning is underway, especially by the Cradle Coast Authority. It may be that in the context of the complex power relations that mark the region, both within the region and as a region within a broader set of juridical State structures (see Stratford, 2008 and Beer, 2014) and in the absence of a settlement between principle actors, there is the possibility that this process is yet another part of the interminable rounds of:

> …doing a lot of strategies and planning and then not actually putting the resources in place to achieve it. That's the problem. Yeah, the resources for follow-up is always the issue. (LGA 7, Economic Development, follow-up)

It would appear that the challenge facing these actors is to break the barriers associated with political lock-in.

5 Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Implications for regional futures

Findings from the first scenario workshop indicated a broad consensus on the nature of the critical factors facing the region. Thereafter, the three rounds of Delphi investigation, albeit from a small sample but with widely disseminated reporting, indicated seeming convergence on the high impact and greatest uncertainty (or, lowest certainty) factors facing the region. This convergence was confirmed in the second workshop, where our branching scenarios were accepted as plausible futures. These initial findings from the early stages of the research indicated a fairly clear potential and desire to overcome both cognitive and political lock-in. Nevertheless, the focus of the second workshop on securing articulated action to initiate economic regeneration was not achieved in practice. Our analyses of the workshop transcripts, presented earlier, indicate that embedded cultural attitudes expressed in relation to current political arrangements within the region presented a barrier to such articulated action. Moreover, it can be argued, in line with previous analysis by Stratford (2006; 2008) and others, that the power relations, in terms of both resource and capability, meant that the participants did not meet as equals. These power differences might underpin the problem identified by Vangen et al. (2015), whereby proposals for collaborative inter-organizational governance may fail due to lack of consideration of the nature of governance of the proposed collaboration. In this respect, the agonistic relations that define leadership relations tend to prevail, with a subsequent lack of the necessary investment in building the trust necessary for successful inter-organizational collaboration (Vangen & Huxham, 2003). While there was discussion of some positive initiatives already underway, it is difficult to see how these could translate into effective regeneration strategies across the region, given the problem of (lack of) regional leadership (Beer, 2014).

The set of semi-structured interviews with senior regional decision makers who had participated in the scenario workshops – conducted some two months after the second scenario workshop – sought to elicit views on whether or not the exercises to date had been perceived as 'useful' and, if so, in what way. They also sought to explore what actions the individuals felt that they had committed to as a direct result of participation – or make explicit that there were none. Our analysis of the interview transcripts revealed a continued lack of articulated actions to achieve the commonly-held goal of regeneration, supporting previous research on regional development that notes the challenges of coordination between levels of government and adequate resourcing of regional agencies (Stratford, 2008; Eversole, 2016).

5.2 Reflections on our scenario process

There has been substantial discussion in the literature about the lack of empirical evidence of scenario projects having direct impact on policy and planning (cf. Bryant & Lempert, 2010; Bowman et al., 2013; Cairns et al., 2013; Rickards et al., 2014a, 2014b; Volkery & Ribeiro, 2009). In the first stages of our scenario intervention approach detailed in the present case analysis, extensive desk research by the team informed first round scenario development. Acceptance of the scenarios as both possible and plausible – albeit the negative one was seen as more of each – led to elicitation of an agreed set of key issues and impacting factors from them. The Delphi inquiry supported and enhanced the small but diverse group of participants' identification of those factors which had both the highest

impact and highest uncertainty. Thereafter, the second stage of 'branching' scenario development, presenting 'best' and a 'worst' case outcomes for the North West Tasmania region from each of the global/Australia-level scenarios, was intended to prevent local decision-makers from standing back and saying that responsibility for outcomes lay entirely in the global/federal domain. Senior-level regional participants were directly challenged to say how they might either thrive in a best case higher-level future, or survive and build resilience in the face of a worst-case future.

The outcomes of this project to date indicate that, despite regional stakeholders acknowledging the plausibility and possibility of each of the four branching scenarios, and hence their implications for the region, problems of capacity remain. Unless we incorporate an understanding of the politics of regions into analysis in such cases, shared commitment to decision-making and action to address the potential worst case outcomes is likely to be rhetorical rather than substantive. This must be seen as a serious impediment to the potential for regional regeneration and innovation within NW Tasmania as part of the broader economic and political issues that impact on the region. However, it may also be the case that, while our project was 'focused' on the regeneration problem, this remained too broad a concept to engage a diverse set of stakeholders with different organizational foci and priorities in deciding a set of clearly articulated common goals (cf. Vangen & Huxham, 2012).

