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Local Government New Zealand Conference  
Designing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

# Cultural Well-being Workshop

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## Abstract

Understanding what is meant by cultural well-being is the key to creating a peaceful and happy society. This paper will look at cultural well-being in the light of social, economic and environmental well-being. It will note the dynamics involved in working with the arts and cultural sector and suggest ways to celebrate all your community cultures, thus achieving the purpose of the Local Government Act 2002.

The workshop will define the words in the Act and further suggest that getting your cultural well-being purpose right will enhance the social, economic and environmental well-being purpose as well.

The UNESCO definition, adopted in the 2001 Declaration on Cultural Diversity<sup>1</sup>, will guide this discussion. 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.<sup>2</sup>

Then we will look at how we can measure the "cultural well-being of communities, in the present and for the future" as required in the purpose of the Act.

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO. 2001. Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, p. 2

<sup>2</sup> 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).

## Presentation

This speech has taken a lot of writing, a lot of talking and a little bit of consultation. This workshop is important. We need to understand the purpose of your Local Government Act 2002 in terms of what it means and how to measure the results. We need to understand the meanings and the anticipated results.

In this workshop, we will look at the purpose of the Local Government Act 2002, and particularly the second purpose relating to the “cultural well-being of communities, in the present and for the future”,

- a) what does this purpose in the Act really mean?
- b) how does it relate to the total well-being of your community?
- c) how does it relate to social, economic and environmental well-being?
- d) how can we measure if we are achieving this purpose?

## Local Government Act 2002

So what does the Act really say?

The purpose of local government<sup>3</sup> is---

- (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and
- (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities, in the present and for the future.

## Interpreting an Act

Whenever we interpret an Act of Parliament there are several steps that need to be taken.

We must read and understand the meaning of the words you are examining,

- a) in the context in the whole Act;
- b) alongside the other words in that part of the Act, particularly those before and after it.

I have used the dictionary, literature and the internet to find the definitions that give a clearer understanding of the words and context of this 2002 Act.

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<sup>3</sup> 2002 Local Government Act: 10 Purpose of Local Government

The words of particular interest for this presentation are: "Purpose" – "Promote" "Well-being" "Cultural" "of communities" and "in the present and in the future".

## Purpose

(Noun)

- Ø A thing to be done, an intention, an aim, the thing intended, the design, something that forms the basis or reason for an action, object to be attained; the action or fact of intending to do something, resolution, determination.
- Ø Something to form the basis or reason for an action event.

(Verb - action)

- Ø to have purpose, to design

## Promote

(Verb – action)

- Ø advance, help forward, move forward, advance or raise, further the development, progress or establishment, support actively, encourage.
- Ø support actively the passing of...initiate, take necessary steps for passing on; publicise and sell.
- Ø to raise in position, publicise, sell.

## Well-being

- Ø good health, happiness, and prosperity; the state of being healthy, happy and prosperous<sup>4</sup>.

For this I draw heavily on the 1988, Royal Commission of Social Policy<sup>5</sup>. That document, although much debated, gives us a way to look at well-being – or what it calls "the standards of a fair society". This document, I believe, is still relevant today. I looked at lots of other documents, but found the Royal Commission put the case best.

It defines the standards of a fair society. With all the reading on well-being this set of standards of a fair society best summed up what other commentators were calling standards for well-being.

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<sup>4</sup> Deverson, T. revision editor The New Zealand Oxford Paperback Dictionary revised edition 2002  
Oxford University Press: South Melbourne, Australia

<sup>5</sup> The Royal Commission on Social Policy -Te Komihana A Te Karauna Mo Nga Ahuatanga-A-Iwi: April 1988.  
Volume One – New Zealand Today: Warrants – Standards of a fair society – (page vi).

So, to start, here they are:

- Dignity and self-determination for individuals, families, and communities;
- Maintenance of a standard of living sufficient to ensure that everybody can participate in, and have a sense of belonging to, the community;
- Genuine opportunity for all people, of whatever age, race, gender, social and economic position or abilities, to develop their own potential;
- A fair distribution of wealth and resources of New Zealand, including access to the resources that contribute to social well-being;
- Acceptance of the identity and cultures of different peoples within the community, and understanding and respect for cultural diversity;

What is "culture" and "cultural"?

- Ø The distinctive practices and beliefs of a society
- Ø The act or process of cultivating land, animals
- Ø A development or improvement of the intellect or behaviour due to education, training or experience.

