

A TALE OF FOUR CITIES – COULD BIGGER BE BETTER?

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ABSTRACT: The area most commonly referred to (even by its inhabitants, who arguably should know better) as 'Auckland City', is in fact four cities – Auckland, North Shore, Waitakere, and Manukau. The explanation(s) for this are not limited to, but certainly include, historical accident and political expediency. The population of 'Greater Auckland', all four constituent cities together, is little more than a million. This is not a large number by world standards, but 'Aucklanders' do occupy an inordinately large area of land, characterised by a remarkably diverse natural and built landscape. A case is made for the amalgamation of these four adjacent cities into one 'Super City', utilising quite powerful and often compelling models that highlight the virtues of economic rationality, integrated environmental management, the efficient provision of infrastructure and services, and exciting opportunities for more comprehensive and coherent approaches to design. The contrary view offers evidence that the economic and other efficiencies propounded by supporters of 'Super City' would be more illusory than real; that any benefits would be far outweighed by loss of identity, reduced access to decision-making processes, increased alienation or 'atomisation' of the individual, and loss or at least weakening of any sense of community. This paper seeks to clarify some of the issues and interests at stake in a decision to amalgamate or not, and records the comments of a number of representatives of groups who would be both involved in and affected by the process and outcome of such a decision – planners, managers, politicians, designers and community groups. The paper endeavours not to resolve or mediate the inevitable conflicts of interests or views that emerge from the enquiry, but will be deemed a success (at least by its author) if the preliminary research serves to refine, explicate, and improve upon the quality of the questions that need be asked (and satisfactorily answered) before such a proposal should proceed.

KEYWORDS: urban sustainability; public administration; amalgamation; integrated management; place; Auckland City; Waitakere City; North Shore City; Manukau City; representation.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is with some trepidation that one begins a discussion that might even hint at the need to reform, restructure, or reorganise at some level the government or governance of New Zealand and its people. The impact of the reforms of New Zealand's economic, political and social structures and norms since 1984 have been all pervasive and profound. There is little in either the public or private domain that has not been altered or changed, often beyond recognition

One apparent outcome of this 15 years of often traumatic change has been observed by the State Services Commissioner, who fears that "...in New Zealand we may have slipped into

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what could be termed a 'restructuring culture' – a culture in which we reach for the restructuring option instinctively, regardless of the nature of the problem we are trying to solve."ⁱ This phenomenon is not new or unique to the latter part of the twentieth century – from the first century comes the lament of Petronius Arbiter, who observed that new situations tend to stimulate reorganisation, 'a wonderful method for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralisation'. Chastened by these warnings, and accepting their message, we ought not however to desist from continual questioning and critique of policies and practices that affect human and non-human wellbeing.

There is particular cause to at least advance an enquiry into the future shape of local government of greater Auckland. Despite its undoubted attractiveness and many natural advantages, and the fact that by world standards the stresses on the city are not great, there still remains considerable cause for concern. Some of the issues are tangible and obvious – the poor state of the transport system, the sub-standard condition of much of the sewerage and drainage infrastructure, especially in the inner city and suburbs where much of the underground services date back to the beginning of the century. Less tangible, but arguably even more serious, is the discovery of an 'Auckland malaise'. A survey carried out by Auckland City Councilⁱⁱ found that Aucklanders appreciate many aspects of their locality – opportunities for education and employment, entertainment facilities, the natural features and landmarks, the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity that is (perhaps belatedly) being seen as an asset rather than a threat. On the negative side is a phenomenon labelled 'infrastructure anxiety', a real fear that the physical underpinnings that make the city viable are inadequate and liable to collapse. Other concerns expressed are that the region's administration is fragmented; there is no 'master plan' for managing development; and an impression that the city lacks a centre, a heart. Many residents feel that their personal safety and that of children and other vulnerable groups is less assured. Undoubtedly many of these concerns are generic, perennial, and have been voiced in every time and place. However the depth of feeling pertaining to the emotional or subjective issues, and the reality of the 'objective' or physical shortcomings, can be denied or ignored only at the peril of surrendering any commitment to sustainability. If people and communities fear for the future, and see no way or mechanism for taking some measure of control to remedy the situation that generates that fear, then the likelihood that much thought or energy will be applied to preserving or protecting ecosystems, or the interests or needs of future generations, becomes increasingly remote. The organisation of local government must bear investigation, in order to reveal any structural or institutional barriers to citizen empowerment and rebuilding a focus on finding solutions rather than a sense of being overwhelmed by and having no power to respond to or resolve problems. In the absence of political will founded on a well informed and positive community mandate, the best efforts of designers, builders and others with commitment and abilities to contribute to building the basis for an improved lived experience both now and into the future are likely to be in vain.

