

# HE ORANGA HOU: SOCIAL COHESION IN A POST-COVID WORLD

Paul Spoonley, Peter Gluckman, Anne Bardsley,  
Tracey McIntosh, Rangimarie Hunia, Sarb Johal  
and Richie Poulton

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A resilient society is one that not only addresses the challenges created by crises, but finds opportunities to transform positively in order to thrive in a changed environment. This requires cooperation for the benefit of society as a whole. New Zealand is generally regarded as a country with a high level of social cohesion, given our considerable diversity; but underlying vulnerabilities and issues remain that are yet to be fully addressed. As discussion turns to how New Zealand might reset as it moves forward from COVID-19, we argue that sustaining and enhancing social cohesion should be a collective priority.

New Zealand's cohesiveness has been evident in the early responses to COVID-19, but we cannot afford to be complacent. It may be challenged in the coming months, as many decisions made by the Government and by individuals and businesses could create tensions in the face of different views of the best path forward. Once social cohesion is lost, it becomes extremely difficult to restore, especially when there is both increased uncertainty and new forms of inequality.

The challenges will rise as the country begins to transition out of the acute phase. Already, tensions between economic and health interests have emerged. Some are in a hurry to return to a pre-COVID life; others see the opportunity for a major reset. Concerns over the centralisation of knowledge and authority have been expressed. Transparency around the evidence base for key decisions is critically important if they are to be accepted by the public. The emergent contestation of views about the longer-term future for Aotearoa-New Zealand needs to be cohesive, not divisive, if we are to find advantage in the recovery.

The crisis has brought into stark relief the position of those who were already experiencing social and economic difficulties. However, at the same time, there are many more people who are going to struggle as a result of the impact of COVID-19; their futures and aspirations may have been shattered. With expanded vulnerability, many may become angry, frustrated, depressed, anxious and suffer a loss of hope which may persist for years. Under such conditions, social cohesion will be threatened.

Māori have historically experienced disproportionate adverse effects of infectious disease and have expressed concern that they have been inadequately involved in decisions that affect them in the current crisis. It is essential to recognise, acknowledge and support the often-inspiring leadership among Māori in addressing their communities' needs in this crisis. Similar comments apply to among Pacific peoples, both in terms of some of the community initiatives already in evidence, and that need further support and recognition.

As a democracy heading towards an election, it is inevitable and healthy that there is a contestation of ideas. However, the reset must not be captured by partisanship and the political cycle because the decisions and actions required must consider the long-term and not simply immediate or short-term fixes. This requires recognition of the need for co-production and co-determination in developing responses that are both sensitive to the different needs of communities and stakeholders and move New Zealand forward. Agencies must seek to co-produce policies, not simply to consult in an often-tokenistic way with communities and stakeholders. To maintain trust, regular and transparent information flows are needed. We also need to enhance our ability to evaluate programmes rigorously and measure the impacts of policies on cohesiveness.

If New Zealand can emerge as a cohesive, safe and COVID-free country, this will not only enhance our global reputation, but will help project New Zealand's place in the world, with flow-on effects for our economy and our citizens. To achieve this, we need to build on the aspirational hopes and positivity that characterise much of New Zealand society, and which have been apparent during the acute phase of the crisis. At the same time we must also acknowledge the unaddressed issues that existed before the crisis and give greater emphasis to addressing these. We now need to find ways to sustain and build off this platform – it would be lost opportunity if advantage was not taken for a human- and society-centered reset.

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*“Whatever it is, coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt ... Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to ‘normality’, trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists ... Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine the world anew. This one is no different.”*

– Arundhati Roy<sup>1</sup>

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1 Roy, A., 2020. ‘The Pandemic is a Portal’, *Financial Times*, 4 April. <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>.

