Putting 'it' together:

fire knowledge, local landscape practices and the integrated mapping of everyday places

Dr Ruth Beilin,[1] and Dr Karen Reid[1]
[1] Melbourne School of Land & Environment, University of Melbourne, Victoria

Many fire management agencies recognise the need to understand bushfire as resulting from both biophysical factors and from the social drivers that create bushfire conditions.

Resilience theory suggests that phenomena like bushfires are part of complex, linked and interdependent social and ecological systems. Interdisciplinary researchers aim to develop new methodologies to study social-ecological systems. To assist the integration of social and ecological data, we apply the metaphor of 'landscape' as the location where the social and ecological systems associated with bushfire are entwined.

'Landscape' encompasses **physical realities** (topography, geology, ecologies) **and** the **social processes** of interpretation, imagination and negotiation that shape natural resource management.

The research framework draws together 'place' theory and the concept of social and ecological memory as key elements in the creation of meaning about bushfire in the landscape and consequent management practices. The evolving methodology centres on an integrated approach, using interviews and 'place mapping' to understand local people's ecological and social connections to the landscape.

The example map depicted below illustrates how the method is used to capture both social and ecological understandings of the landscape. Management agencies can use this method and data to better understand the ways local communities construct their versions of bushfire threats and the assets at 'risk'.
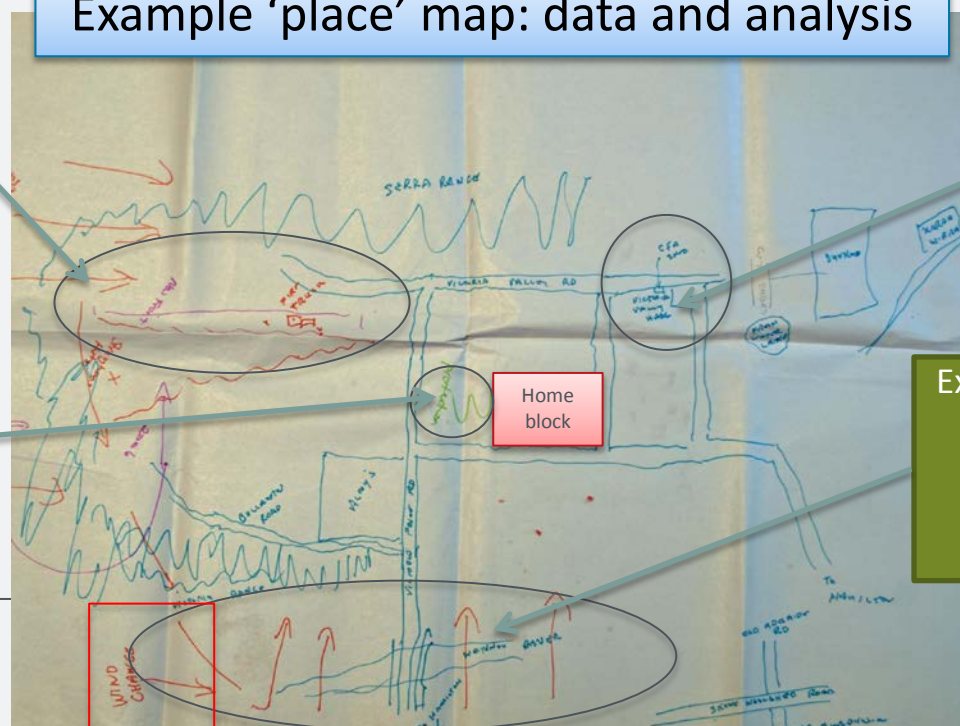
Example 'place' map: data and analysis

Social memory of bushfire practice:

established local practices (eg. back-burning) under pressure from changing agency policy (eg. monitoring the 'going' fire)

Everyday bushfire practice:

grazing north of the home block to reduce fuel load

Places of social significance:

where the community meets:
- everyday social & planning
- during times of specific risk

Example of local social-ecological memory of bushfire:

"IF YOU'RE LOCAL HERE YOU'D KNOW, IF THE WIND CHANGES YOU'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF THE WAY....."

Home block