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Is Mayfield Pool saved yet?: Community assets and their contingent, discursive foundations

Tom Griffiths, Tim Connor, Bill Robertson and Liam Phelan

Abstract

Discourses shape perspectives and behaviours both within and beyond communities. A number of community development researchers have drawn attention to the growing influence of neo-liberal discourse over the way much community development is understood and practised. This article analyses one local community campaign to defend valued public infrastructure, the ongoing community campaign to 'save' Mayfield Swimming Pool in Newcastle, Australia. We draw on Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis to consider the ways in which the dominant neo-liberal discourse has both shaped and been challenged by this community campaign. Our analysis demonstrates (i) ways in which concrete community infrastructures are built on contingent, discursive foundations, and that (ii) dominant discourses which threaten the existence of community infrastructures may be effectively challenged, if not entirely displaced, by community-based counter-narratives.

...even something as solid and long lasting as an Egyptian pyramid
is constituted out of matter in motion (Harvey, 1996, p. 50)

1. Introduction

The epigram above is from a passage in which Harvey explains his dialectical approach to social analysis: an approach which holds that even apparently 'solid' and lasting objects or institutions rely on ongoing processes in order to establish and maintain stability. Such processes are as much social as they are physical. Egyptian pyramids may be made up of matter in motion, but discursive ideas and practices—the value attached to ancient history, the economic value of tourism—have been as important as the physical circulation of atoms in ensuring the pyramids continue to exist in their current form and do not again disappear under the sand. This paper focuses on a campaign to save a community asset with a much shorter history than the great pyramids: a public swimming pool in the regional Australian city of Newcastle which was gifted to Newcastle City Council and the Mayfield community by the mining giant BHP (now BHP-Billiton) in 1966.

Mayfield public swimming pool faced closure in 2007, following a Newcastle City Council review of swimming pool services (Newcastle City Council, 2007a). Like the ancient pyramids, the processes which have thus far preserved this pool, and those which continue to threaten it, are as much discursive as they are to do with physical and economic 'realities'. In this paper we apply Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to the campaign to save this pool to better understand the discursive processes which facilitated the Council proposal to close the pool, and which continue to threaten this community asset. Our analysis extends to how community campaigners have themselves used discursive processes in their efforts to ensure the pool's longevity, and how this interplay of

discourses has evolved. In addition to our scholarly interest, we have been active participants in the campaign to save the pool since that campaign began in 2007.

2. Critical discourse analysis and community development

Readers of this journal would be familiar with analyses of how discourses – systems of linked signs regularly expressed through non-verbal practices or texts, including oral and multi-media communication (Purvis and Hunt 1993, p. 485; Fairclough 2005) – shape perspectives and behaviours both within and beyond communities (see for example Emejulu, 2011). In particular, a number of previous contributors have drawn attention to the growing influence of neo-liberal discourse over the way much community development is understood and practised (for example DeFilippis, Fisher and Shragge, 2009, Kenny, 2002, Mowbray, 2011). Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis, however, has not previously been applied in depth in this journal (our search of previous issues only discovered five articles which refer to Fairclough; in each of these articles the discussion of Fairclough's work is very brief (confined to single sentences)), perhaps because much of Fairclough's own work focuses on the operation of discourses at national and international scales, rather than in local communities. We nonetheless believe Fairclough's approach has much to offer community development scholars, particularly those studying the interaction between local governments and the communities they serve.

Like other scholars of discourse, Fairclough (1991, p. 38, 1995, p. 74) is interested in how discourses influence how people understand themselves, their relationships with other people and things, and what they regard as normal behaviour for groups with which they identify (see also Gregory, 2000, p. 180, Purvis and Hunt, 1993, p. 474-94). More specifically, Fairclough is interested in the way powerful actors fashion or adapt particular discourses and promote them in order to influence the behaviours and identities of particular audiences. In one of his book chapters, for example, Fairclough (1991, p. 46) analyses the way Margaret Thatcher's government developed and promoted a discourse around the word "enterprise". This discourse was part of an attempt to create and legitimise a field of meaning which would lead workers to regard being "enterprising" as a good thing, extending to their more ready acceptance of independent contracting and other less secure work arrangements.

