



2005 New Zealand National Local Authority Community Development Conference in New Plymouth

Wellbeing and Culture – Finding the Positive Dynamics

Keynote Address: 12 noon: 21st September 2005

Abstract:

Wellbeing and Culture – Finding the Positive Dynamics

This presentation will hopefully provide community development workers with an understanding of the dynamics of culture and cultural wellbeing in your community, thus enabling you to support the 2002 Local Government purpose of promoting social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing.

This presentation will concentrate on cultural wellbeing, first defining the words *culture* and *wellbeing* and then noting some positive and negative aspects of community cultures.

It will then give some examples to show community development workers how they can read and understand the dynamics of the different community cultures in your regions and then how to use the positive aspects of culture to promote *cultural wellbeing for the present and in the future*¹.

¹ 2002 Local Government Act – Purpose of Local Government

Wellbeing and Culture – Finding a Positive Dynamic

Speech to Energise Conference 21st September 2005 – New Plymouth 21st September 2005

Introduction

Tena koutou tena koutou tena koutou katoa, Greetings,

First I would like to acknowledge the tangata whenua –Iwi Te Atiawa, Hapu – Ngati, Te Whiti, your ancestors, your Mount Taranaki, your rivers and the land.

It is with pleasure that I make this presentation to the Community Development Conference of Local Government New Zealand here in New Plymouth.

This is a particularly important forum and it has an equally important theme – the election results make it even more important.

Today I wish to build on the speech I gave to the Local Government Conference in Auckland in 2004, and on Local Government Act passed in 2002 and the implications and meanings of that Act and the positive use of the cultural wellbeing purpose in your Act.

It is hoped that by the end of this speech I will have provided you as community development workers with an understanding of the dynamics of culture and cultural wellbeing in your community, thus enabling you to support the 2002 Local Government purpose of promoting social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing.

This presentation will concentrate on cultural wellbeing, first defining the words *culture* and *wellbeing* and then noting some positive and negative aspects of community cultures

Culture and cultural wellbeing and what do these words mean?

Before we can think positively about culture and cultural wellbeing we need to understand these terms we are using and I have been surprised that people are still confused by the meanings of these terms and what we are trying to understand.

So for this presentation the following definitions will be used for culture and I will also define, well being and social capital. Hopefully we will be able to link them all together and understand the importance of using the arts and cultural wellbeing in creating social capital that will enhance your communities.

So for culture, The UNESCO definition, adopted in the 2001 Declaration on Cultural Diversity² helps clarify the word in the modern context.

That definition is:

*... culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.*³

Putting that word into a historical and New Zealand context, we should also look to the following:

Novitz and Willmott in *Culture and Identity in New Zealand (1989)* give a New Zealand perspective that adds to our understanding.

Culture is not simply art, music and literature; it is the total collection of behaviour patterns, values and beliefs that characterise a particular group of people⁴

The dynamics of culture

To further understand this word we need to note that cultures interact and influence each other. So it is also important for your Councils that you also consider the dynamics of culture which as community development workers you are aware of this and use the insights to enhance your work.

You already know that different cultures sometimes have totally different ways of expressing themselves, and therefore an important role of local government is to provide opportunities to enable positive interacting. Such positive interacting enhances understanding between *cultures* in situations and events featuring cultural diversity.

We know that communication between groups and knowledge of the different myths, values, ideologies and rituals can make a huge difference to the way separate groups accept each other and learn to interact positively.

There are hundreds of different *cultures* and they each have their own range of myths and histories values, ideologies and rituals.

² UNESCO. 2001. *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, p. 2

³ This definition is in line with the conclusions of the World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT, Mexico City, 1982), of the World Commission on Culture and Development (*Our Creative Diversity*, 1995), and of the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development (Stockholm, 1998).

⁴ Novitz, D. and Willmott B, 1989. *Culture and identity in New Zealand*. Government Print: Wellington

Generalisations too often encourage prejudice fueled by lack of communication and understanding between different cultural practices. Within the broad Asian group, for instance, there are differences between Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist cultures; similarly there are significant differences between Roman Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, Mormon and Seventh Day Adventist cultures, or between the cultures of the blind, the deaf and those with intellectual disabilities.