The focus of this conference is responsible management of the built environment, encompassing the need to apply 'sustainability' as one yardstick against which to measure the design, use and maintenance of buildings. The aspirations of those who design, construct and manage buildings is in one sense limited only by their individual and collective ability, wit, and imagination. What they *can* do is constrained in reality by existing legislative and institutional structures that (at least in principle) represent the will of the wider populus. New Zealand's legislation relating to the use of land, air and water, contains at its heart an imperative – 'to promote the sustainable management² of natural and physical resources'ⁱⁱⁱ.

² Sustainable management is defined within the Act as managing the use, development and protection of natural and physical resources in a way, or at a rate, which enables people and communities to provide for their social and economic wellbeing and for their health and safety

The Resource Management Act (RMA) defines natural and physical resources as including 'land, water, air, soil, minerals, and energy, all forms of plants and animals (whether native to New Zealand or introduced) and *all structures*' (emphasis added).

The RMA establishes a hierarchical, three-tier structure, at least nominally reflecting the model of subsidiarity, which requires that decisions should be made as close as possible to the point where both the positive and negative consequences of those decisions will accrue. Responsibility for implementing and fulfilling the purpose of the Act is to a considerable extent devolved to the sub-national level, specifically regional and territorial (i.e. city and district) councils. Central government's primary role is to oversee and monitor the Act, to allocate mineral, energy and coastal resources, and to control hazardous substances. It also has responsibility to set standards relating to air and water quality, and retains the right to 'call in' or remove from lower levels of government the right to make decisions regarding proposals deemed to have 'national significance (though to date this latter power has been exercised only once).

Regional councils have responsibility for soil, water and geothermal resources, and discharge of pollutants. They have a role in coastal management, shared with central government agencies. Territorial councils have responsibility for land use (including sub-divisions), noise control, natural hazards, and local control of hazardous substance use. Existing within territorial authorities is a fourth (and often overlooked) layer of governance, the community boards, who may at the discretion of councils be assigned resource management functions, powers or duties, (and whose wider role will be discussed later in this paper).

Local government then has a significant role to play in pursuing sustainability. The extent to which the organisational and institutional structure of local bodies contributes to or detracts from their ability to 'promote sustainable management' is certainly worthy of attention. This is particularly true of the Auckland region, by far the largest urban concentration in the country, and it is against this background that the most appropriate scale for governance and service provision for Auckland will be discussed. Also pertinent to the discussion is the observation that, to date, the RMA (1991) has proven to be a relatively ineffective instrument in the urban context^{iv}.

2. AUCKLAND

Auckland City is hardly large by world standards, with fewer than 380,000 residents. Even in combination with its adjacent cities – Waitakere (168,000); North Shore (172,000); and Manukau (272,000) – and Rodney, Papakura and Franklin Districts, it scarcely tops one million. This is a significant number however in terms of New Zealand's total population of about 3.7 million. It is predicted that population growth in the Auckland region will account for half of the national growth figure over the next twenty five years. Moreover, Auckland's gross domestic product for the year up to March 1998 accounted for \$33,440million, more than a third of the national GDP of \$98,315million³.

Auckland's cities must bear a fair part of the burden of responsibility for measurements showing that between 1980 and 1996 New Zealanders made few gains in terms of resource use efficiencies, or in reducing their impact on the urban environment, and so on quality of life. Within that time period the country's population increased by 15.5%. Total consumer

while – (a) sustaining the potential of natural and physical resource (excluding minerals) to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations; and (b) safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil and ecosystems; and (c) avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of activities on the environment.

³ Figures derived from Statistics NZ, and the Strategic Development Group, Auckland City Council.

energy use, by contrast, increased by 44%; the area of urban land by 78%; number of dwellings and cars by 28% and 31% respectively; and solid waste disposal (within the Auckland region only) increased by 95%^v

Auckland is ethnically diverse, and becoming more so. In 1996 New Zealand European / Pakeha accounted for some 62% of the total; New Zealand Maori 12%; Pacific Islanders 11%; and 'others' 12%. The latter category includes significant numbers of Indian, Chinese, and other Asian peoples, both New Zealand born and, increasingly, recent immigrants.