Some of you will have read my book "Creative Solutions and Social Inclusion – Culture and the Community"<sup>6</sup>

There is a whole section on the meaning of culture.

In that book the meaning is linked to horticulture, cultivation of the spirit, and the cultivation of the land. If you are interested, you should read that book - you can get it from Arts Access Aotearoa or your local bookshop. It will certainly add to this discussion.

But for this presentation I draw on the UNESCO definition, adopted in the 2001 Declaration on Cultural Diversity,<sup>7</sup> to guide this discussion.

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.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Eames, PS 2003. Creative Solutions and Social Inclusion – Culture and the Community : Arts Access Aotearoa available from Steele Roberts Ltd, Wellington or Arts Access Aotearoa [www.artsaccess.org.nz](http://www.artsaccess.org.nz)

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO. 2001. Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, p. 2

<sup>8</sup> 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).

## Word “culture” in modern usage

Before we go much further, I would like to remind you of how the word “culture” is being used today.

We should note that there are many cultures working together and apart. We talk about workplace cultures, business cultures, ethnic cultures, youth cultures, cultural rituals, sports cultures, festivals of culture, and many more.

The word “culture”, in the dictionary, is being used to note “a grouping with common myths, customs, ideologies and values”.

## The context in which the Act was passed

The Act is then about the quadruple bottom line of sustainable development.

A mix of Catching the Knowledge Wave thinking and international sustainable development writing, plus the United Nations Rio+10 Conference, in Johannesburg .

Each word is linked together and makes a whole - “social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities”

This linking, I will suggest, is important.

But first let us take all of these and put them into working models.

## Process of writing this speech

Over the last few months, I have spent some time debating what we mean by “cultural well-being”, and its relationship with social, economic and environmental well-being, with friends, family and my staff. I have done an extensive literature search.

This speech is the result of those discussions and lots of reading.

Many of you have heard me speak before, and I have worked with you as you define your cultural and environmental framework of development. I am not repeating that discussion here, but I am drawing on all my previous work on this topic and hoping to move a step forward.

Many of you will have seen the diagram I use, particularly in my book *Creative Solutions and Social Inclusion*,<sup>9</sup> and from the presentations I have made to you on many occasions. That diagram placed economic and social objectives within a nest made of the culture and the environment.

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<sup>9</sup> Eames, PS, *Creative Solutions and Social Inclusion – Culture and the Community* : Arts Access Aotearoa available from Steele Roberts Ltd, Wellington or Arts Access Aotearoa [www.artsaccess.org.nz](http://www.artsaccess.org.nz)

The Local Government Act 2002 enables us to move one step forward and in my thinking for this presentation we can take our understanding and the significance of cultural well-being one step further and see it as possibly the first of the “well-beings” and, therefore, the most important well-being.

My argument will be that if you get the culture right the rest will follow.

It should then be possible to use social, economic and environmental well-being as the measure of cultural well-being for your territorial local authority. You can place culture at the centre and make it the link that holds the four of them together.

Briefly think of parts of the world, where the culture, myths, ideologies and values are totally inflexible – Taleban, Nazi Germany, Apartheid South Africa, Pol Pot: Cambodia – you can think of many more – maybe parts of the USA – where tolerance and understanding, but also respect for difference, are absent and then we can see the importance of open, dynamic, growing, adapting cultures.

In a healthy society cultures work together, takes risks and listen to each other, but they also grow and move. Tolerance and cultural diversity, alongside understanding can be the keys to social, economic and environmental well-being.

The New Zealand Listener of July 10-16 2004 demonstrates, with words and pictures the evolving nature of New Zealand Culture.

Tim Walkins’s article, “Nation far walking<sup>10</sup>” is brilliant – it shows shifts in identity that shape our nation. These shifts are the expressions of changes in our culture and show cultural well-being. Colin Meads, Keisha Castle-Hughes and dog, gumboots, the country – our culture has evolved. Here are symbols of social, economic and environmental change and adaptation.

Now in our new diagram cultural well-being is the thumb-print in the middle.

The complex, individual, original and unique pattern of your thumb-print is your territorial local authority. The atoms are the social, economic and environmental well-being making up your unique thumb-print. Your points of difference, the culture and cultures that make Nelson Nelson, Wellington Wellington, Auckland Auckland and Rotorua Rotorua.

