

As If People and the Earth Mattered

— *some thoughts on community economic development*

by vivian Hutchinson

vivian Hutchinson is a community activist and social entrepreneur who supports projects and activities that have the potential to make a fundamental difference to New Zealand's social, economic and environmental challenges. This paper is based on his workshop at the New Zealand Community Economic Development Conference, held in Waitakere City, Auckland, New Zealand, in February 2010.

1.

It's great that so many people have been able to come to this conference. It is a very timely meeting. So many people have registered for this event that the organisers have had to change venues and add more workshop options. It is certainly encouraging, as we embark into the second decade of this century, that there is a very lively movement of people wanting to have a more robust conversation about community and economics.

It is perhaps not surprising that we want to have this conversation right now. In recent years we have seen two of the most important events of our generation — the global economic collapse of 2008, and the collapse of the climate change talks in Copenhagen in 2009. The failures involved in both of these events will reverberate throughout our communities for many years to come.

Only a few of years ago, it seemed like our worst years of unemployment were behind us. Where I live, in Taranaki, we had only a handful of young people under 20 years old on the official unemployment register. We were celebrating that one the most entrenched problems in our community seemed to be finally coming to an end.

But now unemployment nationally has suddenly jumped back up to 7.3% or 168,000 people ... the highest rate for a decade. And yes, the unemployment rates for young people, and for Maori, are running at double the national levels.

The media tells us we are coming out of the global Recession. But listen to the stories from many of the groups represented here, and you will see that this is not really the case. People and communities are hurting, and many of the leaders and groups that are serving these distressed communities are also hurting ... especially as funding from government and philanthropic sources is cut back, and the local initiatives that have been created to address local problems are frustrated for the lack of resources.

This means we are having to reconsider all sorts of things. And conferences like this are an important opportunity for us to gather and to think together.

The message of this conference is that *community* is a key stakeholder in how we operate our economy.

There are plenty of people here who will eloquently point out how we have forgotten this simple message. *Community* has been forgotten ... amidst the gambling and greed on the world-wide stock exchanges, amidst the collapsing credit systems,

amidst the staggeringly huge bonuses that are still being paid to corporate banking executives, amidst the bail-outs that governments everywhere have deemed necessary to prop up the crumbling systems that are deemed “too big to fail”, amidst the cut-backs to essential social services as we desperately try to balance the books again, and amidst the continuing denial and the distractions that stop us from addressing the effects that our way of life is having on our environment.

I find it curious that so many people have been talking about the economic Recession as if it some sort of weather event ... a thing as natural as the seasons or the tides. But when we think of the Recession in these terms, we are inhibited from really talking about its causes, or addressing the long-term injustices that have been behind its invisible hand.

So, for myself, I’m trying to stop calling it the *Recession*. I want to call this economic downturn what it is — it’s the *Consequences*. What’s happening around us now are the long-term consequences of *not* treating community as a key stakeholder in how we operate our economy.

Community Economic Development is about how we address these consequences.

Community Economic Development is about the fostering of those parts of our economy where the common good of people, and the sustainable health of our earth, are honoured and treated as important stakeholders.

Basically, it is about the practice of economic development ... as if people and the earth mattered.

2.

I want to thank the people of Waitakere for their welcome and their hospitality ... and in particular, thanks to Mayor Bob Harvey for his presentation at dinner last night. His overview of his eighteen years in local government was impressive and inspiring. Bob Harvey is New Zealand’s longest serving City Mayor, and many of his colleagues around the country are going to miss him when he stands down from being Mayor later this year.

You know, Bob is one of the few people I know that can give a speech in which he shamelessly compares himself to an early Peter Jackson, Barack Obama, and Superman, and recommend himself for the Nobel Peace Prize ... and yet he still doesn’t come across as a complete embarrassment to everyone in the room.

This is because we all know that Bob doesn’t need to exaggerate. He is a genuine giant in the world of local government and the transformation of Waitakere that has happened during his tenure is something that speaks for itself. The successful preservation of the Waitakere Ranges, and the example shown by the Twin Streams environmental restoration and community development projects ... these are legacies that will live on for generations to come. It is not an exaggeration to say that under Bob’s stewardship, Waitakere has already become a “Super City”.

I’ve worked with Bob Harvey when the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs was set up ten years ago. Bob was a part of the core group of Taskforce Mayors, and he would get the

team out on retreat in the Waitakere Ranges to discuss what they could all do to put every young person in New Zealand into work.

I learned then, that beneath the flamboyance and the “cheering on” of his local success stories ... Bob Harvey is a man of genuine humility. Bob shows a real humility before the earth of this place. His love for Waitakere — its beaches and surf, its bush and grand trees, its water and rivers — these are the generative source of his leadership and his governance.