The present shape of the local government of Auckland (and indeed of New Zealand generally) is the result of a fundamental and remarkably rapid 'overhaul' and restructuring carried out between 1985 and 1989. The reform of local government were policies in the manifesto of the Labour Government that came to power in 1984. The system then existing was decried by Labour's spokesperson as being an abject failure in terms of community leadership, accessibility, environmental stewardship and accountability^{vi}. It is undeniable that the number and variety of local authorities that had become established over many years was difficult to justify or rationalise. There existed prior to the 1989 reforms no fewer than 711 authorities, from regional councils, cities, boroughs and counties, through to sundry reserve boards, plant and other pest control boards, and catchment and harbour authorities, and multiple others defined by some mixture of place, resource or function. After the reforms this number was reduced by amalgamation, redefinition and redistribution of tasks, and simple disestablishment, to fewer than one hundred. Resistance from local bodies and their constituents was occasionally fierce, especially from a number of boroughs and counties that had in some cases existed since the earliest days of settlement, but for the most part the opposition was short-lived. The government's declared willingness to legislate away any vestigial grounds for legal challenge to the forced amalgamations effectively put paid to the last bastions of resistance. In the case of Auckland, 44 local bodies were collapsed into 11. The model or form of central, regional, and territorial layers was advocated and applied even in advance of finalising the functions of each layer – "...some astutely questioned why the cart of structure was being placed ahead of the horse of function. In the end, the 'riding orders'... were sufficiently garbled as to allow the government free rein to follow its own inclinations"^{vii}

3. THE RATIONALE FOR REFORM

A striking feature of the public sector reforms between 1984 - 1990 (and later) was their consistency. Each new policy initiative built on and supported previous changes. All the major reforms were guided by a similar body of theory and a common analytical framework. New Right principles and policy outcomes are as evident in the new structures, functions, and practices of local government as they are in the centre.

The public sector reform programme has been influenced by public choice theory, agency theory, transaction-cost analysis, and by "...a closely related set of ideas variously referred to as corporate management, the new managerialism, and the managerialist revolution"^{viii}. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a comprehensive appraisal of the theoretical underpinnings and perceived outcomes of these influences, a number of key elements will be highlighted that are relevant to the current shape and (potential) future of local government in general, and Auckland's cities in particular.

Public choice theory rests on the tenet that all human behaviour is dominated by self-interest. While the pursuit of self-interest in the economic market place is generally accepted (by public choice theorists at least) to deliver socially desirable outcomes, it is argued that similar behaviour in the political arena can be expected to deliver the opposite^{ix}. Politicians and political entities (departments, ministries) can be expected to pursue their own ends, which

may or may not coincide with the interests of their constituents. The Treasury, one of the most powerful drivers of the reforms since 1984, have developed from this view a preference for separating out policy advice from policy implementation, to protect against bias and bureaucratic capture. Advisory, regulatory and delivery functions should be undertaken by different agencies, and wherever possible services should be privatised or contracted to the private sector through a process of contestable bidding ^x.

Agency theory and transaction cost analysis share a similar basis in assuming individuals are 'rational utility maximisers'. Accordingly, social and political life can be understood as a series of contracts between agents (e.g. politicians) and principles (e.g. voters). One way of ameliorating the inevitable conflicts of interests between these two parties is by constant performance monitoring - undertaken to ensure that agents are fulfilling the needs of their principals rather than serving their own ends. This monitoring is not without cost, and a point may be reached where the principal asks whether it may be better to rely on his or her own resources, or to seek out an alternative provider. Transaction cost analysis may be one useful tool for assessing the efficiency of structures of governance and other institutional arrangements, especially in the sometimes murky realm of services that are delivered as some mixture of public good and private enterprise.

The reform of environmental and resource law was certainly in harmony with the ideological tune of the overall programme, intended to reduce and internalise transaction costs and reduce government intervention and regulation. The resource management law reform (RMLR) was also championed by environmental and conservation lobbies both within and outside government, albeit for very different reasons. The progeny of this mixed parentage has produced, in some eyes, a progressive and system that balances a range of interests and values^{xi}, - alternatively, the legislation is an 'unstable hybrid' of the inherently contradictory agendas of market liberalism and environmentalism ^{xii}. What is not in dispute is that the implementation and further development of resource management law has been to a considerable extent placed within the ambit of sub-national or local government, with the central government reserving for itself only a few (albeit significant) powers, and rather less responsibility.