Fairclough's approach raises two important questions connected to power and resistance: why are some discourses more influential and more durable than others, and how might dominant discourses be challenged and displaced? To address these questions Fairclough draws on Gramsci's (1971) concept of cultural hegemony. Gramsci argued that members of the economically dominant class in a society cannot simply impose their rule on others. Rather, they need to build alliances with other social forces and persuade other groups to internalise particular values and norms which, in effect, reinforce the dominant classes control over politics and the economy. From a Gramscian perspective, the equilibrium that this hegemony achieves will always be accompanied by tensions and economic, political and ideological struggles between different economic classes and blocs. These struggles take place at a wide variety of scales and across a broad range of institutions, including arenas within civil society like educational institutions, trade unions and families (cited in Fairclough, 1995, pp. 76-77).

Applying this principle to discourse analysis, Fairclough (2005, pp. 924-25) argues that any “relatively stabilized and durable network of social practices” includes an “‘order of discourse’, a relatively stabilised and durable configuration of...different discourses, different genres and different styles which are articulated together in a distinctive way”. For Fairclough the development of these *orders of discourse* reflect the kind of processes that Gramsci described: different discourses combined in a regularised manner, in such a way that alliances can be constructed and consent for particular practices established. Unlike Gramsci, Fairclough does not see political success by a revolutionary party as the primary means of opposing hegemonic forces. His approach does align, however, with Gramsci’s work elaborating the importance of challenging the ruling class’ hegemony of ideas. In this respect Fairclough suggests a number of techniques and processes by which dominant discourses can be challenged. At the level of text, activists can seek to adapt or challenge particular signs. For example, in the case of the use of the word “enterprise” cited earlier this might involve:

...a matter of struggle over the meaning of “enterprising” by perhaps applying it to activities distant from business, or of drawing upon an alternative vocabulary (e.g. focusing upon cultivating creativity rather than enterprise in education), or constituting alternative subject positions in discourse (Fairclough, 1991, p. 49).

Fairclough thus recognises that to effectively challenge dominant discourses requires more than creating alternative texts and producing and disseminating them in a manner which facilitates their consumption by wider populations. For alternative discourses to be part of successful strategies to change social practices, the new representations and imaginaries associated with the alternative discourses need to be operationalised. That is, they need to be systematically adopted in practice so that the consequent experiences reinforce the internal logic and rationale of the alternative discourse (Fairclough, 1995, p. 90, Fairclough, 2005).

Fairclough’s concept of “orders of discourse” is not only relevant to tensions between nationally-scaled political forces. He argues the principles associated with Gramsci’s concept of hegemony—the need to build alliances, the need to integrate and win the consent of subordinate groups, the tendency for any equilibrium achieved to be open to challenge and hence more or less stable depending on the stability of power relationships—can be applied to analysis of “local processes of constituting and reconstituting social relations through discourse” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 78). In the section that follows we tell the story of the ongoing campaign to save a public swimming pool using Fairclough’s theoretical understanding of the processes by which power is exercised and resisted. Within the community struggle to maintain Mayfield’s public swimming pool there are distinctions between the objectives of council officers, framed around particular conceptualisations of financial imperatives on the one hand, and concepts of essential and valued community facilities as defined by a group of local community members. However, the community campaign can also be seen to connect with a broader struggle, on the global level, whereby many community groups are seeking to challenge a neo-liberal discourse, which has been propagated by elite groups as part of attempts to restore rates of profit and capital accumulation. Before we describe the way discourse influenced the local campaign to save Mayfield Pool, some consideration of neo-liberalism as a discourse and its implications for community assets is warranted.