And another reason why Bob is a role model for Mayors, is that he is genuinely humble before the people of the earth. Over these eighteen years, Bob has played an important role in re-weaving the *tangata whenua* of this region into their rightful place in civic affairs.

It's taken 170 years for my own people to learn, or perhaps remember, how to bring humility to the table when dealing to the legacy of historical grievances that exist between Maori and the Crown. As Bob has pointed out, this is something we particularly remember this week, as the tribes of Auckland finally sit down to sign the settlements in their claims before the Waitangi Tribunal.

3.

Mayor Bob spoke last night of the two major trends in politics that he had seen emerge in the last twenty years. The first was *environmentalism*, and he spoke of how he quickly embraced this movement, and campaigned on a vision that Waitakere would become a role model as an Eco-City.

The second trend he named was *terrorism* ... and while he didn't say too much about this, I'd like to offer a different point of view.

We have many international speakers here at this conference, and I don't want to diminish the real threats and fears that people feel around the world ... but I do think that politicians and the media make far too much of terrorism. In the context of this conference of Community Economic Development, I think it is important to recognise that there is another significant trend happening. We just don't get to hear its story so readily.

Four years ago, Paul Hawken published a book called *Blessed Unrest*, which is sub-titled “... *How the Largest Movement in the World Has Come Into Being ... and Why No-One Saw It Coming*”. Paul Hawken is talking about the tens of millions of ordinary and not-so-ordinary people who are creating or getting involved with projects and organisations that are making a positive difference. These people and groups are addressing environmental issues, or they are confronting power in the face of social injustice, or they are involved in community and economic development initiatives, or leading a revival in indigenous cultures.

Hawken describes the emergence of all these groups as being like the white blood cells in the collective body of humanity. They represent humanity's immune response to political corruption, economic disease and environmental degradation. So many of these groups are under the radar of popular culture. Hawken argues that, when you put all this activity together, they actually represent the biggest social movement in history.

Hawken researched previous social movements to see if there was anything equal in scale and scope, but he couldn't find anything.

These groups are dispersed, and are hugely diverse. They are splintered and wonderfully disorganized. There's no identifiable leader, and there's no consensus on an ideology. It's a movement that doesn't even really know that it is a movement. But we are here ... and there are hundreds and thousands of us, and we are starting to recognise this and starting to link up with one another.

The point here is that, over the last twenty years, our world has seen the emergence of far more social entrepreneurs than terrorists. It's just that we are not telling these stories.

We have already heard at this conference the views of government departments and other funders who are telling us that there are *far too many* community groups being created. This is described as if it is a bad thing. They are telling us that there is too much competition for resources, and we'll all have to learn to combine our efforts and collaborate and become much more efficient and manage things better.

This may be true ... but I think its still early days yet for us to really see and judge what is emerging here.

The complaints of "far too many groups" reminds me of the early days when jazz music started to emerge in America in the early 1900s. The music critics of the time complained that jazz just seemed to have "... *far too many notes.*"

So just step back for a while, and listen to the music. You may notice that the sounds and stories of the people and projects that are featured at this conference are so seldom told in our mainstream popular culture.

When did you last see a movie starring George Clooney as an activist property developer creating more affordable homes for people? Or Leonardo DiCaprio creating a group apprenticeship scheme which addresses the shortage of trade skills? Or Angelina Jolie as a Mayor fighting for a decent harbour entrance that could lead to hundreds of jobs based on aquaculture?

4.

John Forbes is no Angelina Jolie ... but he is that Mayor. He leads the Opotiki District Council, which serves one of the poorest local authorities in New Zealand. He is a passionate advocate for the Community Economic Development of the area. We have already heard from him about plans for a 3,800 hectare mussel farm off the coast from Opotiki, and all the gumboot jobs that would come from processing the harvests from the sea.

John remarked to me yesterday that he was impressed at the diversity of the people who had turned up to this conference, and the workshops being offered. He asked: Have I been missing something? Where have all you guys been meeting all this time?

Well, the fact is that we haven't had a meeting like this in Community Economic Development for nearly ten years. So hats-off to Lindsay Jeffs and Di Jennings for taking the initiative and bringing us all together. Let's hope that we can find the right

formula and support that will ensure that these gatherings become a more regular event on all our calendars.

Actually ... I'm not an old man, but I am feeling a little bit like a revived old fossil here. Like many of the participants at this gathering, I have been involved in all sorts of Community Economic Development initiatives since the 1970s.