5.3 Implications for scenario method and theory

Others, before us, have found the use made of scenario insights to be problematic within multi-organizational contexts. Volkery and Ribeiro (2009, p.1199) noted that, "(e)ven well- constructed, thoroughly analysed scenarios can be of little use and relevance, if the organizational capacity to absorb them is poor, if there is no political backing or if relevant specifics of the policy-making process have not been taken into account". These authors argue that participants need to 'trust' the constructed scenarios – here trust was defined as trust in those who develop the scenarios, the reliability of information within the scenarios, and methodological credibility. Also, they note that scenario interventions can clash with the established routines of political decision making and may 'touch upon' vested interests about policy priorities. Apart from these political factors, they go on to note problematic issues to do with the skills of the facilitators, and the level of involvement of participants with the scenario process.

In a similar vein, Rikards and colleagues (2014b) note that participants need to perceive the scenario material to be rigorous, salient and legitimate – the latter taken to be the fair and unbiased treatment of diverse views and interests. Bryant and Lempart (2010, p.35) note that the "diffuse and heterogeneous nature of public agencies' objectives and interests may make it impossible for them to come to a consensus about the meaning of scenario axes." Rikards and others (2014b, p. 653) also state that other reasons why "(s)cenario planning can struggle to inform adaptation decision making in an evidence-based policy environment" include; i) the lack of an organizational champion to foster continuing interest once the initial scenario development is complete, and ii) lack of immediate opportunity to implement strategic change within existing planning cycles.

While we were fully aware of the limitations outlined in the extant literature, we were initially confident that we had designed a process that would address these through overt acknowledgment. However, as we found in practice, we had failed to ensure that we had sufficient buy-in and commitment from all stakeholders to guarantee that we had ongoing engagement through the process and commitment to building an action agenda to inform policy and planning.

Kahane (2012) is clear that 'action' is difficult to engender in his discussion of scenario exercises that were meant to challenge and change the future of countries – South Africa and Columbia. His prescription is for the scenario development team to 'seed' country-wide discussions: in the South African 'Mont Fleur' scenario intervention, he noted that:

> (W)e distributed 20,000 copies of our full 80-page report, 10,000 copies (in five languages) of a 32-page summary report, and 2,000 copies of a 30-minute video; we ran more than 100 workshops for political, business, non-governmental, and community organizations in every province and every major city; we created five weekly inserts in a national chain of newspapers (with 2 million readers) and six weekly televised debates. (2012, p.70)

From our analysis, we can be fairly certain that our scenario intervention in NW Tasmania was trusted, politically backed, was not threatening to vested interests, was well-facilitated, and involved appropriate participants. However, there was no one single individual or organizational 'champion' – as there usually is within a single organizational-level intervention (cf. Wright and Cairns, 2011) – nor was the opportunity for a subsequent single (major) action made clear. For this reason, the benefits of Kahane's 'seeding' approach resonate with us in our regional – rather than country-wide – scenario intervention.

The second round of scenario development and the agenda for workshop discussion was designed to point specifically at decision-making, or lack thereof, at the local level to develop policy and planning in the face of whatever future unfolds at a broader global/federal level. This was done through a staged process of deep engagement with key stakeholders but without substantial time commitment. However, transcripts of the second scenario workshop and subsequent post-workshop interviews indicate that the intended outcomes of specified and articulated actions by named individuals had not been met (the question of grounded leadership, Beer, 2014). While we had fairly good levels of attendance at sessions from senior stakeholders with deep engagement on the day, we did not have the same individuals present at all sessions. Documentation was issued to all stakeholders' personal email addresses throughout the project – albeit we have no way of knowing if it was read – yet the inability of some to attend all sessions may be a problematic issue. Part of the explanation of this variability is that these personnel were politically located within the region in a variety of uneven and ad hoc ways that undermined the bases of shared approaches towards the development of a strategy let alone its implementation.

We have previously successfully argued that scenario methods should be subject to contextual modification and 'improvisation' (Cairns et al., 2016) to engage diverse, time-poor senior decision makers in focused activity that minimizes their time commitment yet brings 'ownership' of the scenarios and, hence, of their causality in the present and near future. In this project, we have expanded the engagement process while both minimizing time commitment and enabling collaborative yet a-synchronous engagement. This was done through inclusion of the three rounds of Delphi inquiry, where participants were able to contribute individually to a collaborative negotiation of perceived impact and uncertainty for the key factors from the first scenario workshop.