3. Neo-liberalism and community assets

Wallerstein (2000, p. 147) describes neo-liberalism as “one gigantic attempt to slow down the increasing costs of production—primarily by lowering the cost of wages and taxation and secondarily by lowering the costs of inputs via technological advance”. For people who accept the neo-liberal vision, “the good society...(is) one characterized by the predominance of an unfettered free flow of the factors of production, all in non-governmental hands, and most especially the free flow of capital” (Wallerstein, 2003, pp. 221-22). What Wallerstein is pointing to here is one of the defining features of neo-liberal policy, which prioritises market principles and competition as the most effective and efficient means of making goods and services available to the public. This logic necessarily requires a reduced role for the state in the provision of public services, and indeed challenges the very concept of ‘public services’ that are funded collectively and administered by the state.

Turning the social-democratic philosophy on its head, the neo-liberal logic constructs the spending of taxation revenue on the provision of free or subsidised services to the public as unfair and inefficient. As Down (2006) describes, the idea here is that “the market should be the organising principle for all political, social and economic decisions ... [involving] ... trade and financial liberalisation, deregulation, [and] the selling off of state corporations” (p. 96). When such ideas are applied to what many may see as basic public services, like education and health care, it is not surprising that this sort of neo-liberal discourse is being mobilised to justify and explain decisions to close government-funded community facilities like swimming pools (McShane, 2005, p. 2).

4. Social asset or financial liability?: Competing discourses

The proposal in 2007 to close Mayfield Pool was made within a Newcastle City Council (2007a) commissioned report, prepared by private consultants, which proposed a city wide “Pool Service Delivery Model” (PSDM). The PSDM included a significant investment (in the order of \$25m) in the existing public pool in the relatively wealthy suburb of Lambton to turn it into a regional, heated, indoor pool and leisure centre. The PSDM recommended both charging substantially higher entrance fees at the enhanced regional centre at Lambton and closing Mayfield pool in order to provide cost savings through reduced operations expenditure, primarily the costs associated with providing lifeguards at Mayfield pool. Mayfield Pool was selected for closure (rather than one of Council’s other three inland public pools) because it was the closest to Lambton.

4.1 Pool closure justified through (neo-liberal) discourse

This specific example of the Mayfield case, briefly outlined above, can be seen as consistent with a broader neo-liberal discourse which utilises cost justifications and creates a sense of crisis around the management of community facilities with limited financial resources (McShane, 2005, p. 2). The PSDM called for the closure of Mayfield pool, and its replacement on the same site with an above ground water play-park called a “Community Leisure Hub” (Newcastle City Council, 2007a). While the justification to close the pool was framed in a finance-focused discourse, the use of terminology like ‘community leisure hub’ to describe its replacement can be read as an attempt to build alliances by using the word community to justify an economic decision (Fairclough 1995: 78). The Council report, for example, asserted that “The [proposed] Mayfield Community/ Leisure Hub... [constitutes

an] upgrading [of] the community and leisure services offered to the Mayfield community” (Newcastle City Council, 2007a, p. 42). For members of the Mayfield community this particular attempt failed, as they described the water play-park derisively as a ‘sprinkler on steroids’ (e.g. Alison Harwood, pers. comm.).

PSDM proponents, including some council staff, viewed Mayfield pool through a lens that directly aligns with neo-liberal logic and discourse. In this view, falling pool usage (in the context of reductions in the quality of facilities) was held up as evidence that the pool was not a priority for the community, and to highlight the gap between income received from pool use and the costs of managing the property. For example, the report noted that “reduced revenues associated with declining attendances ... are further compounded by Council’s increasing maintenance expenditure and operating costs” (Newcastle City Council, 2007a, p. 4). While such views no doubt reflect council officers’ efforts to balance budgets, the methods proposed to achieve this, and the discourse through which it was presented, is consistent with a neo-liberal logic of seeking to achieve significant cost-recovery of public services through a combination of user-pays and rationalised provision of services.