When we are less informed about cultural differences, we tend to clump people together and judge them from a distance assuming they are all the same, but in all cultures there are variations and complexities.

There are often rigid fundamentalist sections in some cultures and also members of cultures who are more flexible than others. Some people are slow to accept change while others embrace change and new directions enthusiastically.

What is certain is that cultures evolve. They take on aspects of some of the other cultures with which they come in contact.

We note that:

...all cultures are in a state of flux, driven by both internal and external forces. These forces may be accommodating, harmonious, benign and based on voluntary actions, or they may be involuntary, the result of violent conflict, force, domination and the exercise of illegitimate power⁵

For local government, it is through awareness of this cultural dynamic that you design inputs that will enable communities to understand each other and foster social inclusion and engagement.

Understanding that culture is not static also helps. Cultures have residual, dominant and emerging phases, which mean gradual changes in the ideologies, values, the rituals and behaviours as they develop.

Some communities are protected by walls and security systems. They are intolerant of change and intolerant of, or feel threatened by, people who are different from themselves, whether because of colour, sexual orientation, ability or socio-economic status. Their way of life is designed to ensure that they never meet anyone who is different from themselves. This locks them into a behavioural loop which ignores the benefits of social inclusion, which otherwise nurtures engagement, understanding and tolerance.

⁵ De Cuellar, Javier Perez. *Our Creative Diversity* – Unesco Publishing 1995. ISBN Unesco 92-3-103423-5

In the past, we had belief that economic growth comes from physical factors of production – raw materials, natural resources, technology. And then we came to believe that ‘knowledge’ is an important factor of production – information technology in modern theories of economic growth –and from this– that technology powers economic growth. While technology is a critical piece of the puzzle – it is not the whole puzzle.

I believe that it is ‘creativity’ – human creativity – our ability to be creative, that really powers economic growth.

And creativity comes in many different kinds and styles⁶.

This debate also leads to thinking about the three other “well-beings” particularly in relation to

- sustainable development
- resource identification and management
- celebration of unique identities

Thus we should be able to develop **indicators** of social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being.

In New Zealand we have a challenge. There is an understanding, but also a fear of the meaning of “culture”.

In my address to the 2004 Local Government New Zealand Conference, I defined the words “culture and well-being.” It was a surprise to me to see the response. The speech received considerable feedback.

My assessment of this response showed the misunderstanding and “fear” of the cultural well-being objective in the Act.

While I believe this is an unfounded fear, I do acknowledge that it is linked to a perception by many local government officers, that they were going to have to spend money on new arts venues, greater investment in the professional arts organisations and thus an increased spending on the kind of *cultural rituals* in expensive art organisations and European arts festivals. While this could be true, it is only part of the objective.

Hence when I use the UNESCO definition, the perception of greater flexibility in the definition enables them to acknowledge the unique values, rituals, history and ideologies of each region’ and with that the ability to celebrate what makes them special. Along with this comes also the recognition of the resources in terms of social capital associated with the spiritual, intellectual, physical and emotional activities engaged in by all their citizens.

Culture is just so inclusive. It gives meaning to the whole of our life – history, ideologies, values and the way we express who we are.

⁶ Florida, Richard *transcript of presentation to Wellington City Council* (2003)

Now back to the topic. Therefore to understand culture in New Zealand we need to understand our values, our history and our ideologies.

Wellbeing

The term *well-being* is less subject to change in meaning over time, but we should note for a clear understanding of the Local Government Act as most standard dictionaries note it simply means:

..good health, happiness, and prosperity; the state of being healthy, happy and prosperous⁷.

So the Act, by which you currently work and that guides your Councils, therefore states that local governments are called upon:

to promote good health, happiness and prosperity through social, environmental, cultural and economic well-being in a sustainable way.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to include having fun, and the freedom of unorganised activity, as well – since happiness can mean different things to different people.

