



THE FOURTH PILLAR IN THREE COUNTRIES: NEW ZEALAND: *Cultural well-being in New Zealand*

Penny Eames, Managing Director, PSE Consultancy

Tena koutou tena koutou tena koutou katoa, Greetings.

Before I start I wish to acknowledge the first people of this nation, their land, their ancestors and the history of your country, including the pioneers who came to Australia from the four corners of the earth over the last three centuries. I wish to share with you my perceptions about cultural well-being policies in New Zealand, and to place an understanding of 'culture' in the context of economic, social and environmental well-being. This presentation will look at the Local Government Act passed in 2002 and the implications of that Act. It will briefly note New Zealand cultures and make a brief attempt at looking at a method of measuring the outcomes of interventions aimed at enhancing cultural well-being.

Firstly we need a definition. I use the UNESCO definition adopted in the 2001 Declaration on Cultural Diversity¹ 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 beliefs²

In this context we are conscious that Culture is a dynamic force and a crucial part of our makeup that cannot and should not be confined. Although culture and development³ 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 environment⁴". 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 power⁵.

What is equally important is the need to acknowledge and respond in New Zealand and Australia, to the fact that all cultures are different. 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 Australia – and we should and do celebrate those differences, including our relationship with our first people and their values, ideologies and their rituals.

In New Zealand these are now to be celebrated through the processes set up in the Local Government Act 2002⁶. The purpose of local government 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.
- This is an exciting Act. It takes Local Government beyond 'rates, roads and rubbish' and asks territorial local authorities to think about their communities, and the ways to enhance the well-being of their citizens. It has also involved discussion and debate surrounding the meanings of the words and the relationship of the words in the Act and well-being in general.*

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. We have in New Zealand 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 as represented by the major client organisations of the Arts Council of New

Zealand (Creative New Zealand) and possibly the Ministry of Arts Culture and Heritage. 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 their regions and with that the ability to celebrate what makes them special; but also the recognition of the resources in terms of social capital that comes from 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. To understand culture in New Zealand we need to understand our values, our history and our ideologies.

While we are discussing today the Fourth Pillar – I think it is also relevant to place it alongside the other words that link the pillars; the words, well-being and development. The pillars are not alone – Culture is not something isolated. This has been much of the trouble. Culture has been seen as apart – in the muse (Museum) with the academic (Academy), in the theatre, in the Opera House. It has to be seen in the shopping mall, the football field, in the churches or at the barbeque or family rituals associated with birth, 21st birthdays, marriages and funerals. Hopefully this debate will enable us to celebrate the word and measure its importance.

It is now important that in the New Zealand Local Government Act we link the four pillars with the word well-being. The links with well-being are perhaps the most important as they ensure that we consider well-being as: health, happiness and prosperity. Of particular importance to me is happiness. While this is also hard to define, we could note that in Bhutan in the Himalayas there is a Ministry of Happiness – and they are trying to measure ‘gross national happiness’.

This is I would suggest, undervalued in our western style societies and maybe we should try to measure it in the same way as we do for gross national product. This conference is not a time to look at the measurements of economic, social and environmental well-being. There is lots of work being done on that. But there is also work being done on ‘measurements of cultural well-being’ – some of this is significant and exciting.

I have worked hard on this as well and have produced lists to help with the measurements. I will certainly not use today to discuss them, but I do believe this work is significant and can aid the debate. They do include measurements of:

- participation in society
- improved quality of life
- happiness and contentment
- diversity, long life and experiences
- balance for all in intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical well-being
- access for all to resources – venues, sport, arts, religion
- opportunities made available to celebrate one’s own arts
- freedom of speech for all
- everyone able to exercise their right to speak in their own language
- opportunities in place for all to paint, dance, play an instrument, write a poem
- opportunities in place for all to exhibit their art, perform their plays, tell their stories
- histories respected from all viewpoints
- policies in place that recognise different values and aspirations of the community
- respect being shown for values and ideologies
- freedom and opportunities available for the celebration of birth, marriage, and death in accordance with people’s religion
- freedom to worship whatever god or higher being.

Is there a measure of how we work and give freedom to our ethnic or disability cultures? Is this about incidence of violence, of festivals, multicultural festivals and most important, our celebration of indigenous people? Or is it about how we make our towns and villages safe though enhancing our environment using the arts – and our interplay with those art works? Or is it something about trying to achieve an improvement in quality of life, diversity in life and experiences, community participation, balance between intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical well-being?

Is it about giving all people access to resources – venues, sport, arts, religion and opportunities being made available to celebrate one’s own art? Is it about people with disability also having the resources to express themselves, or people in prisons, or setting up the wonderful Creative Spaces where people with intellectual, physical and psychiatric disabilities can express their own cultures.

It is my belief that we must act as a catalyst. We should - always working at arms length, behaving as an agent of change, yet not

controlling or prescribing change - set out to enable people to express in the most appropriate form, their ideals, views and values. 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. This is not to be a speech about the development of the 'third place' - another theme of your centres which celebrate the places people go to be themselves celebrating who they are.

But to culture, and as a conclusion:

Although culture and development⁷ 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'.¹ The creative spark – added to sustainable development and resources. Original thought, imagination and the over-used word, innovation.

Increasingly people are seeing culture in the same way as Maori and North American Indian populations have seen culture. Not as something isolated:

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. Culture is our identity.

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.

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

2. 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).

3. Claxton Mervyn, (2000), *Culture and Development revisited: Culturelink Unesco special edition*

4. De Varine, Huues, (1976), *La Culture des Autres*, Paris, Seuil,

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

6. 2002 Local Government Act: 10 Purpose of Local Government

7. Claxton, Mervyn, (2000), *Culture and Development revisited: Culturelink Unesco special edition*

Penny Eames is a cultural and community consultant working with local government and community groups in New Zealand and internationally on projects that incorporate the arts and cultural well-being in their program. Until November 2004 she was the Executive Director of Arts Access Aotearoa, an organisation she set up in 1995. She has also been Program Manager at the Arts Council of New Zealand (now called Creative New Zealand); Director of the New Zealand Workers' Educational Association; a freelance writer, Justice of the Peace and civil marriage celebrant. She has an extensive publishing record and experience as an international public speaker. Penny is now Managing Director of PSE Consulting, specialists in community and cultural planning.

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