4.2 ‘Our pool’ as counter-discourse

In response to the PSDM’s proposal to close Mayfield pool hundreds of people attended public meetings, organised in the first instance by an active community group known as the Mayfield East Residents Group. This group made effective use of local media (radio and newspapers), and existing email lists, to mobilise approximately 180 residents to the first public meeting. At that meeting the Save Mayfield Swimming Pool Campaign (SMSPC) group was initiated, and a campaign committee formed. SMSPC was made up of local residents, with representation from local schools, business and community groups. From the beginning and throughout the campaign, SMSPC strongly and consistently characterised the pool as ‘our pool’, that is, as belonging to the community of Mayfield and surrounding suburbs. The campaign disputed the process by which the Council had made its decision, and its narrow financial premises, at the expense of the social good. The following principles were developed by community members involved in the SMSP Campaign, discussed at public meetings, and formally submitted to Council:

- that Mayfield Swimming Pool remain in public ownership;
- that Council make a long term commitment to the pool, at least until 2030;
- that Council commit to improving the pool in this period; and
- that Council support the establishment of an ongoing Pool management committee with community representation (Save Mayfield Swimming Pool Campaign, 2007).

In developing this position, SMSPC was endeavouring to move beyond simply averting the pool’s closure and further institutionalise local community involvement in the management of this public asset, consistent with developing ‘the capacity to use one’s rights to maximum effect’ (Ife, 1995, p. 72). Moreover, in calling for further improvements to the pool SMSPC sought to operationalise and so entrench the counter view it was putting forward.

Large community meetings were consciously used by SMSPC as familiar arenas in which to engage with Council rather than simply meeting in Council chambers. This was based on consideration of how to effectively make use of popular power to influence councillors. Other strategies included developing written submissions, a petition with over 2,000 signatures, lobbying in a range of creative ways and incorporating fun, child and family-friendly opportunities to participate in democratic action. Children who used the pool, for example, were invited to draw pictures and accompanying messages about the pool, which were collated and included in SMSPC's submission. Another example of such action was a protest in which approximately 80 residents wore goggles and swimwear outside Newcastle's Town Hall, where a meeting of Newcastle City Council was taking place, to protest and call on Council and the broader community to 'save our pool' and 'improve it don't remove it'.

In its campaigning, SMSPC developed a social justice discourse as a counter to Council's focus on finances and cost recovery, constructing the pool as a public good / public asset that was directly contributing to wider social justice goals in the city. Doing so opened political space to talk about comparative social disadvantage. To address this issue, SMSPC submissions challenged the notion that "research is [solely] the domain of academic and other experts" (Cameron and Gibson, 2005, p. 277). The campaign developed an issue profile (Twelvetrees, 2002, p. 25) by collating demographic information, local history and community knowledge.

Demographic information referenced by SMSPC in campaign materials noted that Mayfield was located in the top 30 disadvantaged postcodes in NSW (Vinson, 2004, p. 10), and thus highlighted the negative social justice impact that the closure of the pool in this particular suburb would have. In making this case, SMSPC drew on Newcastle City Council planning documents that had reported that Mayfield had less recreation space per head than other suburbs of the city (Newcastle City Council, 2006, p. 154). Community research also illustrated that the proposed pool closure would reinforce disadvantage through increased travel costs and reduced access to leisure activities for residents in the Mayfield area. In this way, SMSPC developed and used a discourse framed in social justice in its campaigning. This was also a strategy to re-appropriate terminology like 'community' and 'social justice' in ways that were counter to their use within the PSDM proposal.

This discourse of SMSPC built on that related to Mayfield's comparative social disadvantage, and the social justice implications. This was presented in a positive light by highlighting the strengths of the Mayfield community. As expressed by Robertson (2007, p. 9), "simply labelling Mayfield as disadvantaged doesn't do our community justice. A better approach is to consider how the pool fits into community life now, and the positive role the pool could play in our community's future".