Having identified the potential for the displacement of personal/organizational responsibility toward attribution to remote 'others' – global factors or federal political circles – we developed the concept of 'branching scenarios'. These approaches provide an explicit means of exploring how either; i) a positive future at the global/national level might still be matched by negative outcomes in the region, or ii) a negative higher-level future

need not necessarily lead to a worst-case outcome at the regional level, if local resources and capabilities are motivated and applied to 'make the best of' the situation. The question remains as to how this is to be translated to articulated action in the absence of a political reconciliation, as implied by Stratford and colleagues (2003, 2006, 2008).

We see the potential for branching scenarios across a wide range of complex and ambiguous problems facing society. One example is where communities and regions face the problem of global climate change, struggle to envisage how they might best survive, adapt to, or be resilient in the face of it, yet have already experienced its local impacts – just that these may become worse and more frequent in future (see also Head, 2011). Seeking to address such matters that many see as 'just too big', while recognizing the problematic nature of collaboration between individuals and organizations with differential power and possibly divergent key priorities (cf. Vangen & Huxham, 2012), we propose a reordering and focusing of process for future projects.

Our present Tasmania case analysis leads to our conceptualization of an improved design for an effective scenario intervention within a multi-organizational context. We now posit that a better – or less limiting – approach, in this case, would first involve identifying a set of clearly defined high-impact factors within the overall regeneration project. These might include economic, educational, health, etc. factors. Then, the major decision-making and power-holding stakeholders for each factor could be engaged in a Delphi analysis, to scope the range of their individual views on the potential impacts and uncertainties for this. Thereafter, a set of scenarios – again, we propose branching models to incorporate local agency – can be constructed that place the range of views into the broader regional, national and global contexts. The scenario workshop then held would be one in which inter-organizational collaboration is tightly focused on a single factor of known interest to the participants. We illustrate our conceptual framework in Figure 3. While issues of differential power and trust would still need to be explicitly addressed, we posit that there would be greater likelihood of deep and consistent engagement by a group with directly vested local interests.

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

5.4 Practical implications

Our scenario intervention design, involving a novel application of scenario methods interspersed with rounds of Delphi inquiry has several practical implications. First, it offers the potential for deep engagement with senior stakeholders but does not explicitly require extensive time commitments, particularly in coordinated and co-temporal activity beyond the two short scenario workshops. Second, the use of Delphi inquiry enables collaborative discussion and identification of the most important driving forces, but with anonymity and without the need for synchronicity. Third, in our revised proposed format above, it presents the opportunity for major decision makers with a common problem of interest to explore the range of their views about its potential resolution. Finally, the development of branching scenario narratives that distinguish between the *global* and the *local* points directly to implications for local decision-making in the face of either global opportunity or global adversity.

However, as this project shows, it is not sufficient simply to posit acknowledged possible and plausible positive futures as an alternative to negative futures. Also, it is likely insufficient to bring an external intervention that seeks to explore broad problems, bolting this onto the quotidian of organizational and individual foci and priorities without

recognition of and engagement with these. In our analysis, the major implication of our Tasmania case analysis is that conditions of apparent lock-in can be so deeply embedded that a jointly-recognized need for articulated action to achieve a common good by multiple agencies can be lost. The challenge of the power relations that define regions thus will be evident and possibly addressed, within and beyond the region.