I started off in the mid-1970s as an activist on Maori land rights. I didn't believe that we were going to fully address the poverty and social justice issues within Maori communities unless we stopped the continuing alienation of the land which was their main economic asset. Our nation also needed to address the underlying historical grievances. That's why events like the settlements being signed off here in Auckland this week are so important. It's taken a generation for us all to bring these grievances to a resolution. And the Waitangi settlements are creating a renewed economic asset base for Maori — an asset base from which they are pursuing their own brand of Community Economic Development.

It was also in the 1970s, when I joined with the Salvation Army in its efforts to address the emerging issue of unemployment. We set up the first public-funded work schemes that this country had seen for a generation. We also fought to make skills training an option which the government should support for jobless people.

Ten years later I went on to help create the Taranaki Work Trust which was home to many innovations such as the *Skills of Enterprise* business courses for unemployed people, and the establishment of community-based Enterprise Centres and New Venture Incubators. By sharing and learning from similar initiatives around the country, we felt we were part of a Community Economic Development movement that was helping hundreds of people create jobs for themselves.

I was one of a group of community activists that convinced the Labour government of the time to set up the Community Employment Development Unit. This later became the Community Employment Group, or CEG, and it was an important source of funding and support for local economic development initiatives throughout the country.

I went on to create *The Jobs Letter*, and was its managing editor for twelve years. This was a community-based media initiative which was published every 2-3 weeks, and was read by a huge range of people involved in employment, education, and economic development initiatives. *The Jobs Letter* was a device for keeping people up-to-date with what is happening in these fields, and spreading the ideas and innovations on what it was possible to achieve. All this work has been archived on a website ... and even though we stopped producing *The Jobs Letter* back in 2006, we still get tens of thousands of hits on that website every month.

In 2000, I worked with Christchurch Mayor Garry Moore to initiate the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs. This was an innovation in local government, because until that time the Mayors had no such national forum where they came together independently and collaborate on a social issue. It proved to be timely, and 96 percent of all Mayors (from across the political spectrum) surprised everybody by turning up and getting involved. The Mayors set a cultural goal for our country — *that all young people under 25 years will be in paid work, in training or education, or in useful activities in our communities.*

Five years ago, I worked with Stephen Tindall, and Trevor Gray from the Tindall Foundation, to establish the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship. This a peer learning community of fifteen social entrepreneurs from around the country. These people have been working in a wide spectrum of issues from affordable housing, to disability issues, prison reform, running mentoring schemes in schools, alternative education and training schemes for young unemployed, addressing problem gambling and family violence issues ... and much more. We've been meeting up every six months to critique and support one another's work. Several of the members of the Fellowship are also giving workshop sessions at this conference ... and I'll also talk more about this work soon.

5.

Perhaps one of the reasons why there haven't been a regular series of meetings like this over the last decade, is that not all our stories have been easy to share, and sometimes not even pleasant to listen to.

It is much more comfortable to have meetings which only tell the "good news" stories about our work ... those pull-ourselves-up-by-the-bootstraps, self-help tales that everyone likes to hear. But these stories are only one face of our shared endeavours.

Sue Bradford has been one of the real heroes of Community Economic Development in New Zealand. She is no longer a Parliamentarian, but she continues to be one of the most hard-working active citizens that I know. The Green Party has been the only party in Parliament that has had a dedicated spokesperson on Community Economic Development ... and Sue was almost a lone voice in the House over the last ten years as she has advocated for its principles.

Sue's workshop yesterday outlined a very sobering catalogue of the wider history of Community Economic Development initiatives here in New Zealand. Not all the stories were good news. I cringed at some of them ... remembering my own participation in several of the more disastrous initiatives that she described.

But the stories also made me realise: We have had so few authentic places where we have been able to talk about this. There haven't been that many safe public gatherings in recent years where we can share what we have learned from our mistakes.

And there has been too few places where we could also share the grief that has also come with this work ... those times when our hopes have collapsed, when initiatives have been betrayed, and when creative and innovative schemes have been closed down, and when much-loved colleagues have just disappeared into despair.

In the 1980s we had a series of meetings on community economic initiatives that in the North Island were called *Jobs Gatherings*, and in the South Island they were known as *Te Mahi Tangata*. At many of these gatherings there was a session held called "*Great Mistakes I have Made*".

We all sat around trying to top each other with stories of the more spectacular cock-ups we had made over the previous year. We laughed until it hurt and there were tears of embarrassment and relief. It was very therapeutic to remember that despite our obvious mistakenness, we were all trying to work for a common good here. And the

stories of the cock-ups were just as useful as the “good news” stories and the “break-through innovations” that we had also come to share.

