

# CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY COHESION

This Cultural Diversity and Community Cohesion Theme Paper has been prepared as part of the START – Sustaining the Auckland Region Together project. The paper reflects a range of views and does not represent official positions of the organisations involved.

## 1.0 Introduction

This paper presents a summary of the expert group’s discussion about the Cultural Diversity and Community Cohesion dimensions of a sustainable future for the Auckland region. It proposes ‘end state goals’ for Cultural Diversity and Community Cohesion, identifies opportunities and challenges that we will need to meet, and proposes a series of actions that might help to get us closer to the goal. The group did not agree on all issues, but celebrated their diversity of views and the lively and creative debate this produced.

### 1.1 Definitions and Scope of the Theme

Definitions of “culture” and “diversity” are inherently debatable; however, for this paper, the following are used:

**Culture** is made up of the systems and processes by which we make sense of the world - the abilities, norms and behaviours we acquire manifest in a constantly evolving set of values, symbols, rituals and institutions. Culture provides the lens through which we, as individuals and societies see the world, the sets of rules by which we treat others and the critical template through which we organise ourselves as societies and form our distinct identities.

**Cultural diversity** embraces a whole range of cultures and corresponding identities which may be layered within the one individual and community to create distinct perspectives on the world. Although other definitions could include communities of interest such as arts, business and global cultures; the scope of this paper is confined to cultures based on fixed, inherent demographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, age, ability/disability, sexuality); and on religious beliefs, which are both linked to and transcend ethnicities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The definitions of “culture” and “diversity” have been adapted from the “Cultural Systems Foundation Paper” of the Vancouver CitiesPlus Project. The definition of “disability” is from the NZ Disability Strategy which adopts the “social model” of disability; i.e. people have impairments and become “disabled” through barriers created by the rest of society.

**Community cohesion** is: “the processes between people which establish networks, norms, social trust and facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”.<sup>2</sup> .

These definitions embrace Maori as Tangata Whenua, whilst acknowledging that Maori perspectives on this and other themes will also be incorporated through a specific process for engaging Maori in the START Project.

## 1.2 **General themes**

The following general themes underpin this paper:

- Diversity itself is not a value: respect for diversity is
- Respecting diversity is about how we value our differences and connect with each other
- The fundamental and major challenge is to change attitudes towards other cultures
- If we are to gain positive outcomes from Auckland’s increasing diversity, like innovation and creativity, then we must move beyond mere tolerance of difference to acceptance, respect, celebration and incorporation into our thinking, behaviours and institutions
- The language we use is vitally important as it shapes communication and thereby outcomes, for example, “non-Christian” can be perceived by people of other faiths, as a negative definition of their faith
- A sense of identity, belonging and history are essential for individuals and communities to connect and bond together

## 2.0 **End State Goals**

1. *Auckland has a unique global identity created from both the distinctiveness and fusion of its Maori, European, Pacific, Asian and other cultures.*
2. *Auckland is internationally recognised as a place where diversity is respected and celebrated, with a high level of community cohesion and wellbeing, and clear processes at regional and local levels for people to work together creatively to minimise prejudice, discrimination and racism.*
3. *Auckland has regional governance structures and processes of communication and dialogue that strengthen respect for diversity and community cohesion; and allow decision-making at the most local level possible (subsidiarity), so that all cultural and demographic groups can participate and all voices can be heard.*
4. *Auckland is a region that acknowledges its diverse history which is narrated in a mosaic of natural features, cultural events, historic and iconic buildings and public art.*

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Putman and Eva Cox

5. *Auckland has an urban form, physical infrastructure and built environment that promote a sense of belonging and community cohesion through public spaces, safe and attractive neighbourhoods, transport and communications networks that encourage interaction between people and communities, reflect cultural diversity and are accessible to everyone.*
6. *Auckland is a region where all people have hope, believe they can realise their aspirations and reach their full potential; and where opportunities and access to quality employment, housing, health and education services are not based on ethnic or other demographic factors.*
7. *Auckland is internationally recognised as a centre of learning which draws on its diverse cultural histories and traditions and uses new technologies to provide people with opportunities for engagement, learning about each other, creative thinking and innovation*
8. *Auckland is a region where people look after each other, are genuinely hospitable to new migrants, refugees and visitors; and welcome and nurture these connections with other parts of the world.*

### 3.0 Opportunities and Constraints

A number of factors and trends provide a platform for building respect for cultural diversity and strengthening community cohesion. New Zealanders, on the whole, share values about fairness and the concept of equal opportunities for everyone to achieve their aspirations. They place a high value on harmonious race relations and peaceful resolution of differences. These values are underpinned by legislation and institutions (for example, Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi legislation; the Bill of Rights, Human Rights Commission) and support for international conventions. There is a growing, informed public debate on Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi issues, cultural diversity and national identity. Growing acceptance of Treaty settlements indicate New Zealanders are prepared to acknowledge and learn from past mistakes and injustices. There is evidence that there is less sexism and racism than in the past<sup>3</sup> and an increasing awareness of the rights of disabled people. In general, there is at least tolerance - and growing acceptance - of religious diversity and different sexuality. There has always been a high level of intermarriage between ethnic groups. Although there has been some party politicisation of race and immigration issues, there are no significant political parties based on racism and xenophobia.

