

At the Heart: How Culture and Recreation Intersect

Introduction

The theme for this conference is 'At the Heart'. In line with this theme, my proposition to you is that both recreation and culture lie at the heart of communities and nations; their identities; their diversity; and their health. In this sense, this session will be, as it were, 'state of the heart'.

I will be addressing six main issues in this talk, which will also include a facilitated interview with two leading culture and recreation practitioners

How culture and recreation intersect

Culture and Recreation: these two realms are still often regarded as engaged in an edgy, or even dichotomous relationship; as an either/or debate. Sports are the enemy for the precious cultural dollar. And the other way around.

For instance, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (funded by the Ministry for Culture & Heritage), in their latest Statement of Intent, state that "With increasing competition from other entertainment, including sport, marketing costs need to rise".

Yet most recent New Zealand research has suggested that, if anything, an interest in sport and recreation and interest in the arts are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, Creative New Zealand (also funded by the Ministry), wrote in 2000 that advertising and promotion of arts events at sports events should be a promotional option and vice versa - something which happens relatively infrequently in New Zealand.

Culture and recreation do intersect. That will be the main theme of this session, and yet I acknowledge that the either/or approach is pervasive. One example might be these two brochures [hold up] from the Wellington City Council - one of which is on "Arts and Entertainment" and the other on "Recreation, Fitness and Outdoors".

Now I understand totally the practical need to separate out these issues into two distinct brochures, but I wonder if it unconsciously reflects the fairly widespread view that you either do:

- arts and culture (indoor, and you don't sweat that much) OR
- recreation (outside mostly and you are likely to perspire).

The best place to start might be with definitions, although I am of course aware that there is a lot of debate about how to define ‘culture’ and ‘recreation’. In addition, the terms ‘sport’, ‘physical recreation’ and ‘physical activity’ often overlap or are used interchangeably.

In the case of recreation, the enabling legislation for Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC), the Sport and Recreation Act 2002, refers at a number of points to “physical recreation and sport”.

The physicality of an activity is thus stressed. For the purpose of this talk, I am defining recreation – like SPARC itself - as ‘active leisure’, that is, excluding pastimes such as reading books and playing chess.

It is clear that many of the activities my Ministry funds would not be classed as recreation per se but as ‘culture’ or as ‘passive leisure’. This would include the actions of the hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders who annually visit *Te Papa*, or explore *Te Ara*. *The Online Encyclopedia of New Zealand*.

Like the term recreation, ‘culture’ is contested, and undoubtedly means different things to different people. It undoubtedly encompasses art, dance, theatre, performance and festivals. It also includes museums, historic places, heritage trails and the stories of our ancestors.

But it is broader than that, as you will see soon in the definition of ‘cultural well-being’ my Ministry has proposed. It is about how we live our lives, and yes, that includes how we watch and play sport on suburban fields on Saturdays.

Its also about identity, whether individually or collectively. While culture will always have an intrinsic and individualistic element, it is also linked to the creation of community and national identity; how we think about ourselves. I saw this need for identity creation at first hand; in the more than 100,000 people who queued up at Parliament and lined the streets of Wellington to welcome home the Unknown Warrior (and even more for the *Lord of the Rings* premiere).

Cultural Well-being: What is it and how does it include recreation?

Thinking about what might be meant by ‘Cultural well-being’ will explain the breadth of how culture and recreation overlap.

In your conference packs you will find a copy of a brochure that the Ministry for Culture & Heritage has developed on the term; a term which is

included in the Local Government Act 2002 as part of the purpose of local government. Active leisure is very much part of how the Ministry defines cultural well-being – a definition that many councils are using as a starting point for their own definitions.

Myself and my staff have spent a bit of time in the last year going around the country talking about cultural well-being. In doing so, we have often used the example of surf-life saving in talking about the intersection of cultural and other well-beings, and also in thinking about civic engagement and identity. Surf-life saving:

- helps us enjoy a significant part of New Zealand summer culture – the beach;
- its activities and competitions are an significant part of Australasian sporting tradition; and
- its club rooms are often an important focal point in their communities for a range of other cultural activities – especially youth-culture focused activities.