Of course, all this was before 1990 and the introduction by government of a much more competitive contracting environment in the community sector — an environment in which we quickly lost that sense of shared purpose which could include not only our success stories, but also the lessons from our failures.

6.

I have been starting to look with a much more critical eye at my own back-catalogue of stories and schemes. Actually, I think I have become more self-critical. In terms of the Community Economic Development work, I have been beginning to wonder whether I have been participating in a problem.

I think many of us at this conference have had our focus on the unemployed and the economic challenges of our most distressed communities ... and it is from this base, and from our self-help projects and local ingenuity that we have been trying to build a Community Economic Development movement from the ground-up.

I am now starting to think that this has been part of the problem, and it is a major reason why our efforts have been so marginalised by the rest of society.

While we have been focused trying to build a movement on the backs of the unemployed and our most disadvantaged communities ... the interests of the common good, and the voices for the sustainable restoration of the earth, have continued to be stripped from so many other areas of our shared political and economic life.

Of course that’s a far too simplistic way of saying all that. I’m not trying to disparage my own or anyone else’s work here. And I don’t want to seem all nostalgic for an imaginary world before Rogernomics and SOEs, and the privatisation of community assets ... because I’m not.

My over-simplistic conclusion here is that the Community Economic Development movement has essentially been sidelined into being some sort of extension of social services for the poor and the unemployed ... while “the main game” has remained essentially unchallenged.

I was challenged to think differently about this when I heard a speech given several years ago by Tim Smit, the social entrepreneur and founder and creative force behind the Eden Project in Cornwall, England. Tim Smit was speaking to the UK Social Enterprise Conference, and he challenged the participants to think well beyond their existing contracts for social services and the other silos that they have found ourselves operating within.

Water. Power. Rail. Housing. Health. Education ... even Financial Services. Tim Smit reminded us that there was a time — in living memory — when we used to consider all these things as community and social enterprises. We tried to run and govern them in such a way that they included the voice for a common good, and a sense of sustainability for future generations.

We are not going to fully address the consequences of the economic mismanagement of the last 20-30 years ... until we constructively restore the voice of community and sustainability into each of these areas.

Can you imagine ... that in ten years time we might be meeting here in Waitakere at another Community Economic Development conference, and this conference will be even more bursting at the seams. This would be because the head of Telecom will be here, and the head of New Zealand Post and of all the different privatised Energy Companies. And while we're at it, there'll be the managers of all the big retail chains and shopping malls, and the leaders of Maori tribal enterprises, and of Federated Farmers ... they'll be sitting alongside the heads of the main government departments, and the Governor of the Reserve Bank, and almost every Mayor in the country.

They'll be here because they will have remembered that they are also essentially running *social* enterprises ... and they will definitely consider themselves to be in the business of Community Economic Development.

And, if all this happens ... one of the big questions will be: Are you ready to move over and let them in the room?

The worst thing that could happen to the Community Economic Development movement right now is for it to become some sort of “network of virtue” that sits in its own sense of “rightness”, and publishes its own preferred platform of solutions.

No, this is a time for us all get around the table. It's time for a more open conversation about the many ways we have all contributed to the problems. It's a time for us to learn the skills of dialogue that can reach across our silos of difference — listen to the solutions that all sectors are endeavoring to come up with — and try to find the social and economic common ground that can take all our efforts forward.

7.

We need to bring humility to our own metaphors.

The world-wide economic collapse is a good time to reflect on how, over the last generation, the “business” world-view has so thoroughly colonized the social service and not-for-profit sector. There have been a great many benefits that have come from the “business” world-view ... like important ways of managing efficiencies and management processes, and ways of measuring the things that we say we are trying to achieve.

But the “business” world-view has also brought it's own inadequacies. “Business” has proven to be an inadequate metaphor to describe the complexities of everything we value in our communities.

But, then ... I am learning that most of our metaphors are proving inadequate at this time.

