SOCIAL INNOVATION IN NEW ZEALAND: CULTURAL VALUES MATTER

Cultural values of Māori, New Zealand's indigenous people, are important catalysts of social innovation in New Zealand. Collective Māori social institutions, interactions and connections form a nested ecosystem, embedded in pan-Māori contexts and a colonial history. They inform Whānau Ora, a public policy social innovation, and can underpin community responses to crises.

*Anne de Bruin / Christine Read*

INTRODUCTION

Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand (NZ), are often framed in deficit discourses of poor health, educational underachievement, high levels of imprisonment and poverty [1]. They comprise a minority population of 15 %, marked by a history of colonisation, primarily by settlers from Britain in the later 19th century, and in contemporary times from diverse sources, contributing to an increasingly multicultural NZ society. Relationships between Māori and settlers are mediated by NZ's foundational document, the Treaty of Waitangi, first signed in 1840, and breached over successive settler generations. Recently, however, Crown (Government) settlements with individual tribes have been a means to redress the economic and social disruptions of Treaty breaches. Growing resources and cultural confidence generated by these settlements form a base for tribal entities to advance wellbeing of their members, economically, socially and culturally, and for the emergence of Māori social innovations. Values embedded in adaptive Māori social institutions, that sustained Māori cultural practices through histories of colonisation, are increasingly providing the basis of social innovation.

We use the Whānau Ora policy, a state response to longstanding, negative outcomes for Māori in economic and social wellbeing, and the response to the Kaikoura Earthquake in the South Island of NZ; to demonstrate that cultural values matter for social innovation.

MĀORI SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

The Māori social institutions of whānau (extended family), hapu (sub-tribe) and iwi (tribe) represent the nested hierarchy of collective relationships [1; 2]. Together with the marae (community space), they constitute the ecosystem that provides the scaffolding of Māori social life.
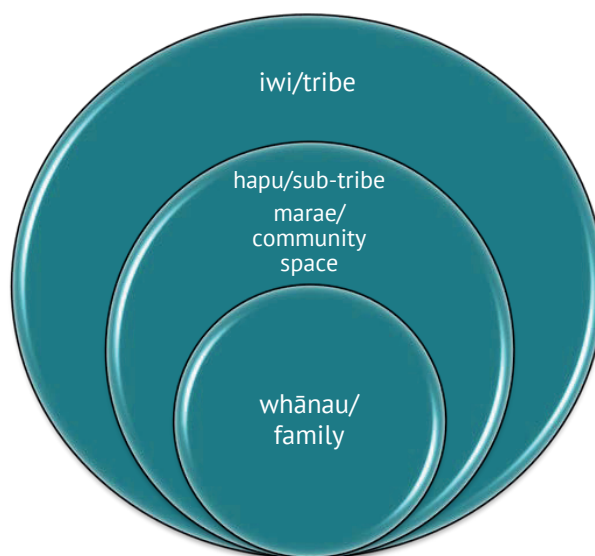
Nested ecosystem of Māori social institutions

Whānau relationships are emotional but also have a spiritual dimension, explicitly acknowledging connections of ancestors as well as the unborn, through the actions and practices of those living everyday life together in the present [2]. Hapu refers to relationships between extended groups of whānau who share not only ties of ancestry, but also economic, social and political interests and responsibilities. The marae is the space for negotiating these shared connections and responsibilities and as such is the site of transmission of culture [2]. It is both a physical entity and a social institution.

It signifies a collective, place-bound connection and cultural identity, which is enacted through cross-generational participation in shared cultural practices. Iwi are the overarching tribal entities that historically have occupied a geographical area, and have responsibility for the sustainable use of its resources. Iwi relationships are based on a shared history and genealogy that inform its economic, political and social responsibilities to the hapu and whānau living within its boundaries.

Traditional Māori values are based on several principles, including manaakitanga (care and hospitality), rangatiratanga (leadership, autonomy, self-determination), whanaungatanga (kinship ties) and kaitiakitanga (guardianship), encapsulated in a Māori worldview – a way of being and acting. This worldview underpins innovative Māori responses to community challenges. Manaakitanga for instance recognises that respect, care, generosity and hospitality, are necessary qualities for the well-lived collective life. Neither based on an expectation of reciprocity, nor contractually based, they serve to provide a sense of security and wellbeing in their everyday enactment.

