



Evaluating Sustainability in Public Programs

Dr Rick Cummings
Dr Andrew McConney
Murdoch University

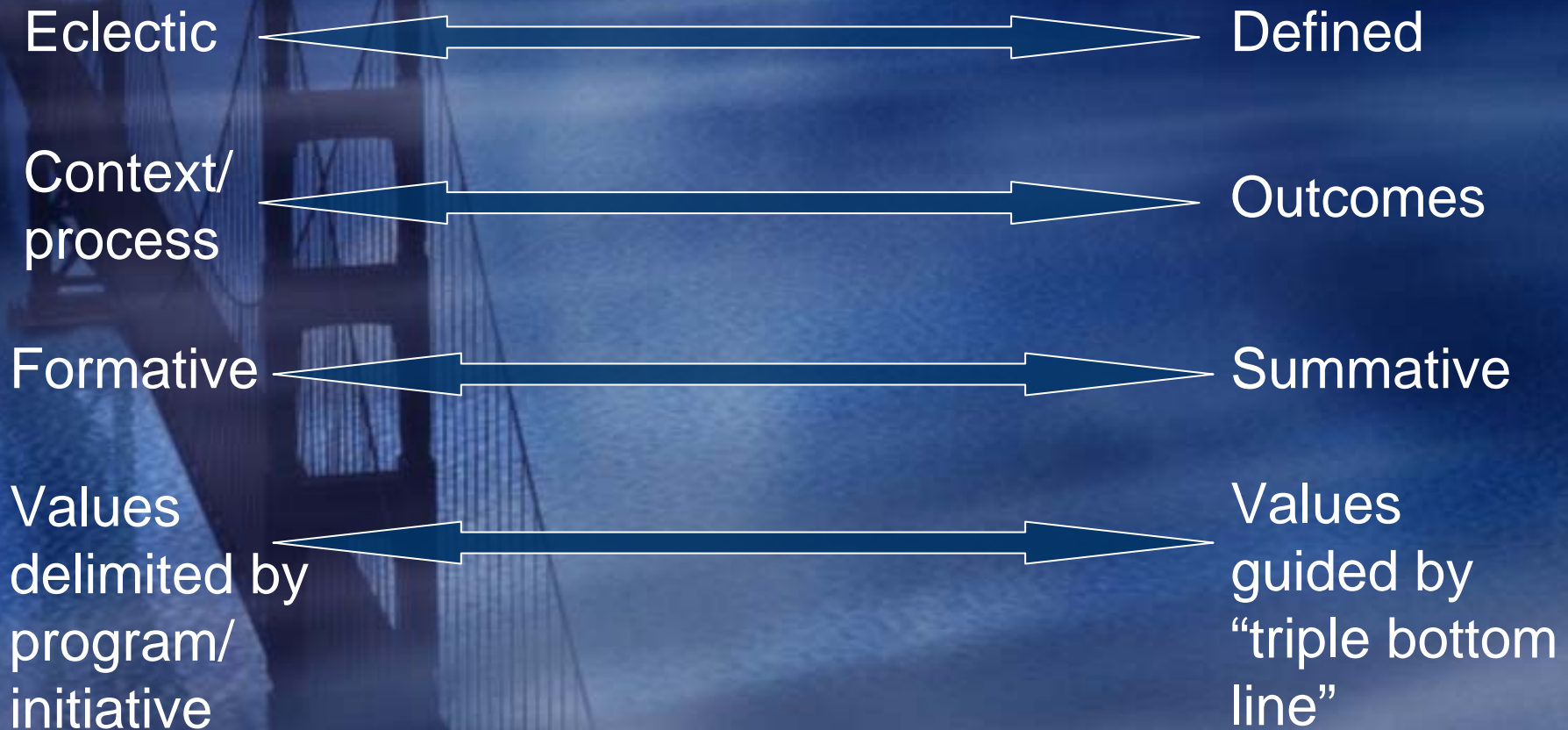
Why sustainability?

- ◆ Popular and evolving term
- ◆ Increasingly part of programs/policies
- ◆ Lack of clarity about the concept
- ◆ Demands to evaluate sustainability

Guidance—what guidance?

- ◆ Deryck Brown (1998)
 - ◆ development aid, institutional learning
- ◆ Dan Stufflebeam (2003)
 - ◆ educational & social programs, benefits to intended participants
- ◆ Graeme Harvey & Ros Hurworth (2006)
 - ◆ health-related initiatives, contextual and process focus (laying the groundwork)
- ◆ Robert Vos (2007)
 - ◆ environmental sciences, systemic interconnections, intergenerational equity

Where are we?



Questions/discussion?

1. As evaluators of social and educational projects, programs and policies what does it mean for these evaluands to be *sustainable*?
 - a. As evaluators of social and educational projects, programs and policies what have been your experiences evaluating *sustainability* in particular evaluation studies? What can we learn from these experiences?
 - b. As evaluators, do we need/want a broadly shared definition of *sustainability*?
2. As evaluators, do we approach or think about the construct of sustainability differently depending on context or discipline? For example, are there differences in concept or method for educational programs versus health improvement programs or social welfare programs?
 - a. Alternatively, are we best served conceiving the definition a transdisciplinary one, as are many in the practice and theory of evaluation, broadly conceived (e.g., merit, worth, value)?

3. Given that the construct arose in the fields of ecology and conservation biology, as part of the emergence of environmentalism, what can we learn construct-wise from these fields?
 - a. Similarly, what if anything can we learn from these fields regarding methodologies or approaches for the assessment and evaluation of *sustainability*?
4. To present, how has the evaluation of *sustainability* been approached in the practice of evaluators of public social and educational programs? What can we learn from the literature on social and educational program evaluation?
 - a. To present, how has the evaluation of *sustainability* been conceptualized by evaluators of public social and educational programs? Is conceptualization of the construct evident?
 - b. What indicators or dimensions have evaluators used, and what measures might be used?
5. What evaluation approaches (e.g., Stufflebeam, 2001) or conceptual frameworks (e.g., Chen, 2004; Patton, 2001) are best suited or positioned for the appraisal of sustainability of public programs and policies?