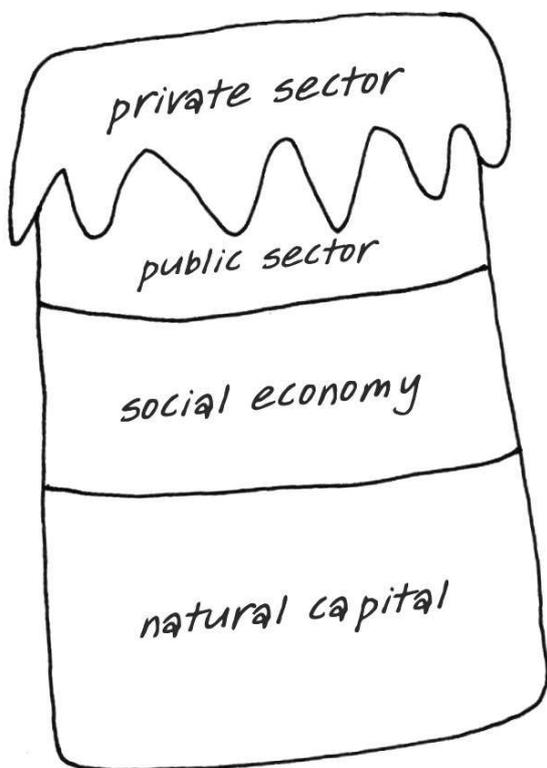
The metaphor of heroic community self-help initiatives is inadequate when trying to address the systemic level of changes that are needed on most of our complex problems.

And similarly, the political and policy metaphors that frame everything up in terms of “Left” and “Right” thinking ... they are just not complex enough to cope with the truths that can be found in both these political world-views.

In 1990, we had a gathering in Christchurch of Community Economic Development practitioners from all over the Commonwealth. One of the speakers we invited to New Zealand at that time was the economist Hazel Henderson.

This tall and elegant global citizen gave a powerful speech which deconstructed the prevailing metaphors of modern economics. She brought her own picnic-basket of metaphors, which offered an alternative view.

She went to a whiteboard and drew a picture of a three-layered cake with icing on top. This homely illustration seemed perfectly appropriate as she had just finished explaining to us that the root derivation of the word “economics” came from earlier words that meant “the management of the household”.



Hazel’s cake looked like this:

— The bottom layer of the cake was “Mother Nature”, our natural capital and the resource base from which all our economics rests upon.

— The next layer up was the “Social Economy”, all the community and family structures that support households and parenting, all the do-it-yourself, and volunteering, and bartering and sharing, and caring for the old and sick and people at the margins.

— The next layer up is the “Public Sector”, which provides all the infrastructure of state and local government, the roads, the bridges, the sewerage, the schools, the police and defence.

— The top of the cake ... actually, the icing on the cake ... is the “Private Sector”, the official market economy of production and consumption, of employment and investment and savings.

The point that Hazel Henderson was making was that the health of our official market economy rests upon the health of the deeper layers in this cake. The trouble is, we have been taking these deeper layers for granted ... and, until recently, we hardly ever counted what is going on down there.

But we are learning now: any discussion of economic development is inextricably related to questions of public infrastructure, community development, and the sustainable health of our natural resources.

8.

I have been listed on the programme today as speaking to the subject of : “*Putting social enterprise and community economic development on the map*”.

As I was preparing for this workshop, I recognised that most of the social entrepreneurs I know don't really want to be *on the map*. They would say that they are in the business of discovering and creating new maps. Social entrepreneurs are distrustful of the current mainstream maps because they haven't really shown us the way to the solutions we are all seeking.

And if you look at the current maps, you see that the health and care of community and natural resources are not considered to be part of “the main game”. Our work and enterprises are forced to live on the margins. We are so much on the margins that when the Prime Minister called a Jobs Summit last year ... he only invited a token representation of people from the community economic sector.

Perhaps we need to take a leaf from Bob Harvey's book ... and be much more shameless at our own self-promotion, and our “cheering on” of each other's projects.

No wonder the community sector is on the margins. We've got such a low self-esteem that we put up with being called the “Third Sector” ... a term which one speaker here described as being satisfied at “...*coming Second Place at Losing.*”

We've got such low self-esteem that we centrally define ourselves in terms of what we *are not*. We are called the *Not-for-Profit* sector. Or we say we are representing an *Non-Governmental Organisation* or NGO. You can see how derogatory this is if you can imagine going to your next funding negotiation at a government department, and you refer to everyone there as being from an NCO, or a Non-Community Organisation.

Nevertheless ... the point here is that a social entrepreneur is not the sort of person that will be content to remain where they have been placed *on the map*. They will want to change that map.

A social entrepreneur is about bringing *innovations* to address our most stuck social, economic and environmental problems. And these innovations are disruptive.

One of the shadier aspects of the Community Economic Development movement is the knowledge that there is a lot of money that can be made from *organising* our social and environmental problems ... as long as you don't disrupt “the main game” from continuing to take place.

But a social entrepreneur is disruptive to the status quo. They are not in the business of *organising* the problems, or making a living from them. They are in the business of *healing* the problems. They want to permanently alter the perceptions, behaviours and structures that are creating the problems in the first place.

9.