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Respondents	2014	1st Scen. W'shop		Delphi Rounds			2nd Scen. W'shop		Scen. Follow Up Int.
Identifier	**Int.**	**Open**	**Mayors**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**Open**	**Mayors**	**Up Int.**
Local Gov. Elected	Yes	No	Yes				No	Yes	No
Local Gov. Elected	Yes	No	Yes				No	Yes	No
Local Gov. Elected	Yes	No	Yes				No	Yes	Yes
Local Gov. Elect./Bus.	Yes	No	No				No	No	No
State Gov. Elected	Yes	Yes	n/a				No	n/a	No
State Gov. Elected	Yes	No	No	X	-	-	No	No	No
State Gov. Elect. (retd.)	Yes	No	No				No	No	No
Local Gov. Official	Yes	No	No	-	X	X	No	No	No
Local Gov. Official	Yes	Yes	n/a	X	X	X	No	n/a	Yes
Local Gov. Official	Yes	Yes	n/a	X	-	-	No	n/a	No
Local Gov. Official	Yes	Yes	n/a				No	n/a	No
Local Gov. Official	Yes	Yes	n/a	X	X	X	Yes	n/a	Yes
Local Gov. Official	No	No	No	-	X	-	No	No	No
Regional Dev. Officer	Yes	Yes	Yes	X	X	X	No	Yes	No
Regional Dev. Officer	No	Yes	n/a				No	n/a	No
Regional Dev. Board	No	No	Yes	-	X	X	No	No	No
Higher Education	No	Yes	n/a				No	n/a	No
Health Service	Yes	No	n/a				No	n/a	No
Federal Gov. Official	Yes	Yes	n/a	-	-	X	No	n/a	Yes
State Gov. Official	Yes	No	n/a				No	n/a	No
Union Official	No	Yes	n/a				No	n/a	No
Union Official	Yes	Yes	n/a				No	n/a	No
Industry Org. (Peak Body)	No	Yes	n/a	X	-	X	No	n/a	Yes
Industry Org. (Peak Body)	Yes	Yes	n/a	X	-	X	Yes	n/a	Yes
Bus. (ex. Fed. Gov. Official)	Yes	Yes	n/a				No	n/a	No
Business	No	No	n/a				Yes	n/a	No
Business	No	No	n/a	X	X	X	No	n/a	No
Business	No	Yes	n/a				No	n/a	Yes
Business	Yes	No	n/a				No	n/a	No
Not Stated	No	No	n/a				No	n/a	No
Not Stated	No	No	n/a				No	No	No
Not Stated	No	No	n/a				No	n/a	No
Not Stated	No	No	n/a				No	n/a	No
Not Stated	No	No	n/a	X	-	-	No	No	No

Table 1 – Overview of regional stakeholder participation across multiple research activities (Note: Excludes those who participated <u>only</u> in first round interviews)

Factors	Issues
1. Attitudes towards education, training and employment	Adapting to and adopting new technologies, impact of disruptive technologies, embedded rejection of need for education/training, historical expectations of jobs without
2. Economic resilience and reliance	'Handout' mentality, taxation policy and revenue income, downward flow of trade agreement impacts, GST flows to
3. Managing expectations and resources	Provision of population services, future of UTAS campus, responses to federal decision-making, 'Everybody wants everything'
4. Value-adding from natural and human resources	Local value-adding to raw resources, transport costs, 'Brand Tasmania', generating employment and local wealth
5. Attitudes to foreign investment	Ambivalence of both actively seeking and negative views, over-reliance on China, unclear relationship with Indonesia, favoured views on 'Anglo' investment from UK and New Zealand
6. Leadership for the future	Lack of federal leadership, lack of local leadership, instability, short political cycles
7. Integration and fragmentation	Fragmentation across federal/state/ local, over-government locally, fragmented service deliveries, competition between communities
8. Demographic profile change	Ageing population, youth migration, youth staying in a weak economy/society, population and services
9. Attitudes to health and ecology	Lifestyle choices, quality of life, relationship with environment, healthy living vs. health services
10. Global conflict and instability	Ongoing political/economic/social conflicts, deteriorating environment, climate change, intensifying of natural

Table 2 – List of factors and encapsulated issues identified from first scenario workshop transcripts

Higher-level Scenario A – 'Best' Case		Higher-level Scenario B – 'Worst' Case	
Looking back over the decade since 2015, we can clearly see that the Australian and global economies avoided any GFC2 and maintained growth, albeit not evenly distributed…[] While successive federal governments of both sides tinkered with the detail, the general direction was maintained to encourage states to take local initiative. In response to these Federally-mandated		Looking back over the decade since 2015, it would be easy to blame external factors for our situation here in north-west Tasmania…[] Here in Australia, political fragmentation and infighting dominated the period…[] For Tasmania, and the north-west in particular, the effects of these global and national circumstances had…	
Local Scenario A1	**Local Scenario A2**	**Local Scenario B1**	**Local Scenario B2**
… the Tasmania government facilitated a program of high-level strategic and aspirational objective setting across the state, supported by new Regional Development Boards…[] Government set a remit for the regional bodies to bring diverse groups and communities together to focus on common strategic objectives…[] There is no sign of flamboyant flagship projects, but there is evidence throughout of an infrastructure that is well maintained and very much fit for purpose…[] Let me welcome you to our region where we have built our own future.	… there was a failure to take advantage across Tasmania generally, and the north-west in particular…[] The decade can be characterised as one of a series of missed opportunities…[] In hindsight it is possible to identify a number of deep rooted problems that contributed to the current malaise. Attempts to bring the region together failed as old rivalries, mistaken perceptions and short term opportunism again shaped the agenda…[] Let me welcome you to our region where we have wasted our future.	… provided a catalyst that galvanized action to bring about positive change…[] The fiscal outlook for the NW was challenging…[] This saw the spawning of localised initiatives addressing a range of social issues. Gradually the economy became one orientated around addressing needs rather than wants and alternative trading schemes, including the Tassie Dollar, were commonplace…[] Let me welcome you to our region where we have safeguarded our future.	…. set the scene for economic, social and infrastructure deterioration over the decade…[] The weak Australian economy coupled with ever-higher oil prices had driven transportation costs to and from the state ever higher. Mining and tourism sectors languished…[] The region is typified by an antiquated and ill-maintained infrastructure, a diminishing, aging, unmotivated and unhealthy population…[] Let me welcome you to our region where we have no future…