Strategies to destabilise the dominant discourse also included presentations to the public, and to Council, highlighting the historical significance of the pool as a gift from BHP to the public in 1965, as is noted on a brass plaque at the pool's entrance. There is some power in this understanding, strengthening SMSPC's claim, and counter discourse, that the pool belongs to the local community. The power of this discourse is also evident in community outrage that Council would propose the removal of what had been an historical gift to the local community. There was more to this story, however. BHP's provision of the pool has been interpreted by the local community as a *quid pro quo* of sorts, after BHP took ownership of Shelley Beach, Mayfield's last waterfront area in the 1950s, filling it in to make the land available for industrial uses (di Gravio, 2007). The characterisation of the

pool as belonging to the community is a major theme in a verbatim theatre play script based on interviews with Mayfield community members about the pool and the campaign to save it (McArthur, 2009).

To further support the construction of an alternative discourse, SMSPC targeted candidates in the lead up to 2007 local election. This campaign activity included the development and publication in the local media of a scorecard rating candidates responses to questions about the pool and its future. This strategy sought to influence candidates' position with respect to the pool, both directly and via the construction of an alternative discourse based in the local community and its needs.

4.3 The counter discourse delivers...

The period of the campaign for Mayfield pool coincides with a period in which global economic forces impacted on Newcastle – and other local councils. Newcastle City Council lost approximately \$12 million in the global financial crisis (GFC). The GFC, and aftermath of its initial phase, created conditions in which mainstream politicians and economists were questioning neoliberal orthodoxy (e.g. Stiglitz, 2010). Scholars such as Emir Sader (2008), analysing political developments across Latin America through the same period, went so far as to suggest that we were entering a post-neoliberal era. In the Australian context, this general mood was manifest in the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd arguing that neo-liberalism's time had come (see Rudd, 2009).

Against this backdrop, the campaign's most immediate and remarkable success is that the initial proposal from Council to close the pool was suspended. The pool has remained open since 2007, and late in 2007 Newcastle City Council (2007b) passed a resolution committing to keeping the pool open for at least five years while Council staff worked with community members to develop a 'business case' for the pool's future. Council's use of the term 'business case' may be read as an attempt to continue to frame discussion of the pool and its future within a strictly financial discourse, consistent with a neo-liberal logic and discourse of balanced budgets and cost-recovery. However, rather than accepting this framing, SMSPC responded with an agenda to further enhance and develop the pool as a valuable social asset by drawing on one of its campaign slogans to 'improve it don't remove it'. This was a significant part of the counter discourse highlighting the pool's potential to make a greater contribution to the public good through further improvements.

The campaign was successful in achieving a number of tangible outcomes to improve the pool, beyond simply keeping the gates open. The most notable of these was the installation of solar heating in 2009, which had been a key SMSP campaign demand in the lead up to the 2008 Council election. This improvement ensures that the water is at a steady and comfortable temperature throughout the swimming season. Other concrete improvements emanating from the campaign included new shaded areas which make the pool suitable for school swimming carnivals, upgrades to signage and entrance gates, and new children's playground equipment within the pool grounds. In addition, since 2008 and with support of two local mosaic artists, SMSPC has involved local school children and other community members in a series of design, production and installation workshops, leading to the installation of a community mosaic at the pool. The mosaic, which officially opened in March 2013, runs the full 50m length of the pool, and is testimony to the level of community support for this asset. The mosaic project is partly about beautifying and valuing the pool, and is also a way to foster an even greater community sense of ownership of 'our pool'.