A similar set of arguments could even be made for less strenuous sports such as bowls – does not the famous view of the hundreds of bowlers in front of the historic Rotorua Bathhouses say it all in terms of culture and sports intersecting? It makes a great postcard, whether in the early 1900s or today, but it also exemplifies the breadth and reality of how we live our lives.

Similarly, when we think of the proliferation of events around the country – from Diwali, Matariki, Guy Fawkes, V8 Supercars, Otara Market, Anzac Day and even the old Christmas lights in main streets – all these commemorations are:

- promotions of cultural well-being;
- builders of community values, beliefs and identity; and, crucially,
- linkers of culture and recreation.

Civic engagement and identity

Sport and recreation are engaged in for more than the ostensible reasons of physical activity and health, although these are strong drivers. These activities also exist because of, and within, cultural contexts. For many people, recreation is sport, but the lines are blurred more often that we think and these activities also play an important part in connectedness, identity-building and citizenship.

The links between recreation and culture have important spin offs in terms of the type of citizens they produce. When Michael Sandel, Professor of Government at Harvard University spoke at the Local Government New Zealand conference this year, he noted societal benefits of more active, more engaged and more connected citizens.

Although most New Zealanders take part in what are classed as ‘cultural activities’ - 93% of us according to *A Measure of Culture* - there is a distinction. As well as citizenship impacts, New Zealand leisure data indicates that physically active adults – [ie. those who engage in active leisure = recreation] - are also more likely to participate in *passive* civic activities, such as reading a newspaper or going to the movies or attending museums, compared with those who are largely sedentary.

Thus it seems that there is one group of people which participates in a wide range of leisure activities (both active and passive) – the balance of which affects their citizenship potential - and a far smaller group that has a much more limited range of – mostly sedentary – leisure activities.

The economic and political importance of overlaps between culture and recreation

In cities all over the world – including this harbour capital – we are witnessing a transition from cities of production to cities of consumption, especially of cultural tourism. There is subsequent investment in the infrastructure of convention centres; renovated waterfronts; sports and recreation facilities; and entertainment districts.

This investment can be overplayed, as a pre and post-Hurricane Katrina comparison between Houston and New Orleans reveals. Nevertheless, the amenities that a city or district has (such as parks and waterfront recreation areas) for active and passive leisure do appear to be linked to the rating of that place as desirable or not as a migration destination, over and above the ostensible traditional drivers of employment prospects.

The cultural infrastructure that allows both passive and active leisure to happen are key for communities. People want nice places to have a drink and go to a show, see some paintings and throw a Frisbee round with the kids as well as having the good job package.

On that note, I now want to break my talk by having some practical examples and dialogue from Porirua. This will be in the form of a facilitated interview by Angela Yeoman, Policy Manager in the Ministry’s Policy Group, with Gary Simpson and Darcy Nicholas from Porirua City Council.

[Angela to facilitate next 15 mins]

Thank you, Gary, Darcy and Angela [some ad lib reflections and then segue back to speech].

No Competition: We need culture including recreation

Earlier this year, preliminary findings were released of the benefits of a ‘creative fitness’ regime, which is being ‘tested’ on groups of older people in the US. After a year, those participating in the cultural study group were healthier than those in the control group. They reported better overall health, fewer doctor visits, less use of medications, and fewer falls and hip damage. They also reported less depression, less loneliness and higher morale. Connections with other people reduced the risk of social isolation, a well-known cause of morbidity and mortality.

This is similar to the results of a study published in 1999 in the *British Medical Journal*, also on people over 65, that social and cultural activities, such as book clubs, had the same impact on longevity and general health as physical fitness programmes.

Not that you should give up walking and eating vegetables.

But getting in touch with your inner Bic Runga or Margaret Mahy may offer some special advantages.

A creative programme engages the brain as well as the body. The links between cultural and recreational activities - the *balance* between passive and active leisure seems to matter. After all, even Anton Oliver and Daniel Carter are widely reported as enjoying the visual arts as well as the ‘brutal ballet’ of rugby.

Culture and recreation need not have a dichotomous relationship – they are inextricably linked. In any case, changing social patterns and norms are changing and blurring the distinctions between passive and active leisure, such as in new activities such as leisure shopping (‘going to the mall’), café culture (‘having brunch on weekend mornings’) or the rise and fall of sports (such as the rise of touch, snowboarding and ‘parkour’ (urban freeflow running), and the decline of jazzercise).