Table 3 – Summary overview of 'branching scenario' narratives

Looking back over the decade since 2015, it is easy to blame external factors for our situation here in north-west Tasmania. While some commentators talked of GFC2 in the late 2010s, it was more a case of a second great depression…

Here in Australia, political fragmentation and infighting dominated the period. Any notion of tax reform or voting reform had been placed firmly on the back burner and successive Labor and Coalition governments sought only to prop up the ailing economy, using short-term, high-profile projects to stimulate areas of special interest to them as elections drew near. Sadly, Tasmania did not really enter into the equation for these…

The region is typified by an antiquated and ill-maintained infrastructure, a diminishing, aging and unmotivated population, and it has no real voice at the table in Hobart, let alone in Canberra, where Australia's aspirations for a position in the new world order will be debated.

I am not sure what the future will bring for my children, but probably not here.

Looking back over the decade since 2015, it is apparent that while the Australian and global economies avoided any GFC2 and maintained growth, albeit not evenly distributed …

To take advantage of the allocated resources, the Tasmania government facilitated the emergence of a development agency, Tasman Enterprise (TE)…[] charged with enabling Tasmania to take full advantage of what was anticipated to be a thriving Australian and global economy over the next decade.

The success of these, and other similar programs, drew upon the top-down approach, but success was predicated upon attitudes at the local level when these opportunities were presented. While for many, the first decade of the 21st century had been characterised by growing despair and detachment…[] the next decade was defined by a new confidence, belief in the future, and knowledge that this future must by and large be built from the ground up at the local level.

Let me welcome you to our region where we have built our own future.

Fig. 1 – Key outlines of 'extreme scenarios' from scenario workshop 1

Top-level global/ national futures	'Best' case future – stability, collaboration, reform, growth		'Worst' case future – conflict, lack of change, decline, exclusion	
Regional futures	'Best'	'Worst'	'Best'	'Worst'
	Taking advantage and making the very best of opportunities	Failure to exploit and missing out on opportunities offered	Building resilience and making the most of what opportunities can be	Inaction, decline and a culture of despair and 'learned
Prompt questions	How is the ground to be laid to enable this route if circumstances are right? Who must do what now and in the near future?	What are the critical failures of decision/non-decision making and action/failure to act? Why does such a regional culture persist?	Who would enable and lead decisions and actions to bring this about? How would the populace be engaged to be active participants?	Why does this situation persist and where is blame attributed? What is to be done now and in the immediate future to avoid or mitigate against this situation?

Fig. 2 Outline of the two-tier 'branching scenarios' concept.

Societal Question/Problem – Defined in stakeholder

Key Institutional/Organizational Decision Maker

Desk

Content Analysis – Emergent

Theme   Theme   Theme   Theme   Theme

Identify Theme (A) Decision

Delphi Inquiry – Explore breadth/depth of

Construct Exploratory 'Extreme Scenarios' – Covering breadth of all themes, but with focus for individual theme stakeholders

Scenarios A & B – 'Best' and 'Worst' case

First Scenario Workshop – With theme stakeholders to explore and expand theme inquiry

Content Analysis, Report and

Construct Challenge 'Branching Scenarios' – Covering breadth of all themes, but with focused outcomes based on theme stakeholder agency

Scenarios C1, C2 & D1, D2 – 'Best' C and 'Worst' D case extremes at global/national level, with local 'branching' to show:
C1 – 'Making the most of…'
C2 – 'Taking the most from…'
D1 – 'Making the best of…'
D2 – 'Doing….?'