The central premise therefore, and central part of this speech, is Culture and Cultural Well-being. If you get your culture right - the rest will follow.

Later in this speech we will look at measurements and I will suggest that measurement of cultural well-being could be indicated by our social,

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<sup>10</sup> Walkins, T. 2004, Nation far walking. The New Zealand Listener – July 10-16, 2004

economic and environmental well-being, and therefore those factors provide confirmation that we are fulfilling the Act in our unique situations. Remember, "well-being" for all four, means health, happiness and prosperity.

I like the fingerprint as a metaphor for my description of culture. Above all, a finger or thumb-print has a unique pattern - it has its own history, usefulness and interaction with your everyday life, your community and the world. Its complex shape was formed by genetic and other happenings well before it was born. Its surface has ripples which increase its surface area and enhance its sensitive response to its environment. Its distinctiveness means it can identify the owner and has marked the things he or she has touched. Sometimes it is worn smooth by use, or bears scars from injury.

In the same way let us look at the culture of a community with unique physical and social history and yet still responds to the present.

## Communities

Again from the dictionary – "any group living in one place or having common interests" – usage "community of interest" or "can be the general public". These could be your residents or ratepayers, or the voter who will hopefully elect you in the upcoming local government election.

## Present and the future

Interestingly, the Act doesn't say past, but it does ask us to look to the future and to do that alongside the present.

"Everything you do today has an impact on what happens to you in the future." This was what I was told by Rinku, a rickshaw driver in New Delhi. It is equally true of local government. It is part of the purpose of the Act. Your planning today will influence what happens in the future.

Before we go any further there is one thing about culture that is essential to this discussion.

We must understand that culture is not static. Culture has residual, dominant and emerging ideologies and values and these are seen in the rituals and behaviours – these are demonstrated in the New Zealand Listener – July 10 -16 2004 so well by Tim Watkins.

## The dynamic nature of culture

The New Zealand Listener July 10 -16, 2004 – shows that vibrant nature of the last 65 years. Culture and identity changing – developing – growing – and being influenced by internal and external forces.

Hence the following quote helps us to understand “cultural well-being” in the context of local government and, as in the Act, “communities”.

...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 power<sup>11</sup>

## Meaning of the purpose of the Act, when the words are all put together

As we define the meaning of the Act we need also to know what we are hoping to achieve. What makes our society good?! What makes a “fair society”? What do we want to happen for our society generally?

What are we seeking? What should be our performance indicators showing we have a “good, fair, society”? Are they seen through:

Health, lifelong education, economic security, cultural freedom, clean and safe environment, low crime statistics, children, the elderly and people with disabilities supported.

In Social Report 2003<sup>12</sup> Hon Steve Maharey says:

This government’s vision is for an inclusive, prosperous and environmentally sustainable New Zealand.

People in New Zealand want this nation to be a place where all individuals are able to achieve their full potential, where all have the opportunity to participate in a vibrant and growing economy, and where our environment is enjoyed by both current and future generations.

To understand how all of this fits – it is now important to examine the words that hang alongside cultural well-being. In the Act - Social, Economic and Environmental well-being.

## What is social well-being?

First then, lets look at social well-being. The more I thought and read about cultural well-being, the more I realised how closely it is linked to social well-being. If you get the culture right – then the social well-being followed.

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<sup>11</sup> De Cuellar, Javier Perez. Our Creative Diversity – Unesco Publishing 1995. ISBN Unesco 92-3-103423-5

<sup>12</sup> Maharey, S, Hon, The Social Report te puronga oranga tangata 2003: Ministerial Foreword:

I have often been fascinated by the health and happiness of some very poor communities and the unhappiness of some communities that are really wealthy. So what makes social well-being – I don't think it is money or "prosperity".

Here again I went to the Royal Commission on Social Policy – this time to the papers.

According to Peter Davis<sup>13</sup> in his paper, in Volume III of the Royal Commission on Social Policy

Social well-being is distinctive;

...it refers to the satisfaction of social goals and cannot be reduced to any of the standard economic measures of welfare;

...it is 'social' in the sense that it goes beyond the private concerns of individuals to a dimension of public and collective significance;

...it involves assessments not only of individuals but also of groups, institutions and other social forms and processes, including society itself;

.... Health, education, housing, justice, employment and personal social services are key factors of social well-being;

So are these the links I need to define cultural well-being.