Acceptance of the notion that environmental planning should be more appropriately undertaken by local rather than central government came about only with some considerable reluctance in New Zealand, as did the realisation that inadequate institutional arrangements had been a considerable constraint on local government in this respect - constraints such as fragmented and overlapping jurisdiction; inadequate funding and statutory powers; and a lack of political and professional capability^{xiii}.

Central government for many years deliberately denied too powerful a role to local government in order to protect its own vested interest as the largest developer in the country. Local government for its part seemed unable for the most part to rise above 'parish pump' or parochial politics, and demonstrated little enthusiasm or capacity for a broader role. Similarly, local bodies have seldom had more than an incidental role in health, housing, or education, matters that are quite commonly handled at the local or sub-national level in other polities.

Local government has long been recognised as the 'poor relation' of New Zealand politics - the 'four R's' of rates, rubbish, rats and roads' traditionally being the limit of its ambit. Local government politicians have seldom been well rewarded in any material sense for their efforts - New Zealanders display only occasional qualms about paying MPs quite handsome salaries (usually prompted by an individual action of an MP deemed by some sector of the community to be even more than usually foolish or venal!), but typically begrudge the meeting fees, transport and other expenses that are the lot of local body counterparts. The idea of paying

even a quite modest salary to councillors (other than mayors) has been treated with either outcries of opposition or derision. One outcome of this has been that the typical profile of a local government politician has been white, male, middle age - elderly, conservative, and financially independent (with apologies to the exceptions to the rule...). In a 1992 survey 6% of councillors were less than 35 years old; 84% were 35 - 64; and 10% over 65. The same survey showed that managers, professionals, and farmers were over-represented to the tune of 250%. The usual route to local government has been through school committees, ratepayers, sports and service clubs, and similar entities.

Another perhaps related phenomenon has been that turnout for local body elections has seldom gone close to even 50%, and is often much less, compared with general election turnouts that have traditionally been well above 90%, despite there being no legal obligation to vote. In a survey on the North Shore it was found that 28% of the 500 respondents had written to or phoned the council in a year, mostly for minor administrative or compliance queries; 3% had attended a meeting, and only 1% had made submissions to the district plan^{xiv}.

Party politics as always been relatively rare in NZ local government, unlike other comparable polities. Some (irrational) talk of 'keeping politics out of local government' has indicated a preference for pragmatic, issues based processes, rather than overt or formalised ideological divisions. In practice, however, there has also been some evidence of coincidence of views between non-party local tickets and national parties. The Citizens and Ratepayers Association whose adherents dominated Auckland local bodies for many years (and in some areas still do) have been perhaps unkindly referred to as the National Party in mufti. The Labour Party has some history of party tickets contesting in the major cities, but it is debatable whether the effect was positive or negative – the Party on occasion claimed the moral high ground for not hiding under some allegedly 'non-partisan' umbrella group. More recently the Alliance has campaigned overtly on party lines, and with some success. In the most recent (1998) elections a combined Labour – Alliance ticket (City Vision) won a plurality, though not a majority, on the Auckland City Council.

4.REPRESENTATION

'Aucklanders' elect their local body representatives on the basis of wards that exist within each city boundary. Auckland City has seven wards, reduced from ten prior to the last election. The wards are established, in theory, to reflect communities of interest, but in practice the ward boundaries owe more to geography than demographics or socio-economic or other criteria. Each ward elects a number of councillors according to its population – the largest, Penrose, allows its 79,000 voters four councillors. The ratio of electors to councillors is in the order of 15,000 – 20,000 to one. This basic pattern is replicated in the other cities, although with variations of size and scale.

While councils set policy directions and guides, within the limits of the legislation, and exercise regulatory powers in respect of environmental management, buildings, infrastructure and so on, provision of services is conducted at arms length from the political process. The ideological context of the reforms is manifest in the creation of Local Authority Trading Enterprises (LATES) and wholly owned companies, that are still largely within public ownership but operate on a 'business' or corporatised model. Much of the work formerly done by council employees operating council-owned vehicles, tools and plant is now contracted out to private companies. There is still considerable pressure from business interests and from the right of the political spectrum to further divest public assets – water, roads, sewerage, etc., - into the private sector, on the basis that this would be inherently more 'efficient' and would provide windfall profits that might be reinvested in updated and renewing amenities. Opponents of privatisation point to the sale of telecommunications and energy services formerly provided by central government, which have so far failed to deliver on the promise of reducing national debt levels and encouraging competitive pricing and