The Social Entrepreneur Fellowship has been a collective of fifteen community leaders who are working at this disruptive edge. The stories of the Fellowship are diverse ... but they are also similar. Each member is in some way exploring innovations which just may well create a fundamental difference in their field.

Nuku Rapana from the Pukapuka community, Robin Allison from the Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood and Emeline Afeaki-Mafile'o from South Auckland's Affirming Works are also here ... and we'll hear from them later. I don't have the time here to go into all of the other stories, but here's a glimpse at a few :

— John Stansfield spoke yesterday about the difference between *organising* and *healing* problems in the context of addressing the issue of Problem Gambling. When he took over as CEO of the Problem Gambling Foundation, most of the emphasis of the work of this organisation was on therapeutic caring for the individual addicted person. But when John looked into the figures of problem gambling and watched the more recent trends in this field, he could see that our communities were being particularly burdened by one unsafe product — the pokie machine. So he started campaigning to raise awareness of the impact that this machine was having ... and how the gambling industry had to clean up its act.

— Brian Donnelly is another member of the Fellowship. He heads up the Housing Foundation, and he is very much aware that New Zealand has one of the least affordable housing markets in the world. Home ownership is a key component of family and community security ... and yet, over the last decade, owning a home has got further out-of-the-reach of low-income New Zealanders. Brian and the Housing Foundation have been trying to address this by not only building new housing development (like the suburban development they are creating here in West Auckland) ... but by pioneering a range of shared-equity financial arrangements which enable low-income families to start on a pathway of home ownership.

— Viv Maidaborn heads up CCS Disability Action, one of our oldest and most effective community development organisations. CCS has not just been content to run social services. Viv has led the creation of a community enterprise called *Lifetime Design* which has a set of design standards called the *Lifemark*. This project aims to have a systemic impact on the design of every New Zealand home so that they can be more accessible and adaptable for people of every age, stage and ability.

— Kim Workman has helped bring many innovations into the New Zealand prison system. He helped establish the kaupapa Maori prison units and he also established the first Christian faith-based prison unit at Rimutaka. He has taken a lead in creating a whole range of restorative justice programmes. But Kim Workman isn't stopping there. He has embarked on a national strategy to try and get all of us to rethink the prevailing attitudes that exist on crime and punishment.

— Stephanie McIntyre is the Director of the Downtown Community Mission in Wellington and she works with some of our community's most vulnerable citizens ... people with long-term alcohol dependence and who are often sleeping rough on the streets. But Stephanie is not just content to run a foodbank and an overnight homeless shelter. She believes that these are the people who most need a stable roof over their heads, regardless of the fact that their lives are incredibly unstable and they certainly won't be passing a sobriety test. So she has forged ahead with a "housing first" policy of care for these people ... which will ultimately see the establishment of a new style of "wet house" sheltered accommodation.

10.

The Social Entrepreneur Fellowship has been going for the last three years. It was an initiative that came out of the philanthropic world, and it has had the generous backing of the Tindall Foundation.

The initiative has been an opportunity for some of the leaders from the philanthropy and grant-making world to learn more about social innovation and entrepreneurship by getting to know some of New Zealand's leading practitioners.

The Fellowship has also been a *peer learning community* of these practitioners ... and that's an important point for these people who often find themselves as solitary leaders in their own fields. It's a community of practice. The members have been using their time in the Fellowship not just to develop their own skills of social enterprise ... but they have also been giving each other support and feedback on their different projects.

It's a very diverse group ... and this diversity has been one of the real assets of the Fellowship. One of the intentions here is to create a way of meeting that will force everyone to think outside of "the silos" that most of us still operate within.

I think that one of the things we have reaffirmed in this initiative is the importance of having learning communities like this. They are important because social entrepreneurs are *action-learners*. They are in the business of *creating* the knowledge they need to take their projects forward. Learning communities are a device for getting these people to stand back and reflect for a while so that they can discover what they already know, and then extend that knowledge in ways that they haven't yet imagined.

And yes, learning communities can often also develop into a place of trust where practitioners feel safe enough to share some of their harder stories ... and the lessons they have learned from their mistakes.

In learning communities, conversation is *the work*. In learning communities, conversation is the incubator of innovation. In learning communities, we get to remember that conversation is the way that the world is remade.

11.

I have been involved in several learning communities over the past thirty years, and they each have played a significant role in fostering the innovations I have been able to bring to my work.

In the 1980s I was a member of a group that called itself the Rainbow Catalyst. This was a collection of community activists from around the country who were also working on economic development initiatives.

This group helped to incubate and generate the *Skills of Enterprise* business courses for unemployed people, and helped to set up a network of Employment Resource Centres through which we kept each other in touch with a whole range of innovations that were emerging in this field.

