Widening the scope of scenario planning in small communities: a case study use of an alternative method

Andrea Rawluk, Annelise Godber

Scenario planning can nurture the learning and communication processes for social-ecological resilience, particularly for resource dependent communities. When such communities face uncertain futures, scenario planning can be empowering. In pre-existing scenario planning methods, community-wide collaboration is relied on to explore the future, represent the needs and understanding of community members and foster learning. However, when cultural norms prevented men, women, and youth from coming together in the community of Ukupseni in Panama, the authors and community together sought to devise an alternative method. The research objectives were twofold. First, to develop an alternative scenario planning method that would facilitate learning among leaders and decision makers about community needs and perspectives, and second to explore ways to direct desired futures. In pre-existing methods, scenario planning can involve forecasting, which is conducted through community-wide collaboration to explore possible future scenarios, and backcasting with the creation of one vision through consensus. We utilized forecasting with individual interviews to create scenarios and conducted backcasting with each of six community groups separately (young men, young women without children, young women with children, older women, older men, and individuals with formal education) to outline a desired future vision for each group. This resulted in six different visions. We created an organizational matrix to unify the results from the forecasting and backcasting and allow for the comparison of the different community group visions. This matrix allowed leaders and decision makers to observe that women and youth, the most marginalized members of the community, had convergent visions that were very different from men whose perspectives and knowledge are more often utilized in decision making. It is our hope that the proposed alternative method can support the accessibility of scenario planning to a wider breadth of circumstances and facilitate creative discussion in the face of uncertain futures.