service provision with attendant benefits to the public. An attempt to privatise the Ports of Auckland was prevented by significant public opposition in the early 1990s. The Auckland Regional Services Trust (ARST), was an entity established to manage the assets and debt burden of the Auckland Regional Authority (ARA) when that body was transformed into the Auckland Regional Council. Along with the change of name, the regional body was required to divest itself of services and ownership, to take up its new policy and regulatory functions. The Trust was expected to sell the inherited assets in order to repay the considerable debt the old ARA had managed to acquire. In the event, the ARST successfully traded out of debt, retained the bulk of the assets in public ownership (to the extent that it was allowed to by central government, which legislated to force the sale of the regional bus company) and continues to accumulate considerable cash reserves. This example has provided a powerful argument for the continued public ownership of assets.

The 'lowest' (and so arguably most crucial to representation) level of local government are the community boards, created at the time of the amalgamation so that the areas of some of the smaller authorities became communities with community boards within some of the new districts. Not all territorial authorities have community boards – they are most evident in the more densely populated and diverse urban and suburban areas. Apart from a limited number of functions assigned to them in legislation, the functions of community boards are those delegated to them by their 'parent' council. The legislation allows community boards to consider and report on any matter referred to them by the territorial authority, or that is of interest to the board. This includes road works, water supply, drainage, parks and recreational facilities, and traffic management. The Boards are also empowered to communicate with community organisations or special interest groups. The legislation also allows for almost any function of councils to be delegated to boards. Essentially, boards are intended to be the point of first contact for constituents, and are expected to reflect and report on the concerns of their communities which might otherwise be overlooked by the larger authorities.

A survey of community boards^{xv} highlighted the extent to which the boards were perceived to be successful, or to be satisfied with the relationship they had with their respective councils. Boards that reported satisfactory and positive relationships typically mentioned the following factors:

- The council has a clear policy on delegated functions
- Councils put in place procedures and resources to ensure that formally delegated functions could be delegated in practice
- Council delegated enough powers to the board to make them feel they were carrying out a useful function
- The council carried out genuine consultation, kept boards well informed, gave adequate time for boards to consider and respond to issues, and provided reasons in the event of turning down or amending board recommendations
- Boards were allowed representation on council committees, and treated collegially by councillors and council staff
- Boards allocated adequate discretionary funding to be distributed as grants to community groups

Overall, the number of instances where the relationship was deemed to be successful, or at least improving, was revealed in 1995 to exceed the unsuccessful examples – 63% reported satisfaction, 6% partial satisfaction / dissatisfaction, and 21% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Anecdotal evidence and recent discussions with board members indicates that within the Auckland region at least the satisfaction levels are declining, as some boards complain of being increasingly marginalised, under-resourced, and then accused of ineffectiveness and lack of performance. Issues that are deemed to demoralise and disenfranchise boards include:

- Poor communications between board and council, and a disrespectful or dismissive attitude amongst council staff (often perceived as taking their cues from councillors)
- Lack of information, feedback, consultation, and resources, including basic needs such as meeting facilities, secretarial and communication services
- Delegation that is symbolic rather than real
- Council taking excessively long time to respond to boards queries or recommendations, and failing to report back on decisions relating to board functions.
- Inability to advocate for, or make progress with community concerns or initiatives, due to inadequate resources and access to decision-making processes, which leads to boards losing credibility within the community
- A perception that boards are seen by some territorial bodies, and within central government, as an anachronism created out of expediency, one that should ultimately (and sooner rather than later) be eliminated.

5. IDENTITY AND PLACE

'Place' has been defined as a geographical concept that "...provides a fundamental means by which we make sense of the world"^{xvi}. Knowing and having some understanding of the environment and people in our immediate locality; knowing our place relative to other social groupings, our sense of what makes 'us' different from 'them'; our place in the wider global context. "In each of these senses, place functions to lend security, a knowledge and assurance of how things are and might be expected to continue...in New Zealand's urban localities, restructuring has contributed to growing levels of insecurity, but generally has been greeted by resignation rather than active protest"^{xvii}.