Whānau Ora Policy [3]

KAIKOURA EARTHQUAKE

In November 2016, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit Kaikoura, a town of around 2080 permanent residents and a popular tourist destination. Damage to transport routes isolated the town. Houses were damaged. Water, electricity and sewerage systems were disrupted. Residents and tourists trapped in Kaikoura were largely dependent on their own resources. The challenge of responding to this crisis was taken up by Kaikoura's marae, Takahanga Marae, with support from its iwi, Ngāi Tahu. The marae promptly opened its doors to those in need, providing food, shelter and comfort to the homeless and stranded. It became a distribution centre for supplies and a liaison centre for emergency services. Local whānau and hapu supported those in need, while the Ngāi Tahu iwi drew on experience from the earlier Christchurch earthquakes to provide additional support. Hapu and iwi acted innovatively in using the resources to hand, drawing on traditional expressions of leadership, hospitality and social connection.

Cultural practices centred on the marae, proved eminently adaptable during crisis. Networks of relationships/connections enabled Takahanga Marae to repurpose in the aftermath of the quake. Facilities and skills in accommodating and feeding large numbers on the marae, were repurposed to support a displaced population. Connections to its local community enabled it to coordinate with local government emergency responses, connect to national government and emergency structures and access skills and resources in the wider Kaikoura community. Connections between the marae and a wider iwi leadership structure, with experience in emergency mobilization of community support in the Christchurch quakes, facilitated a transfer of tribal resources. This ecosystem of Māori social institutions, informed by values of manaakitanga, rangatiratanga and whanaungatanga, supported the marae to confidently and innovatively adapt cultural practices to deal with post-quake crisis circumstances. This process enabled the wider, non-Māori population to perceive traditional Māori practices and values as creating a space of possibility for social innovation.

WHĀNAU ORA

Social innovations based on Māori cultural values, are beginning to address more complex and intransigent problems that have sustained a sense of crisis in Māori economic and social wellbeing. Negative health, education and employment status of many Māori whānau (families) has prompted innovations in social service delivery that encapsulate Māori cultural values. Whānau Ora is one such policy. It focuses on whānau vitality being pivotal for

individual members, collectively and individually, to reach their potential. As the figure on Whānau Ora shows, whānau lies at the core, services are devolved to commissioning agencies who become intermediaries that work with local partners to ensure 'navigators' link with whānau to deliver the customised support and services each whānau needs to achieve wellbeing.

Whānau Ora sits alongside mainstream social services and its navigators assist families find their way through these services when needed. In its focus on whānau as the site of remediation and regeneration, it seeks to impact on the environment in which whānau live. It offers support to build social, cultural, economic and educational resources within the whānau and achieve physical and mental wellbeing. It therefore represents a 'bottom-up' strategy at the whānau level, fostering and supporting better relationships and connections between Māori and state organisations, thereby enhancing the wellbeing and empowerment of Māori in NZ society.

CONCLUSION

Social institutions of Māori life form an adaptive ecosystem of interrelationships, interactions and influence located in both place and history. This ecosystem, underpinned by cultural values, is increasingly an integral facet of social innovation in NZ. Culture matters! It is a source of community resilience in crisis times and has potential to effect transformational social change through policy innovation.

REFERENCES

[1] Henry, Ella (2007): In Kaupapa Maori entrepreneurship. In: Dana Leo-Paul/ Anderson, Robert (Eds.): International handbook of research on indigenous entrepreneurship. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham UK, pp. 536-548.

[2] Durie, Mason (1999): Marae and implications for a modern Māori psychology: Elsdon Best Memorial Medal Address Polynesian Society Annual General Meeting. In: The Journal of the Polynesian Society, 108 (4), pp. 351-366.

[3] Te Puni Kokiri (2017): Whānau Ora. Internet: https://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/ whakamahia/whanau-ora/ [Last accessed 23.03.2017].