There are signs that New Zealanders are beginning to celebrate some aspects of cultural diversity. Diversity is flourishing in the arts and creative industries with especially strong representation of Maori and Pacific artists.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see the reports "Human Rights in New Zealand Today" and "Race Relations in 2005" Human Rights Commission

Diversity is also influencing New Zealanders' lifestyles, with increasing numbers attending ethnic/religious festivals and enjoying ethnic restaurants, arts and media.

There is, therefore, some cause for optimism that New Zealand has the potential to become a successful culturally diverse and cohesive society.

Attitudes are the most significant barrier to achieving this. People have to see the benefits of cultural diversity to themselves and the reasons for change. At present, most New Zealanders' appreciation of other cultures is at the more superficial level of "dinner, dance and dress", rather than an appreciation of the more substantive benefits of diversity - innovation, creativity, access to new markets, more influence in the world. There is limited cross-cultural contact at the personal or neighbourhood level. In Auckland this is reinforced by the trend to less socially mixed areas/suburbs because of rising land prices and the pressures on the housing market. In some areas this is leading to ethnic enclaves of lower-cost or social housing; creating "communities of fate" rather than "communities of choice". There is still stigma and discrimination around disability and ethnicity and the marginalisation of people who are visibly different.

The media plays a critical role in how we perceive other cultures. Our television is dominated by global media corporations and overseas content. Coverage of other cultures by our "mainstream" media is inadequate, often stereotypical and unbalanced.

The very low levels of participation and representation of Maori, Pacific and other ethnic minority groups in local and regional governance, is a threat to community cohesion and must be addressed.

## 4.0 Impact of the Forces

Six 'Forces of Change for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' have been identified as part of the START project, and presented in a series of working papers for debate. These forces have been identified as being likely to impact on the Auckland region and its people over the next century. Considering Cultural Diversity and Community Cohesion in light of the Forces, the following potential impacts emerge:

In summary these are:

- Demographically, Auckland will be very different from the rest of New Zealand.
- Auckland's increasing diversity of cultures, identities and worldviews –and the impact of the forces of change–presents both opportunities and threats to community cohesion.
- Advances in biotechnology may increase competition between demographic groups and heighten debate on ethnics and values. New communication technologies have the potential to both strengthen or lessen connectedness, participation and community cohesion.

- To ensure all demographic and cultural groups are able to participate in governance at local and regional levels, new ways of decision-making and forms of participation may have to be developed.

By 2050, Auckland will have 41% of the New Zealand population but will be very different in the mix, numerical balance and age structure of its population. Auckland will be younger, more Asian, more Pacific, less European and possibly less Maori, than the rest of New Zealand. Immigration will continue to be a dominant force. Climate change could result in significantly increased migration to Auckland, especially from Australia and the Pacific Islands. Relatively fast changes in Auckland's demographic and cultural mix could put pressure on community cohesion.

People will identify with multiple ethnicities and, with an increasing mobile and fluid global population, people will also identify and be connected to communities elsewhere. China and India will become economic superpowers and this provides opportunities to maximise the advantages of Auckland's increasing Asian population. Auckland may also be influenced by global trends and events that have a negative impact on respect for diversity such as increased nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and political extremism.

There will be increasing diversity of religious faiths and world views and Christianity may not remain the pre-dominant faith. Increasing longevity and developments in biotechnology like "designer babies"; increased survival of low birth weight babies and seriously disabled accident victims, could have positive or negative impacts on respect for diversity, attitudes to disability, and intergenerational equity. There is likely to be increased debate on bio-ethics and euthanasia, especially as disabled people and older people become numerically stronger and participate more. There could also be cultural shifts in how we relate to the environment and value increasingly scarce resources, drawing on te Ao Maori and values of "kaitiakitanga".

Technology can both connect and divide people and change the way social relations develop. Social interaction and interpersonal skills may decline as people use email and texting to communicate and work more from home. Technology also provides opportunities for more communication and engagement, learning and creative thinking and the possibility of a global civil society - for example, a group of people working in a common cyberspace, or sharing a cultural event online.

These impacts may provide the opportunity to evolve a set of shared values which are critical to cohesion; or shared values may become less possible as we become more diverse. We will need to find new ways of developing common values, identifying our interconnectedness as well as our differences and gaining the skills and competencies to deal effectively with cultural differences.

**The above impacts raise critical issues about governance, participation, power and control over resources in Auckland.**

In the future, it is likely that the important economic and cultural relationships will be region to region, rather than nation to nation. Therefore, decisions on Auckland's future need to take account of the region's large diaspora; particularly the parent communities in the Asia-Pacific region. Government

immigration policies should contribute to regional growth, economic and social development strategies, through integrated planning at a national, regional and local levels; including addressing the likely impacts on existing communities and community cohesion.