An admittedly 'unscientific' but none the less interesting survey was done to ascertain from a number of residents and some of their political representatives the extent to which they identified with 'their' city, and the extent to which they thought others might identify. Reiterating the rather subjective and non-random nature of the survey, it nevertheless produced a quite high level of consistency of perception. Auckland City dwellers typically identified quite strongly with their city, its features and icons, and were quite willing to defend it from criticism or disparagement from 'others'. This level of commitment did seem to reduce as a function of distance from the central city and inner suburbs – notably as one moved into areas formerly having their own identity as boroughs or identified to some dominant physical feature, whether natural or manufactured. Similarly, the Waitakere City respondents expressed quite a strong attachment to their city, in part as a perverse defence against the image of the 'Westie' (a distinctive and much maligned figure in greater Auckland's urban mythology!), and also in respect of the extent to which they associated their city with the spectacular wild ocean coast that defines their western boundary, and the still bush-clad hills that gave the city its name.

North Shore City dwellers, by contrast, tended to treat the City as merely an administrative entity, preferring to identify with older village and township settlements – Takapuna, Milford, Northcote, 'the Bays'. This may reflect the strength and coherence of the older municipalities, and the reluctance with which many Shore residents accepted the inevitability of enforced amalgamation in the late 1980s, or more simply the genuine diversity and discrete nature of centres on 'The Shore'.

Manukau City dwellers displayed some similar tendencies of identifying with suburbs or towns rather than the City, which was often represented in terms of a retail or commercial reality, or an administrative structure, rather than as an entity deserving of attachment or loyalty. Even for the less than rigorous standards of this survey, it must be noted that Manukau may be less readily compared in terms of identity than are the other three cities, to the extent that there exists very large and diverse Maori and Pacific Island communities that

may typically relate to other (and more significant) frameworks for identity and notions of place.

6. INTEGRATION

The picture that emerges then is of an urban landscape of some one million people, divided in to four major political entities (cities) with 'lower' levels of representation that are sometimes effective, occasionally below par, and too often dysfunctional. Service provision is by a mixed model of publicly owned assets operated on a business or corporate model, at arms length from political 'meddling', and considerable private involvement on a contract basis. Proposals for further privatisation are strongly contested. Regional oversight of environmental issues may prevent ill-conceived projects or destructive practices, but cannot dictate or impose a high level of integration of design, infrastructure or service provision. Active public participation (as opposed to sectoral or vested interest) typically is not high, and if anything is decreasing as cynicism and distrust increases. At a practical level, a great deal of expenditure is required to either upgrade or renew existing infrastructure, to the extent that the Auckland City Council is proposing a 17% increase in rates on property. Other cities are also indicating the need for double figure increases. There is correspondingly little leeway to initiate improvements or enhancement of the built or the natural environment, even when in the long run such investment might contribute to sustainability and quality of life objectives.

The question that might now be raised – did the amalgamation process stop too soon, and would the people, and the natural and physical resources of greater Auckland, be better served by fewer political boundaries or divisions? The benefits of integrated environmental management are now widely accepted and recognised, and the arguments for efficiencies of scale and elimination of duplication are equally well founded. A number of recent examples of issues in Auckland may illustrate the point.

Local-body owned Watercare Services is finding resistance to a proposed sewerage scheme in North-West Auckland that is intended to take load off the Mangere treatment plant. The difficulty essentially is that Waitakere City, and to a lesser extent Rodney District Council, need to 'buy in' to the scheme to make it viable. Each of these entities is however contemplating smaller scale 'stand-alone' projects, alleging that they could offer better value for money for residents. While conceding that all sides may have some valid reasons for their positions, it is difficult to deny a water services manager's assessment that two plants would represent 'bad politics and bad engineering'^{xviii}

In a less mundane but equally fractious context, the artistic or 'cultural' community is frustrated by the fact that some ten million dollars awarded in a 'one-off' grant to the Auckland region from central government is sitting unused while councils dispute how and where the money should be spent. An umbrella body of 70 arts group appealed for the money to be kept as a regional fund, but it has been distributed to the cities and districts on the basis of population, and the fear is it may be 'frittered away' and the opportunity lost to fund artistic and cultural activity over a long term and within some integrated scheme. The proposed regional trust would make measured grants while expanding the fund through endowments and donations. The chief executives of the four cities have so far failed to find a formula for a joint funding policy, while the districts are increasingly under pressure to keep the money close to home.

On a more positive note, there is also evidence that the cities can co-operate and work to resolve problems of mutual concern and interest. Auckland City and Waitakere are involved in a joint venture to develop strategies and plans for a 'western corridor public transport' scheme, realising the need to integrate transport and property issues to assure a 'seamless' system for moving commuters between West and Central Auckland, currently a heavily congested and problematic route.