## So what now of economic and environmental well-being?

Economic well-being - the science concerned with production and consumption; sufficient to give a good return; of relating to the economy. Economics is the study of the production and distribution of goods, services and wealth.

We know these are measured and often used to define our society. The internet was full of methods to measure economic and environmental well-being.

Economic well-being is determined through statistics, standards of living, family income, poverty ratios and gross national product.

Economic well-being is also dependent on social and cultural well-being – the way we see our economic growth is certainly cultural.

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<sup>13</sup> April 1988 Royal Commission on Social Policy: Volume III part one: Peter Davis: Objective Measures of Social Wellbeing. P347

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Environmental well-being - environment – the surrounding influences; the external conditions affecting the growth, development and well-being of plants, animals and humans; physical surroundings and conditions; computing the overall structure within which a user, computer, or program operates – hence environmental – of an environment or environments.

Measurements would be through the standards of water and air, the safety of our cities and rural area; availability of parks, home environments being supportive for children; sports facilities and access to beaches being safe and engaging, mountains and the bush accessible, also having regard to conservation – preservation and protecting – not being harmful.

Our nuclear free New Zealand is environmental but it is also part of our culture. Our values of sea bed and foreshore are intrinsically environmental and cultural.

### So, now back to the vexed question of cultural well-being

What are the cultural well-being outcomes we are seeking for your communities?

Maybe cultural well-being goals could be:

- a) participation in society;
- b) improved quality of life;
- c) diversity, long life and experiences;
- d) balance for all in intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical well-being;
- e) participation in education
- 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, death and in accordance with people's religion;
- p) freedom to worship whatever god or higher being.

If these are the goals, then how do we measure them?

If we could agree about what is cultural well-being then that would be a start. I would suggest that to do that, you would need to a survey and consult your people in your community. All local government areas are unique and the values, ideologies and histories different.

Once we have conducted this research then we can start to design performance measures to see if we are achieving this purpose of your Act.

Alternatively we could decide to measure the input in the same way we measure economic indicators – the number of events, publications, speeches given and these would include:

- a) books and stories published
- b) exhibitions set up in varied locations for very different groups
- c) festivals held
- d) diversity in meals and restaurants
- e) different languages spoken
- f) children and adults exhibiting their art work and performing their music and theatre
- g) number of arts, sports and leisure clubs and groups
- h) number of incidents of racial violence
- i) number of cultural interactions – diversity in festivals
- j) projects funded for diverse groups with multi-cultural participation
- k) peace and tolerance
- l) languages spoken

These are not the resulting cultural well-being of your territorial local authority, but they would indicate that something is happening.

So let's try again: Cultural well-being measurement could be seen in terms of communication, participation and peace.

The impact of the stories told, festivals run, tolerance shown, knowledge of diversity, creativity shown. Then it would be measured as a "fair and just" society.

If these are to be the measures of success, the resulting territorial local authority would be exciting – maybe this will be the results of "Creative Wellington – Innovation City".

Yet cultural well-being, I would suggest, goes further. It recognises the significance of our unique cultures and communication – everything from the open market to the picnic – the importance of the participation arts and evening and weekend sport.

Interaction, participation and communication should provide us with opportunities to understand and communicate in a positive way.

Hon Judith Tizard often tells a story about one of the inmates in our Auckland West art programme. He learnt to speak with his paint brush, rather than his fists – the result is his ability to live peacefully with his neighbours and to contribute to society, now he is out of prison.

This is not about the professional arts and professional sport – this is about all of us participating in work and leisure – engagement, involvement, tolerance - social, economic and environmental well-being.

Now how do you achieve these outcomes and what makes a “well” society?

## Partnerships

You don't do it yourself. Your Act says you should “promote”. You can do that only in partnership with those in your community who can run the events and set up the communication links, but also with environmental, economic and social planning. You support “creative spaces”, participatory sport and arts, and see as a public good anything that encourages engagement by all.

## The catalyst

What you should do is to act as a catalyst of activity.

Working at arms length, behaving as an agent of change, yet not setting out to change, setting out to enable people to express in the most appropriate form, their ideals, views and values<sup>14</sup>.

You set up partnerships and networks to enable programmes to be established and owned by your citizens. Working with prison groups, street kids, people with psychiatric or intellectual disabilities, refugees and migrants, and encouraging those groups to see positive solutions and express these creatively.