The current low levels of participation and representation by Maori, Pacific Peoples and other ethnic minority groups in governance, must be addressed to provide more balance in the distribution of power and prevent increasing disparities, ethnic tensions and negative impacts on community cohesion.

### *Tangata Whenua*

Tangata Whenua are already numerically less strong in Auckland, than in the rest of NZ, although with a growing economic base. With increasing pressure on essential resources and new technologies for extracting resources, there may be increased political tensions around the Treaty and Maori customary rights to and management of resources. This has implications for Auckland's relationship with Maori as Treaty partners and with the rest of New Zealand. We need to engage equally with all iwi/hapu in the region<sup>4</sup> on how they see their role in the sustainable development of the Auckland region.

## **5.0 Actions**

Some fundamental changes in thinking and attitudes are required to achieve the End State Goals identified in Section 2. This means there are no “quick fixes” and the priority should be on educating our children and young people for a culturally diverse society. Catalyst actions - actions that provide a platform for more substantial actions - we need to take now include:

### **5.1 Education System**

Respect for diversity should be a principle underpinning all Auckland's schools, the curriculum and teacher training. This includes programmes on understanding other cultures, identifying shared values, our interconnectedness and differences, and recasting our teaching of history to give a balanced view of the contributions of other cultures. Particular emphasis should be on developing the intercultural skills that enable us to navigate our way through cultural differences - e.g. communication skills and knowledge of cultural values that underpin behaviour<sup>5</sup>. Specific initiatives could include “pairing” schools with different ethnic/socio-economic profiles, using existing and current technology to overcome Auckland's spatial barriers.

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<sup>4</sup> Waikato-Tainui, Te Taou, Ngāti Whatua, Kawerau-a-Maki, Ngai Tai, Ngāti Paoa, Waiohūa and Ngāti Wai.

<sup>5</sup> The Draft New Zealand Curriculum 2006-currently out for consultation- includes a set of values seen as supported by New Zealanders; these include diversity and learning about different kinds of values, how to emphasize with other values and discuss disagreement that arise from different values.

## **5.2 Community Development**

Government and Local Government should support communities to identify and organise their own initiatives to foster and derive benefits from diversity; and create formal and informal opportunities to develop, experience and use skills to deal with cultural diversity. There are many existing activities and events that are strengthening celebration of diversity and strengthening community cohesion. These include major initiatives like the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme,<sup>6</sup> major events like the Pasifika Festival as well as the growing number of local community events and multi-cultural festivals.

In the short term, Government, Local Government and other agencies, should give priority to expanding and promoting these initiatives through funding, capacity-building and other forms of support.

Organised sport provides opportunities to build shared goals and values that transcend ethnic and social differences. Support, including funding, should go to specific programmes in clubs and informal activities that promote diversity through sport, for example, the Halberg SportAccess Trust initiatives to include disabled people, and support to sports favoured by Asian communities.

Government, with other sectors, should explore the idea of a national “institution” or programme that brings young people together for a common purpose.

## **5.3 Communications and Media**

People have to recognise the benefits of cultural diversity to themselves, their communities and New Zealand as a whole. Government, Local Government and other agencies need to develop targeted communication strategies, creatively using new technologies and New Zealand-made films and television documentaries to help achieve this.

The Government should work through public broadcasting and their own communications, to provide balance to the global news media and promote New Zealand’s distinct cultures rather than dominant global cultures. Maori, Pacific and ethnic news events, drama, films, documentaries, music, film etc, should be clearly visible in the “mainstream” media; along with actions to increase the diversity of people working in the “mainstream” media. At the same time, Maori, Pacific and other ethnic media, such as Maori TV, and Triangle TV should be supported by Government.

## **5.4 Governance**

Auckland’s local and regional governance structures should be reviewed on the principles of recognising, respecting and reflecting diversity and the principle of subsidiarity. The aims would be increasing participation, strengthening community cohesion and achieving representation that reflects Auckland’s demographic mix. The immediate focus should be on increasing the participation of Maori, Pacific Peoples, other ethnic minorities and young

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<sup>6</sup> [www.hrc.co/diversity](http://www.hrc.co/diversity)

people, making governance processes accessible and relevant to them. This is more likely to be achieved through local processes for dialogue and decision-making that give all communities choice and a share in decisions which impact on them. These include discussions on Auckland's long-term future; immigration and settlement policies; land use and infrastructure planning.

## **List of References**

The following are references for programmes and initiatives referred to by the Expert Group in the course of their discussions.

Human Rights in New Zealand Today, Race Relations in 2005 - [www.hrc.co.nz](http://www.hrc.co.nz)

New Zealand Diversity Action Programme - [www.hrc.co/diversity](http://www.hrc.co/diversity)

National Interfaith Forum - [www.hrc.co.nz/newsandissues](http://www.hrc.co.nz/newsandissues)

New Zealand Disability Strategy - [www.odi.govt.nz](http://www.odi.govt.nz)

Preparing New Zealand for Asia - [www.asianz.org.nz](http://www.asianz.org.nz)

The Virtues Project - [www.virtuesproject.com](http://www.virtuesproject.com)

Draft New Zealand Curriculum 2006 - [www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz)

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