You can add

Resiliency
Engagement with community
Having social capital

Cultural change

I note that not only do cultures have emerging, dominant and residual, phases but that:

...all cultures are in a state of flux, driven by both internal and external forces. These forces may be accommodating, harmonious, benign and based on voluntary actions, or they may be involuntary, the result of violent conflict, force, domination and the exercise of illegitimate power⁸.

What is equally important is the need to acknowledge and respond in New Zealand, to the fact that all cultures are different.

⁷ Deverson, T. revision editor *The New Zealand Oxford Paperback Dictionary revised edition 2002* Oxford University Press: South Melbourne, Australia

⁸ De Cuellar, Javier Perez. *Our Creative Diversity – UNESCO Publishing 1995*. ISBN UNESCO 92-3-103423-5

Myths, ideologies and values vary. Whether you look at a town, a part of a city, a workplace culture, a disability culture or the culture of a gang, sports club or family. They all have unique cultures.

For New Zealand the values will be different from those in other countries—and we should and do celebrate these differences, including our relationship with our first people and their values, ideologies and their rituals.

Developing social capital

The term “capital” refers to the social networks that help society to function effectively; the voluntary associations (including community groups, sports and cultural clubs, and residents’ associations) that provide linkages between people in the community and enable them to be more effective in business, politics, and a wide range of social activities.

Social capital refers to the ‘connectedness’ between citizens. To develop social capital communities require high levels of trust, a range of voluntary associations, and opportunities to meet and discuss community concerns⁹.

The measurement I am using includes measures of:

- a) Participation in society
- b) Improved quality of life
- c) Happiness and contentment
- d) Diversity, long life and experiences
- e) Balance for all in intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical well-being
- f) Access for all to resources – venues, sport, arts, religion
- g) Opportunities made available to celebrate ones own arts
- h) Freedom of speech for all
- i) Everyone able to exercise their right to speak in their own language
- j) Opportunities in place for all to paint, dance, play an instrument, write a poem
- k) Opportunities in place for all to exhibit their art, perform their plays, tell their stories
- l) Histories respected from all view points
- m) Policies in place that recognise different values and aspirations of the community
- n) Respect being shown for values and ideologies
- o) Freedom and opportunities available for the celebration of birth, marriage, and death in accordance with people’s religion
- p) Freedom to worship whatever god or higher being.

Is there a measure of how we work and that give freedom to our ethnic or disability cultures?

⁹ Extract from 1997 *IRS workshop* reported in Robinson, David ed Social Capital in Action. Institute of Policy Studies: Victoria University of Wellington: 1999

Should we also note incidence of violence and why these happen? Is it more positive and about sports and arts events, multicultural festivals and the most important, our celebration of our indigenous people?

Or is it something about trying to achieve an improvement in quality of life, diversity in life and experiences, community participation and balance?

Is it about giving all people access to resources – venues, sport, arts, religion and opportunities being made available to celebrate ones own art?

Our territorial local authorities and arts organisations should be setting up partnerships and networks to enable programs to be established and owned by our citizens.

The enhanced cultures will include those of ethnic, youth, disability, older adults, families, churches and sport groups.

To develop social capital communities require high levels of trust, a range of voluntary associations and opportunities to meet and discuss community concerns.

Examples of social capital?

- a group of neighbours keep an eye on one another's homes,
- tightly knit communities like the round table
- Church groups
- Support groups – rape or cancer survivors
- Schools
- Civic associations
- Meeting places "Where everybody knows your name"

Social capital & Putnam

Social capital works through multiple channels:

- Information flows (learning, exchanging ideas)
- Reciprocity (mutual aid)
- Bonding networks
- Bridging networks
- Collective action
- Broader identities and solidarity – translates "I" mentality into a "we" mentality.

Putnam further stresses¹⁰ the economic value of social capital. He suggests three things – it is worth reading the whole passage:

¹⁰ Putnam, Robert *Bowling Alone – the collapse and revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster: New York. 2000 pp 288 -289

First social capital allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily...

Secondly social capital greases the wheels that allow communities to advance smoothly... and the third way is which social capital improves our lot is by widening our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked. People who have active and trusting connections to others... ¹¹."