In the 1989 I helped create the Heart Politics gatherings which became another learning community fostering a whole range of activities ... in social justice and peace

issues, environmental sustainability, and personal growth and spiritual fulfillment. One of the early spin-offs from this was the establishment of the Jobs Research Trust, and *The Jobs Letter*.

In the 2000s, we created another group called the Stewardship Learning Community. This group explored *dialogue* processes (in the tradition of Physicist David Bohm) as a way of fostering the literacy and practice of stewardship amongst active citizens, public servants, and community organisations. This work went on to influence the practice of *social innovation dialogue* which has become part of our Social Enterprise Fellowship retreats.

There's actually nothing too special about these particular examples of learning communities. If you interview many of the other community activists that are attending this conference you will hear them describe a huge diversity of learning groups that they have been a part of and have contributed to their work. Some of these groups have also been within our more formal learning institutions ... but more often than not, these groups have been organised informally.

All these groups have served a wider movement for change by creating a space where *action-learners* can reflect for a while, and have the conversations that just might make a practical difference in their work.

12.

It is a strange thing that in a media-saturated consumer culture we find our world is still hungry for the good places where we can have a decent conversation. We are hungry for the sort of dialogue that goes a whole lot deeper, that is not afraid of complexity, and can speak to the heart of our most pressing problems.

We are hungry to get beyond the constant broadcast-mode of talk-back hosts, the columnists and commentators, the “exclusive” interviews and politically managed “talking points” ... and find a place where we can simply speak with and learn from one another.

Learning communities are nothing new to human beings. To gather and to find ways of talking more deeply with one another is probably stitched right into our DNA.

Human beings already know how to talk about extremely complex issues ... in ways that tap into the intelligence of a diverse group of people ... in ways which spark new possibilities ... and in ways which profoundly reveal what each individual needs to do personally.

Yet most of us have been living in a majority culture has had little recent experience of how to tap into this deep inner knowing. We have simply needed to create the spaces where we can remember it.

*... where many people gather
from need or friendship
truth begins to awaken
as eels rise in the dark river.*

— James K. Baxter, *Winter in Jerusalem*

If I had a major recommendation to make from this workshop, it would be this: Go and start your own learning communities. Make a commitment to following up this event by reaching out to other community economic development practitioners in your area ... and invite them to sit down and talk.

Don't wait for permission to do the learning you need to do. Don't wait to be invited into some special fellowship or to gain a place on that amazing course at the university. Just go ahead and start it and invite your community of practice into a deeper learning journey.

Make sure you make that group as diverse as you can possibly handle. Be patient with one another. Give each other s p a c e. Learn to listen well.

You might even get to hear some completely new music.

13.

In times of profound change — like, right now — the future is in the hands of those people who are still in conversation with one another.

We've got some major challenges ahead in this future, and we will need to face them as learners as well as practitioners.

I do hope that a reinvigorated Community Economic Development movement will become distinguished by the quality of its conversations ... and it will be underpinned by a hugely diverse eco-system of learning communities that are keeping these conversations going.

In this future, we will remember that *community* is a fundamental stakeholder in how we operate our economy.

And when this is remembered, we may well learn how to better practice the art of economic development ... as if people and the earth mattered.



vivian Hutchinson
February 2010

Notes and Links

- This paper is based on a workshop and other contributions given by vivian Hutchinson to the Community Economic Development Conference, Auckland 2010, held at Waitakere City, Auckland, New Zealand, on 9-11 February 2010.



- The Community Economic Development Conference website can be found at www.cedconf.org.nz
- *Special thanks* to Lindsay Jeffs, Di Jennings and the volunteers from Community Waitakere.
- This paper can be also downloaded in PDF format from www.scribd.com/people/view/102096-agathis
- vivian Hutchinson QSM is a community activist and social entrepreneur who supports projects and activities that have the potential to make a fundamental difference to New Zealand's social, economic and environmental challenges.

vivian has been one of the pioneers in community-based action for jobs in New Zealand, especially in establishing programmes for the support and education of unemployed people. He was a founder of the Taranaki Work Trust, the *Skills of Enterprise* Business Courses, the Jobs Research Trust, *The Jobs Letter*, the New Zealand Mayors Taskforce for Jobs, and the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship. As an adviser, vivian has helped with the establishment of enterprise and economic development units at a local authority level, and the creation of government employment agencies and programmes. vivian is also a co-founder of the Heart Politics Gatherings, the Stewardship Learning Community, and of ChangeMakers 5-10-5-10. He is a Board member of *Givealittle*. For more information see www.vivianhutchinson.org.nz.