Less easily quantified achievements of the SMSP Campaign have included changes in the working relationship between Council staff and SMSPC, and in the way the pool is managed. From SMSPC's perspective what began as an extremely confrontational relationship, provoked by the PSDM recommendations, evolved into a significantly more constructive engagement. In the period immediately following the 2007 decision to keep the pool open, during which solar heating, play equipment and shade cloth were all being implemented, council officers worked constructively with the community campaign. In that period SMSPC also initiated events at the pool, such as monthly Sunday afternoon live music performances and circus skills workshops for kids in order to encourage pool usage by expanding the nature of activity at the site. We now celebrate the pool's birthday each November with a community picnic. Council also bought more inflatable obstacle course equipment, and scheduled more days on which the obstacle courses would be deployed at public pools across Newcastle, including Mayfield.

In more recent years however, the relationship between SMSPC and council officers has deteriorated. Our view is this is due in part to internal upheaval in Council, manifest in seemingly continuous restructuring, and changes in personnel. In early 2011 SMSPC reported to elected councillors the successes, but also the change in the tone of the relationship with officers over the previous five years. A critical manifestation of this has been the 25% increase in pool entry prices in 2011 accompanied by a resurgent discourse of financial liabilities and the viability of public services. Following the increase in entry fees, pool usage numbers dropped by 36% in 2011/12, further exacerbating the claim – based in neo-liberal logic – that the pool is not 'financially viable' (see Clarke, 2012). As noted by Crase and Dollery (2005) (in McShane, 2005, p. 8), "In a debt-shy environment, the main response of local authorities to concerns about financial sustainability has been to raise user charges, outstripping the withdrawal of state funding".

In 2012, and with the next local government election scheduled, the relationship remained strained. SMSPC chose to reprise its previous election work and again surveyed candidates, in an attempt to reinforce the counter discourse it had helped to construct since 2007. After substantial internal deliberation, SMSPC used the 2012 election and the candidates survey to call for a three year free entry trial period to all public pools in Newcastle, with the exception of Lambton pool (the still live PSDM proposal to transform Lambton pool into a regional swimming centre is underway, at an estimated cost of \$25m, paid for through a rate rise, and making a call for free entry to Lambton pool problematic under those circumstances). The call for free entry was an explicit strategy to decisively reframe the pool discourse in social justice and community value terms, rather than in more limited terms centred on finance and partial or full cost recovery, the latter only leaving space for consideration of what – if any – deficit Council can or will bear. In this sense, SMSPC has explicitly rejected the admission price mechanism as a means of collecting revenue to maintain the pool, and for determining who can access the pool. This is consistent with the long term campaign of improving the resource and access to it by members of the Mayfield community, but SMSPC's call for free entry has more strongly highlighted the SMSPC's rejection of neo-liberalism's confidence in the price mechanism as the best means of allocating services.

This call for a free entry trial received substantial media coverage and, before the election, a majority of the thirteen councillors who were eventually elected (four Australian Labor Party, two Greens Party, and two unaligned independents) indicated support for a free trial period of some duration. At the time of writing a notice of motion has been tabled within Council, calling for a three

year free entry trial period to all public pools in Newcastle and the establishment of a formal working party comprising councillors, council officer and community members to explore options for the long-term viability of public pools. Whether or not this motion is passed in its current form, by calling for free entry rather than simply a price reduction, SMSPC has effectively used the opportunity of the election campaign to further intervene in the discourse in the public debate. In pre- and post-election opinion pieces in *The Herald* (Newcastle's daily newspaper), SMSPC and supporters argued the case for the social benefits of free entry; and also appropriated the 'business case' language by arguing that free entry could make better business sense. This argument was based on evidence that the high entrance fees were significantly reducing pool usage and were in any case only covering approximately a quarter of the cost of running the pool: hence removing fees would maximise the benefit to the community of Council's investment in the pool, while the increasing patronage could increase possible revenue from the kiosk at the pool, as well as opening up other potential revenue streams (Clarke, 2012). In this way SMSPC made some concessions to the prevailing neoliberal discourse, but in a way that inverted its assumed policy outcome, while also promoting a counter discourse framed around the community benefits of public pools.