Many of these activities are also linked to use of the Internet. Digital developments are also the way of the future in broadcasting and information transfer. My Ministry is embarking on the establishment of a New Zealand *Cultural Portal*. This will be a web-based portal for the cultural sector, and

will include an events-based website with searchable information on cultural events of national, regional and local interest including sport and recreation activities. It will – virtually – link culture and recreation and show the intersections of passive and active leisure.

Integrating the four well-beings

In this final section of my presentation I want to talk about the integration of the four well-beings – economic, environmental, social and cultural – as a way of balancing and linking culture and recreation.

At the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, we have a view that it is at the intersection of the well-beings where councils are likely to find the greatest possibilities for innovation and efficiency. Cultural tourism, such as the forthcoming Southern Odyssey Cultural Tourism Trail in northern Southland is an obvious example. In the case of Southland, this project will impact on all four well-beings in terms of having economic benefits (through being an attraction for short-stay and longer-stay visitors), as well as environmental and social benefits through the promotion and care of cultural and environmental assets.

Another example is in the use of cultural/recreational activities as one means of dealing with a range of social and health issues. The provision of youth sports and recreation activities is a ‘cultural’ action, but may meet a ‘social’ outcome. The well-known comment by Youth Court Judge Mick Brown, ‘*A child in sport is a child out of Court*’ exemplifies this approach.

Many of you will be familiar with the use that regional councils in particular make of their regional parks. The Ministry has noted the extensive focusing on history, storytelling and recreational activities in many regional parks. An interesting South Island development is the proposed *Mahinga Kai Cultural Parks* being put forward by Ngai Tahu. On screen is part of a presentation by David O’Connell from Ngai Tahu. This proposal includes symbolic art works co-existing with traditional food-gathering locations and a very strong sense of place. But are the parks then to be regarded by central and local government as cultural or economic or environmental or social in impact? Or are they all four?

One activity though, that possibly underscores the fact that the contribution to well-being is often more sophisticated than simply identifying an activity with one of the well-beings, is the way in which different territorial authorities are interpreting the provision of their public toilets.

(I never thought public toilets could underline a point in a speech before but bear with me...).

Public toilets are often an integral part of recreation plans for tourists, sports participants and citizens, whether engaged in passive or active leisure. In almost all instances, each LTCCP has connected the provision of public toilets with only a single well-being. For example:

- *Environmental well-being* – public toilets identified as contributing to sustainable management of the environment.
- *Social well-being* – public toilets identified as being part and parcel of providing for a civil society.
- *Cultural well-being* – public toilets as providing for cultural well-being by limiting, for example, culturally offensive practices.
- *Economic well-being* – public toilets as an amenity which encourages visitors to shop and spend locally (Superloos etc).

The reality is that the provision of public amenities like this is probably about all of these things, rather than any particular one. As with public toilets, arts, culture, sports and recreation can be ascribed to many well-beings and I look forward to the day that we can move to a more holistic application of policy at the central and local level.

Conclusion

It seems to me that we are seeing in contemporary New Zealand society debates about identity that are bringing together the well-beings, notwithstanding their special individual attributes. And we are seeing arts and culture overlap with sports and recreation more and more.

In particular, I hope I have teased out some observations to spark debate, such as these contentions:

- The cultural infrastructure that allows both passive and active leisure to happen is key for communities.
- More cross-sector research and thinking will break down the idea that an interest in sport and recreation and interest in the arts are mutually exclusive.
- The distinctions between passive and active leisure are blurred given the similar benefits that accrue to both – a balance seems to be the best bet for a healthy and connected lifestyle.

- Recreation and culture overlap and intersect at many points and the experience in Porirua demonstrates this.
- The integration of the four well-beings is optimal for innovation, holistic policy-making, and a good state of ‘community heart’.

We have some time left and it would be great to get some discussion going. In particular, I would ask for examples of how you think about – and apply - the links and overlaps between recreation and culture.

There are two hand-held microphones that are available to speak into.

Thank you, and, in particular, a big thanks to Darcy Nicholas and Gary Simpson for speaking so freely and insightfully from their positions at Porirua City Council – mediated by Angela Yeoman. Note the website on the screen (www.mch.govt.nz/cwb) for ongoing information about cultural well-being, and there are handouts on your way out. Thank you.