- The New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship is an ongoing learning community which includes
 - *Brian Donnelly* from the NZ Housing Foundation is directly creating affordable housing developments for low-income families, and exploring new financial models for home ownership.
 - *Emeline Afeaki-Mafile'o* has created a Pacific style of mentoring programmes which are being run in many schools in South Auckland.
 - *Gael Surgenor* has led some major social marketing campaigns from within the Ministry of Social Development ... campaigns which are fostering better parenting skills (*SKIP*) and addressing family violence (*Are You OK?*)
 - *John Stansfield* recently headed up the Problem Gambling Foundation, where he led efforts to reframe problem gambling from an addictions issue to a social justice issue. He now leads the Waste Resources Trust on Waiheke Island.
 - *Kim Workman* used to lead the Prison Fellowship, and more recently has set up a national campaign to re-think our attitudes towards crime and punishment.
 - *Major Campbell Roberts* directs \$100 million worth of social service programmes which the Salvation Army runs in New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga. He is also a highly-respected international advocate on social justice issues.
 - *Malcolm Cameron* has created many innovative youth development and training programmes in Dunedin. He started 4Trades, which is a smarter way to run an apprenticeship system.
 - *Ngahau* and *Debbie Davis* have established a whole range of youth training and economic development initiatives in the Northland town of Moerewa.
 - *Nuku Rapana* runs community and economic development initiatives that serve the Pukapuka community in New Zealand. These people are descendants of families who once lived on a small Pacific atoll which is part of the northern Cook Islands.

— *Philip Patston* is a thought leader in the human rights of people who live with disability. He is also a comedian and provocateur who has a unique way of getting people to re-examine their responses to diversity.

— *Robin Allison* led the creation of the Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood in West Auckland, where the houses have been designed for energy efficiency, and the community has been organised to practice ecological and social sustainability.

— *Stephanie McIntyre* runs the Downtown Community Mission in central Wellington where she has been trying to establish “wet house” accommodation for the city’s chronic relapsing alcoholics.

— *Viv Maidaborn*, from CCS Disability Action, has recently established Lifetime Design and the Lifemark, which is an initiative to improve the design of New Zealand homes so that they can work well for people of every age, stage and ability.

- *for more information* of the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship see www.nzsef.org.nz
- *as if people and the earth mattered ...* a phrase borrowed (and extended) from the British Economist E.F. Schumacher who in 1973 published the ground-breaking book “*Small is Beautiful*” which was subtitled “*a study of economics as if people mattered*”. Schumacher’s book went on to directly influence the work of the next generation of thought-leaders in the field of economic development ... people such as Paul Hawken and Hazel Henderson. For more see www.amazon.com/dp/0881791695
- *unemployment statistics ...* from the Department of Labour Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) for December 2009. The national unemployment rate was 7.3% and 168,000 people. Youth unemployment rate was 18.4%, and the ‘Maori only’ unemployment rate was 15.4%. see www.dol.govt.nz/lmr/lmr-HLFS.asp
- *Paul Hawken ...* see “*Blessed Unrest — How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming*” by Paul Hawken (pub Viking 2007) for more information see <http://astore.amazon.com/nzsef-20/detail/0670038520>
- *John Forbes and Opotiki Harbour developments ...* see www.opotikiharbour.co.nz
- *Tim Smit and social enterprises ...* from his speech to the Social Enterprise Coalition Voice 07 conference . See www.guardian.co.uk/video/page/0,,2001916,00.html. Tim Smit’s story of the creation of the Eden Project in Cornwall is a must-read for all social entrepreneurs ... see www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0552149209
- *Hazel Henderson* was speaking at the *Commonwealth Conference for Local Action and Economic Development*, run by COMMACT in Christchurch in July 1990. You can find Hazel’s cake in several of her books, such as “*Beyond Globalisation — Shaping a Sustainable Global Economy*” by Hazel Henderson (Kumarian Press 1990). For more information see www.hazelhenderson.com
- *social innovation dialogue ...* for more see www.vivianhutchinson.org.nz/socialinnovationdialogue
- “*Measuring the Maybe — some thoughts on evaluation and social innovation*” (November 2008) by vivian Hutchinson, can be viewed and downloaded at www.scribd.com/doc/8511057
- “*A Generous Difference — some thoughts on philanthropy and social innovation*” (March 2009) by vivian Hutchinson, can be viewed and downloaded at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/13839690>
- *other speeches and papers by vivian Hutchinson* relating to his work with social entrepreneurship and social innovation, are available on the internet at www.scribd.com/people/view/102096-agathis