

SECTION II: RELATIONAL PRACTICES

In chapter 2 I outlined a way of understanding sustainability at the present time in terms of touchstones of change, participation and power. I finished by noting the emergence of relational practices in which powerful actors are being engaged in a collaborative and generative manner.

In this section I begin my elaboration of two forms of relational practice in the context of sustainability and the collaborative engagement between powerful actors. In **chapter 3** I look at the relationships between NGOs and business, in which axis there has been a move towards the practice of collaboration. I first suggest why such arrangements may be emerging at the present time and then go on to describe the ways in which these relationships have been understood in the academic literatures concerning business, society and NGOs. At the end of this chapter I move into a more critical appraisal of the literature, a critique which is made in the context of a perceived coalition of demands for inquiry emanating from the sustainability agenda.

In **chapter 4** I look at the relationship between knower and known in social science inquiry and research, specifically at group of practices labelled participatory action research or action research that involve the collaboration between participants in inquiry. I describe the essence of such practices and suggest some of the ways in which they bear resonance with emerging visions concerning sustainability. I finish the chapter with a short vignette that seems to hold forth a number of important nodes that link chapter 3 about business-NGO relationships with chapter 4 about participatory forms of inquiry and takes us into the subsequent sections of the thesis.

Whilst I seek always to refer to my reading of the academic literature in these explorations it would be a mistruth to suggest that my own experiences of these relational practices and reading of “non-academic” theories have not influenced my presentation herein.