Groups within your community will then find that they have the skills, knowledge and expertise to;

- a) create extra income
- b) communicate areas of misunderstanding
- c) express anger, frustration, and distress
- d) bridge the gaps between their culture and the dominant culture without compromising or diminishing the positive characteristics of their own culture
- e) build communities that celebrate difference
- f) enhance their environment

We could think of lots more....

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<sup>14</sup> Eames, PS. Speech to National Council of Women. July 2000: Whangarei

## Social cohesion

It is my contention that understanding and working on your cultural well-being will enable you to celebrate what is unique about your area. This identification and celebration is sometimes called “your point of difference” - the unique culture of each region that can be enhanced for economic gain.

Whether it is Michael Porter or any of the social economists – you will find that it is your culture that will help you find that point of difference, and then social and economic well-being.

Arts Access Aotearoa has found this through working with communities, particularly those on the margins of your societies. With them, we have enabled them to record their own culture and analyse their own environment. The communities themselves become involved in the process, determining what resources in human capital they have available and then deciding how they can best celebrate and show the rest of society their own diverse cultures.

This is particularly important if we are working with people at the edges of society who are often misunderstood. Those misunderstandings may be exploited by opposition politicians talking about crime, immigration and people on sickness, invalid or unemployment benefits.

Once the cultural analysis process has been completed, then the communities involved can choose the most appropriate rituals to celebrate what is positive about their cultures, their identity, and the values, ideologies and rituals of their cultures. These can then be shared, and slowly understanding can begin.

These rituals may be exhibitions or performances sometimes festivals. They could equally be street parties, dances, musical events, parties, function in your community halls, in the shopping malls, in schools, churches and throughout your region.

## Culture and Development

An understanding of the relationship between the cultural, social, environmental and economic well-being is also important to help us recognise and understand the difference between cultural development and culture and development.

Understanding this difference may be part of defining your culture and with it the creativity and adaptive ability of our society. Some of the specialists who are engaged in cultural mapping have started working with this process.

Culture and development is not about cultural development. Culture will develop because of the dynamics of getting cultural well-being right.

Sometimes cultural development has been interpreted as meaning the development of museums, theatre venues, the performing arts companies and

the art galleries. I don't believe that is the intention of the Act or the way we should interpret it.

This Act is about the "cultural well-being of communities, in the present and for the future".

Culture and development are inextricably linked to social, economic and environmental well-being. Claxton Mervyn stresses that culture, [and for territorial local authorities cultural well-being] plays the crucial role in growth and development<sup>15</sup>.

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'<sup>16</sup>.

We should note that it is the creative spark – added to sustainable development and resources - that is the thing that has enabled humans to develop at all - from well before the invention of the wheel and the adze to the computer and the internet. Original thought comes from culture and is added to imagination and innovation. This is the start. That spark is essential and involves a society taking risks, making mistakes, experimenting and then developing.

## The indigenous people's view

It is interesting to note that in much of the internet discussion of culture we see articles about indigenous people. These discussions note that:

Culture is our identity - not an "add on".

Culture is our identity – not a mirror or exhibition of who we are!

Culture is our identity – not just a way to express or define that identity.

We note our Ministry of Culture and Heritage's statement of intent:

Culture and heritage play an integral part in New Zealanders lives and identity, are a force for social cohesion, social and economic development, and help define our place in the world<sup>17</sup>.

I would take this further, and note that culture and heritage are who we are as a society. By understanding and supporting our myths (heritage), our values, ideologies and rituals we have a force for social cohesion, social and economic development, and an opportunity to celebrate our place in the world with pride.

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<sup>15</sup> Claxton Mervyn: Culture and Development revisited: Culturelink Unesco Special Edition 2000

<sup>16</sup> De Varine, Huues, La Culture des Autres, Paris, Seuil, 1976

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Culture and Heritage 2004 – 2008 Statement of Intent: Page 7.

For local government the defining of your cultural policies should be about who you are.

Remember at the beginning of this presentation:

... 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<sup>18</sup>.

## 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;
- ∅ Measurements are linked 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 cultural well-being should not be seen as an "add on";
- ∅ You should act as a catalyst, behaving as an agent of change, setting out to enable your people to express who they are, in the most appropriate form, with their own ideals, views and values;
- ∅ Remember finally that your role is to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities;

In the present and for the future

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<sup>18</sup> Unesco Stockholm 1998 - ibid

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