



Practitioners' Workshops: Christchurch, 22nd June 2007 and New Plymouth, 27th June 2007

Summary of Proceedings

Introduction

The SCNZ Board has recognised the need to provide direct support to those working at the local community level to develop and deliver sister city exchange programmes, in such a way that compliments the Annual Conference. In response to member feedback and as a result of our own findings in our work on the Aichi Project, two initial workshops were arranged to take place as soon as possible following the 2007 Conference in Te Anau. It was decided to hold one each in the North and South Island, and offers were made by Christchurch City Council and New Plymouth District Council to host them.

Format and Attendance

The workshops aimed to give community representatives the opportunity to define the sister city ideal from their perspectives, identify what they believe is working and what isn't working, to share experiences with peers and to tell SCNZ Inc. what it could and should be doing better. The programme was as follows:

11.00: Welcome from President Peter Tennent

*11.20: Short presentation on Aichi Project and leveraging off world expos –
Brian Cross*

11.30: Summary of Key Issues, elaboration, invitation for comment and additions

- The drivers of sister city-type relations – what they are and what they should be*
- The community benefits and the obstacles to achieving them*
- What works and what doesn't*
- Keeping our links energised in the face of so many other priorities*
- Maximising community support and active involvement*

12.30pm: Break for lunch and networking

1.00: Open Forum on Key Issues

2.30: What more can and should SCNZ Inc. be doing for members and their communities?

3.00: Close

The workshops were well supported, with 31 attending at Christchurch and 18 at New Plymouth. Participation came primarily from community volunteers engaged in sister city programmes, with local governments also well represented by staff and a small number of elected representatives. The attendance mix achieved participation aims.

Welcome

President Peter Tennent welcomed attendees and introduced the day, acknowledging the strong support for sister cities at community level as demonstrated by attendance, and emphasising the need for ideas and initiatives to be shared and for open discussion on what works and what does not.

Aichi Project Presentation

Executive Officer Brian Cross presented findings on this NZ Government funded programme, noting that what works in our community links with Japan is also generally applicable elsewhere. Main points arising from the presentation and subsequent discussion on it were:

- Sister City links are a key factor in New Zealand's bilateral relationship with Japan, as demonstrated by Central Government support for building them. The assistance of the Japanese Embassy and CLAIR and how the project has helped to build those links was acknowledged.
- Copies of the Aichi Best Practice Manuals are now with all New Zealand local governments that have sister city-type links, and in the case of those with links in Japan, a copy in Japanese is also with their partner cities. The manual is a resource freely available to all and containing a wide range of excellent programmes, many traditional, many based on new ideas.
- A manual update is in progress for distribution 2007, to include a Business Section and a template for recording of statistical information on sister city-type exchanges. Both meetings strongly endorsed the need for statistics so that better quantitative measures of sister city success are available. General community information and school resource material is also in production.
- There is great potential for more citizen visits in both directions. Air New Zealand may be of greater assistance with packages if they can be shown the benefits in numeric terms. Community clusters could work together more to get critical mass: eg. New Plymouth/Wanganui with Mishima/Nagaizumi, Wellington/Lower Hutt/Porirua with Sakai/Minoh/Nishio.
- In time, the Aichi Manual needs rebranding to accommodate examples from our links to other countries, or a separate manual is needed for each major country linked with.
- The importance of non-personnel exchanges (eg art exhibitions) and sending individuals as representatives (eg Miss Taranaki at Mishima Summer Parade). On official visits, the importance of taking media representatives to "tell it like it is" and economic development staff who following the trip must keep working on connections made.
- The need for understanding of where business sits within sister city relationships. Different countries take a different approach. With Japan, care is needed not to jeopardise non-business links by pushing economic development goals too hard.
- Learning from the opportunity Aichi World Expo 2005 has provided us, the need to be positioned to take even greater advantage of Shanghai World Expo 2010. SCNZ's resources are very limited and it could not be doing this work without project funding.