Acknowledging and understanding Cultural Capital¹²

Now I wish to share some of my new thinking. Increasingly people are talking about Cultural capital. This phrase was first used by Pierre-Felix Bourdieu (1930-2002). He was an educationalist and he believed that people's social capital influenced their education potential, particularly their expectation of where they will go in life.

The fundamentals of cultural capital are forms of knowledge; skill; education.

More recent thinking looks at cultural capital in terms of the value of the myths, histories, ideologies, values and the performance, rituals and behaviours that come from celebrating and investing this cultural capital in societies growth and development.

I would like to take the discussion further, and this is just new thinking to me. I would like to suggest that the cultural capital – particularly the ideologies of a society directly influence economic, environmental and social wellbeing and development. We could look at China, India, Iraq and Afghanistan, Cambodia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Ireland and Finland and how their culture has influenced the development of the economy. Dare I also look at USA and what we have been seeing in New Orleans – the culture of the right and the cut backs in social services and government spending linked to a particular culture's ideologies concerning individual rights. I just offer you this thinking and say it is new to me and I will work more on it in the future.

What I am sure of is that we should think about the culture of our regions and then see if the cultural capital can be used to grow your economies. In this I am including the farming cultures, the industry culture, Maori culture and our unique way of working in New Zealand.

This takes me to thinking generally about economic wellbeing as part of cultural wellbeing and cultural capital.

¹¹ Ibid 288

¹² Eames Penny *Cultural Capital* ©

Economic wellbeing

I have also been doing a lot of thinking about wellbeing and about the role of “wealth” in wellbeing. Wealth is not just money – but financial wealth is really important. I have visited many communities in the last few years that are quite poor, in India, South Africa, Pacific Islands and Europe, and wonder how we find a way to ensure that we have communities that are sustainable and yet do not lose the important social capital and cultural wellbeing.

I am not sure of any answers, but I know that “gated towns” and “isolated communities” are not necessarily wealthy, and certainly if you look at the social, economic, environmental wellbeing of your communities we need to measure the social capital and connectedness and then move toward enhancing the positives, where happiness, engagement and sustainable income generation.

Again this is where I think the arts and culture come in and the development of markets, festivals and settings that encourage some income generation without destroying the value of the communities. I was interested again in some of the interviews when one of the councils bulldozed down a caravan park. Those interviewed didn’t talk about money – they talked about relationships.

2002 Local Government Act

I want to put these in the context of your Local Government Act, so at this point I wish to outline the relevant clauses to strengthen the argument.

Purposes of local government and role and powers of local authorities states:

The purpose of local government¹³ is---
to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and

to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities, in the present and or the future.

Thus the Preliminary section of the Act recognises the diversity of New Zealand communities and notes the importance of taking a sustainable development approach. The Purpose in part 2, emphasises the present and future.

Engagement

What is increasingly being stressed is that communities need to get together and provide citizens with opportunities, (regular) opportunities for engagement and what is called social connectedness.

¹³ 2002 Local Government Act: 10 Purpose of Local Government

There are people trying to analyse what went wrong in New Orleans – was it that the United States larger community didn't engage in the crisis. Had the "individual" rather than the "collective" led to a feeling that the problems of New Orleans had to be dealt with at local and state levels. Some of the critics are suggesting that.

What happens here in emergencies. I was listening to a discussion of the Manawatu floods. The person interviewed said. "we quickly telephoned all our neighbours and told them to get out quickly" " then we went to the Marae and took what stock we could to higher ground". I was interested in the order. Neighbours first, stock second and I assumed their own safety came alongside both of these.

This is one of the reasons I am so interested in cultural wellbeing – that came first, with social, environmental wellbeing second and third. They then ensured that the economic wellbeing could be redeveloped.

Maybe this deserves discussion here. Many of you will have had to deal with crisis in your area. I was in Pukehina a couple of days after the Whakatane, Matata floods – I was so inspired by the way people were opening their homes for those in trouble. People in New Zealand are engaged and we must encourage this and not lose it for anything. Robert Putnam¹⁴ would argue that United States has lost much of that engagement and hence there is a collapse in the American community.