Second Scenario Workshop – With theme stakeholders to agree draft articulated decisions and actions

Feedback into Full Institutional/Organizational Decision Maker Group – Development of integrated decision and action framework to address central question/problem
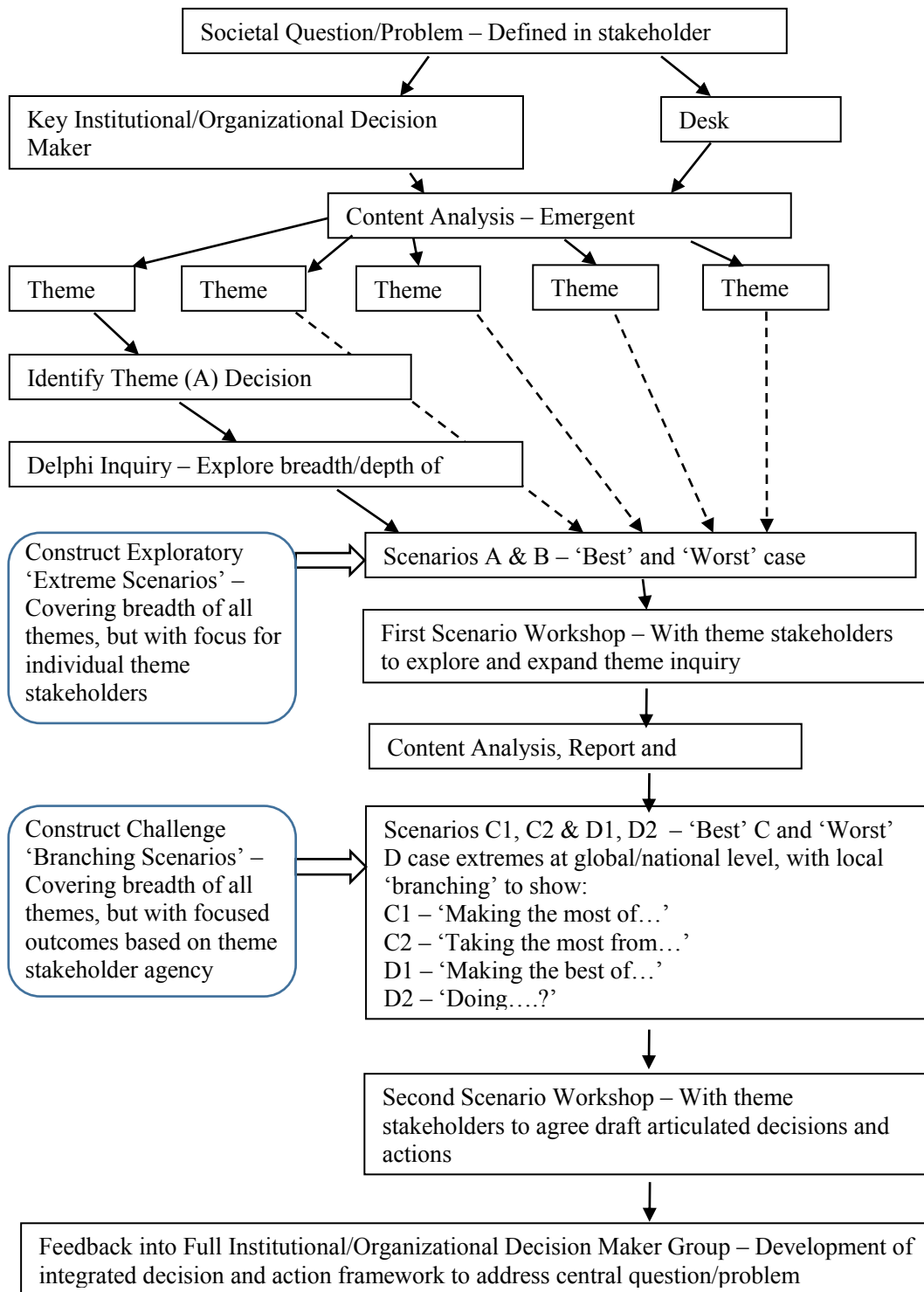
Fig. 3 – Conceptual framework for broad social inquiry with deep stakeholder engagement

Map 1 – North West Tasmania region in context