Key Issues¹ and Open Forum

Comments drawn from wide-reaching open discussions are summarised as follows:

- Key driver of Sister Cities are: the pleasure of meeting and mixing with other cultures; gaining mutual respect and enriching experiences; sharing arts and culture.
- The combination of people and culture results in better business. But business is not a driver as an absolute.
- What is offered in New Zealand through Sister Cities is something special to visitors at the personal level
- P2P contact and the community potential due to diverse outlooks; economic drivers do have influence; there is interest in the community in finding out more about Sister Cities.
- Local government support is critical - councillor representation on committees, which need to comprise a broad range of enthusiastic interests, a high level of professionalism, and include young people.
- A good model for some - Council driven relationships based on community support. Region to region links should be developed.
- A connection with the sister city, and a passion for it. Relationships start with social interaction.
- Better clarification of community goals and objectives needed, and better alignment with local government plans.
- More youth and education provider representatives needed on committees, more information and experience sharing through use of media, events and social activities.
- Cultural tolerance and understanding; education is where the future is.
- Economic benefits are developed around friendship - creating links and understanding
- Community morale is lifted when locals interact with sister city visitors
- More high profile media coverage is needed. One idea is education of media students by attending study groups. Identify the right journalists and keep promoting good stories.
- Need to sell the benefits and the passion out into the general public arena.
- Sister city exchange publicity needs to be presented in a media-friendly way
- Main obstacle is funding. Need to change the funder perception that sister city community groups are part of local government.
- Trusts and incorporated societies have rules restricting funds spent on a purpose outside NZ. Possibly set up a 'Friends of Sister Cities' group or charitable foundation.
- Proposal to develop two sister city "hands" – cultural and commercial. Opportunity for a programme to be developed internationally based on trade.
- Exchange activities need to be high profile and diverse to hold public interest
- Need to identify local areas of uniqueness and build exchanges around them.
- Need to find out what is wanted before visits take place, and evaluate afterwards.
- All sister city interests should share resources and information
- Sister company relationships possible for knowledge exchange, mentoring and information sharing
- A better public profile at Government level is needed
- Recognise the benefits of job exchanges and the social ambassadors that staff from sister city can be.
- Halswell Quarry Park works – it provides a realisation of sister cities in the community

¹ The Christchurch Workshop broke into four groups, each reporting back. The New Plymouth discussion was in one group.

- Patience is required when communicating with sister cities. It takes time to build relationships.
- School and sporting exchanges work best.
- More delegations should go into the community to engage people who would otherwise have no chance to be involved in sister cities. Use sister cities to give general citizens an international experience they otherwise would not get.
- Support national tours for visiting delegations, with committee-supported private home functions – highly valued by visitors.
- Take the junket out of sister cities by informing people better. The public good needs to be publicised.
- Need for better website links, and a column in local paper. Make it easy for editors with copy and photos. Need to be persistent when dealing with media.
- Need to encourage kids and community groups to get involved with projects, maximise public involvement, not just that of the core group. Communicate more with groups such as Rotary and Probus.
- Sister City links with Asia provide positive mana for local Asian communities and can help with positive media coverage
- If we are looking for more relationships, see what will fit and work, identify where exchanges are not already occurring, suggest ideas and discuss opportunities.
- Consider cultural, academic, people, business and tourism icons in each city in identifying a match. But many links are serendipitous and can still develop with individuals driving them.
- Why do we have so many links in Asia and not many in Europe and other parts of the world? Reasons of history and the proactive nature of Asian countries. USA is building many Third World and Middle Eastern links.
- Local government professional input – only three NZ councils have full time staff engaged in international relations. Very different in Asia.
- How to keep young people involved after their school sister city experience.

What more can and should SCNZ be doing for Members?

- A link to “Fundview” required on SCNZ website, and support for external applications by members.
- Conduct more research on ‘what works’
- Provide templates on visit protocols, basic etiquette and general country information
- Consider a system producing commission for committees from tour groups
- Build a resource of bad as well as good experiences
- Obtain its own better funding so that more members services can be provided
- Repeat current workshops in each island once a year at easily accessible locations
- Consider workshops outside of working hours.
- Organise smaller regional committee gatherings to share information and feed off each other
- Non-participating councils and communities to be encouraged to attend workshops in future
- The database to be developed to include committee members and interested public as well as members
- Publicise Sister Cities at a national level – what they do and what the benefits are.

Sincere thanks to all who participated in and contributed to these successful workshops.