7. A FRAMEWORK FOR RESOLUTION?

At the outset, this paper proposed the need for a set of questions or criteria against which a proposed formation of one city might be evaluated. Any such criteria should seek to encompass the environmental, economic, political, social and cultural requirements of individuals and communities. An objective assessment of the likely economic costs and benefits of amalgamation must certainly be attempted. Intuitively, many would agree that 'bigger must be better' if only to the extent that it could eliminate duplication in such areas as financial management; data acquisition, storage and retrieval; policy development and compliance monitoring, and other of the various services that one body could perhaps supply at much less than the costs involved in running four 'parallel' operations. The more populist view that has been expressed focuses on the 'trappings' of office, and points to the savings possible in servicing only one mayor and set of councillors and attendant services (albeit in all likelihood a body larger than any single existing council). Any projected long term savings must be balanced against the short term (but possibly significant) short term human and economic costs that a restructuring would inevitably entail.

There is already evidence that the larger the units of local government the less likely it is that social and economic differences will be exacerbated – when the primary source of income is from property rates some redistribution of wealth occurs as those owning more valuable property pay a higher proportion of the costs of services^{xix}. Would this form of 'equity' be furthered by amalgamation, or would it provide incentives for the more well off to strengthen their already dominant position in terms of representation, and devise means to balance the equation? In any case, the axiom 'bigger is better' has too often proven an economic fallacy to be accepted without stringent analysis.

Integrated environmental management (IEM) might reasonably be expected to be enhanced by amalgamation, but could not be taken for granted. Auckland's natural environment is remarkably diverse, complex, and subject to an array of demands and pressures. Would the apparent logic of integration be offset by loss of local knowledge, or a closely felt identity with and concern for natural features? Many of the models representing the benefits of IEM are found to display more coherence and effectiveness in the abstract than in reality^{xx} – implementation typically becomes more problematic as a function of distance (both actual and conceptual). Would designers be afforded more scope to find better and more productive solutions? Or would such an approach simply increase the scale of adverse impact if the design in practice was found to be wanting?

In terms of service provision and the construction and maintenance of infrastructure, there seems to be some scope for 'de-coupling' functional or administrative boundaries from political ones. The LATE and contract models seem to offer some scope for better co-ordination or at least co-operation, at least so long as each of the four existing entities is assured that its interests are best served by (perhaps) establishing a separate entity for managing, prioritising and delivering services. Conversely, is it realistic to expect a workable outcome in the face of historical evidence that political entities seldom surrender authority or control readily, and the public is often equally jaundiced in its view of 'equity' or willingness to accept that the need of others might be more pressing than their own.

It would appear that in terms of individual identity, the move to a single city would pose few threats. A more comprehensive survey, however, taking into account the 'communities within communities' (sports clubs, ratepayers associations, business people's organisations, for example) might generate a very different and less diffident response. The possibility that the very fact of more restructuring, regardless of any benefits that might accrue, might have a negative impact on individuals and groups, would need to be considered.

Perhaps most critically, the opportunity for individuals and communities to have a hand in determining their own futures must be protected and enhanced. This claim is advanced not only as an ethical preference, but also based on a pragmatic observation that in the face of public resistance or even disinterest, progress towards realising 'sustainability' will falter. Could the larger and so potentially more remote city level representation be balanced by further empowering and engaging the community boards model. Or would such a model inevitably over time see the effective demise of boards as real points of public access to decision makers and decision-making processes, as more powerful and narrowly focused interests gained pre-eminence?

8 CONCLUSION

This paper has touched only lightly on some of the issues that must decide questions of how best to manage and enhance the quality of our built environment, in order to effectively promote 'sustainable management'. The idea of forming one Auckland 'Super City' in place of four is not being presently being advocated as a serious proposal. The idea is abroad, however, and could relatively quickly develop some degree of 'traction'. In a more general sense, it is incumbent on us all to continually go back to first principles, to be bold enough to question whatever system or processes of management hold sway – not in order to reinvent the wheel, or to 'fix that which is not broken', but to think seriously about what we do, and why. If existing structures seem to serve, then why change? If better means can be devised and applied to the benefit of human and non-human species, then how can we not meet the challenge and aspire to do things better and differently?

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- ⁱ Wintringham, M., *Annual Report of the State Services Commission*, Wellington, 1998
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