I have also been reading about what is increasingly called "The Third Place". When I gave the keynote address at Plunket' Volunteer conference the feedback evaluation forms mentioned peoples interest in this concept.

So what is the Third Place.

The Third Place¹⁵

Well the First place – home

Second place – work

Third place - a place to go to be oneself

Community third places are therefore very important.

- *Third places are the core settings for informal public life, they are places where people can meet old friends, make new acquaintances, discuss the important issues of the day, and temporarily throw off the weight of the world that can drag them down.*

¹⁴ Putman Robert, *Bowling Alone – the Collapse and revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster: New York

¹⁵ *The Great Good Place* by Ray Oldenburg, 1999, New York: Marlowe and Company

- *Oldenburg claims that involvement in informal public life has important psychological, social, and political implications, and such involvement is made possible by the existence of third places.*

Community and cultural dynamics and how community development workers influence development of social capital can also be linked to the development and support of the third place concept.

Encouraging cultural wellbeing

Encouraging development of cultural activities particularly those where people meet each other:

- Festivals
- Markets
- Social groups, choirs, orchestras, book clubs, embroidery and patchwork
- Third places

Economic Capital and Cultural wellbeing

Richard Florida¹⁶ in *Rise of the Creative Class* emphasises the importance of **talent, tolerance and technology** in making creative and innovative cities – Florida is quoted a lot and some of what he is saying is shown with the growth in cities like Wellington and Napier and the role that particularly the arts, culture, software development and the film industry has certainly been New Zealand examples showing what can happen in this sector.

Creativity and economic growth

So at this point we rejoin the theme in this presentation:

It has shown the relevance for your communities of Richard Florida's vision of the rise in the creative class including noting the economic value of Social capital and this thinking has encouraged us to think of cultural wellbeing having the spin-off of stimulating tourism.

- *In the past, we had belief that economic growth comes from physical factors of production – raw materials, natural resources, technology.*
- *And then we came to believe that 'knowledge' is an important factor of production – information technology in modern theories of economic growth – seem to suggest as far as they have got – that technology powers economic growth.*
- *... while technology is a critical piece of the puzzle – it is not the whole puzzle.*

¹⁶ Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It Is Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*

- That 'creativity' – human creativity – our ability to be creative, is what really powers economic growth.
- And creativity comes in many different kinds and styles¹⁷

Culture including history and heritage

Let us go back to culture and I will stress again that culture does include:

- Myths and histories essential part of cultural wellbeing
- We need to know where we have come from
- We need to understand the culture of our communities and the way they are moving;
- We need to think more about how we can celebrate cultural capital and use it for the wellbeing of all in our communities.

Spark of development

The creative spark – added to sustainable development and resources. – original thought, imagination and the over-used word, innovation.

Although culture and development are inextricably linked, it is culture that plays the crucial role because it 'is the sum total of original solutions that a group of human beings invent to adapt to their natural and social environment'¹⁸

Conclusion

Finally in conclusion:

- Cultural well-being is the key to social, economic and environmental well-being;
- The spark of development is creativity, and creativity is linked to the nature of culture and cultural development;
- It can be measured as the links to social, economic and environmental well-being and sustainability;
- More work needs to be done to enhance our understanding of **cultural well-being** and that work should focus on social, economic and environmental well-being, and not be seen as an add-on;
- You act as a catalyst, behaving as an agent of change, setting out to enable people to express who they are in the most appropriate form, their ideals, views and values;
- Working out your cultural capital and social capital can enable you to develop further your economies;
- In New Zealand we are trying to define and promote social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of all communities; and our Local Government Act stresses this in the present and for the future.

¹⁷ Florida, Richard *transcript of presentation to Wellington City Council* (2003)

¹⁸ De Varine, Huues, *La Culture des Autres*, Paris, Seuil, 1976

What it doesn't say and I hope you will recognise is that this can be done through developing social capital, cultural wellbeing and thus economic and civil wellbeing.