4.4 Contingent discursive stability

Orders of discourse are always contingent, usually stable but never fixed. The continued existence of Mayfield pool, and the shifting nature of the public debate about it, demonstrates this well. When councillors voted in late 2007 to keep the pool open, councillors voted on a resolution that council officers played a role in drafting. As we noted earlier, the resolution called 'for further consultation to take place between Council and SMSP Community Group over a five year period to investigate the business case for the retention of, and future improvement program for, Mayfield Pool' (Newcastle City Council, 2007b). Through the use of this financial framing, the development of a business case, it is clear that what was occurring was a move to establish new order of discourse (Fairclough, 1993) which accommodated some of SMSPC's demands, but did so in a way that constrained those demands within the overall neo-liberal discourse. SMSPC's demands were to be accommodated in the resolution through SMSPC's submission to council, which made the social justice argument for the retention and improvement of the pool 'be received as a basis' (Newcastle City Council, 2007b) for the development of the business case.

Mc Shane (2005, p. 7) argues that recent developments in the technical and financial management of local government infrastructure have not been matched by a focus on what he calls the social value of facilities. Hence he suggests that there is a need for a new political discourse about the role of public facilities to focus on concepts such as identity, well-being, connectedness, civic engagement, diversity and equity. SMSPC's activities have gone some way to generate this sort of discourse, but as we have outlined this has not been a smooth process. The Mayfield Pool website (www.mayfieldpool.com) developed by SMSPC has continued to record stories of the campaign and articulate the call for a focus on the social value of pools.

Conclusion

The campaign for the future of Mayfield pool is a local campaign, but one that directly connects to global conditions, most notably the Global Financial Crisis and its impact on government revenues and spending, coupled with the accompanying and still dominant neo-liberal discourses. These discourses constrain public debate about valuable – and in this particular case much loved – community spaces and places. There have been discernible shifts in the prevailing discourse around the future of Mayfield pool in the six years of this current and ongoing campaign. Repeated price rises in particular have contributed to creating a space in which our call for free entry has been able to achieve substantial traction. This is a significant shift, and though or perhaps because it is occurring at the small, local scale, it raises for us the question about the role of forces at smaller scales in the struggle for larger social change. We see these events in Mayfield, NSW, Australia, as part of a classic dialectical relationship in which events and discourses at the larger and smaller scales impact on each other.

Our analysis of the local campaign to retain Mayfield's public swimming pool has been based on Fairclough's discourse analysis, in an attempt to more deeply understand the processes by which particular constructions and representations of this social asset and how it ought to be managed have played out. Crucially, Fairclough's framework has allowed us to identify local government discourse that reflect the contemporary, but contested, hegemony of neo-liberal logic with respect to public spending and services, and to track the ways in which counter-discourses, based on alternative logics, were introduced and used by community actors to help shift local government policy. To some extent, the alternative 'order of discourse' has been adopted and operationalized by policy makers, with the potential then to further reinforce the counter-view of public assets and services accessed by local communities.

In *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit (2004) cautions against use of the word 'save' in framing campaign goals, as in 'save the whales'. She argues that things are never absolutely saved, rather that they are either lost, or they remain to be defended. And while some things that are lost may be recovered, Solnit (2004) reminds us that campaign successes in 'saving' assets, concrete social goods, and more intangible ideas, are always provisional. The discourse constructed in the process of saving, and established to maintain such things, remains contingent, open to future challenge, appropriation and reinterpretation. In this case then, both the physical swimming pool, and the ideas of social justice and public goods that have underpinned its retention, remain to be defended. In Fairclough's terms, they persist to be further operationalized and entrenched. This neatly captures one of the core elements of community campaigns under a banner of social justice. As advances are made, we are reminded of the need to push further, to deepen and where possible institutionalise the counter discourse being advanced.

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