# INTRODUCTION

There are moments of societal disruption that require deep reflection on how best to sustain our resilience, both to cope with the present and to thrive in the future. COVID-19 is one such moment. The severity and impact of the current crisis are indicated by the extreme uncertainty as to how or when it will end.<sup>2</sup> A resilient society depends on social cohesion – that is a willingness to cooperate, while acknowledging diversity, in order to prevail and prosper. Sustaining social cohesion needs to be a policy priority as we move into a post-COVID-19 world. We refer here to ‘he oranga hou’ (the ‘new wellbeing’) to describe the need for *strength of the collective* to co-determine a new normal in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

New Zealand is generally regarded as a country with a high level of social cohesion, given our considerable diversity, especially ethnic and immigrant diversity. Since the 1970s, social cohesion has become an increasingly significant aspect of Aotearoa-New Zealand, as the rights and institutional arrangements that recognise Māori as tangata whenua have taken centre-stage. This has not been without significant and ongoing struggle for Māori. Recent high rates of net migration<sup>3</sup> have also invited ongoing discussion as to how best to recognise and include minority ethnic and immigrant communities in various institutional and national settings.<sup>4</sup>

A high level of social cohesion can be seen in New Zealand’s response to COVID-19 in the acute phase. Enhanced cohesion is often seen in the initial response to major crises<sup>5</sup> as communities pull together against a common threat. We have seen that members of communities with fewer socio-economic resources have responded to the crisis by drawing on their collective strength and by engaging in the wider community in new ways. Mutual aid initiatives have been very apparent. But as the situation evolves over time, social cohesion risks being undermined, and may become worse than before the crisis.

Degradation of social cohesion is already beginning to occur in many nations as they face the economic and social ramifications of the pandemic. In the USA, where cohesion was already weak, protests against state government responses have occurred around the country.<sup>6</sup>

New Zealand may have been privileged with regard to pre-existing levels of cohesion, and the examples of enhanced social cohesion shown through the lockdown, but cannot afford to be complacent. Once social cohesion is lost, it becomes extremely difficult to restore, especially when there is both increased uncertainty and new forms of inequality. In sectors where it was already weak, lost opportunities will deepen already embedded

inequities. We expect social cohesion to be threatened, especially if anger, frustration, depression and increased levels of anxiety occur and persist for some time, possibly years.

In the coming months there will be many decisions made by the Government and by individuals and businesses as we seek the best path forward – both to recover and to repair the damage caused by COVID-19 and the responses that will be required, and to seek advantage in the ‘new normal’ that will follow. This could be driven either in a primarily top-down and partisan (and thus more likely divisive) manner or, alternatively, through a constructive and inclusive process. The path chosen will affect our social and economic futures and influence our ability to find opportunity in the challenges we face. The ability to whakamana (uplift and uphold the authority and dignity of individuals and communities) will be an important factor in determining our collective futures.

The focus here is on those factors that affect New Zealand, and over which we have some control, but we also acknowledge that New Zealand will be constrained and affected by global challenges, particularly those faced by trading partners. There will be a number of externalities that will impact the country over quite some time, especially as recessionary effects are felt.

Our argument is simple: COVID-19 has so ruptured our existing world that as we move to respond to this substantially altered environment, with likely substantive changes or resets in much of our society and economy, sustaining and promoting social cohesion must be a key policy consideration: indeed it will give us an advantage on the global stage. The use of the word “rupture” is deliberate – it signals an inflection point “when opportunities and risks multiply ... and when new structural scaffolding is erected”.<sup>7</sup>

Social cohesion should be a cornerstone of this new scaffolding. This is also an opportunity for profound honesty in reflecting on the way the rewards and challenges of living in New Zealand are distributed across our society and how this can shape a new, post-COVID national narrative.

2 Davies, W., 2020. ‘The Last Global Crisis Didn’t Change the World. But This One Could’, *The Guardian*, 24 March. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/24/coronavirus-crisis-change-world-financial-global-capitalism>.

3 Between 2013 and 2018, New Zealand experienced a net gain from immigration of 260,000. Auckland is ranked the fourth most diverse city in the world.

4 This new diversity prompted a discussion of policy initiatives, including social cohesion, in the early 2000s. The most recent policy initiatives in New Zealand concerning diversity have deployed the term ‘social inclusion’. We talk here about social cohesion, of which inclusion is but one component.

5 F.B. Alberti 2020. Coronavirus is revitalising the concept of community for the 21st century. *The Conversation*: <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-is-revitalising-the-concept-of-community-for-the-21st-century-135750?utm>

6 BBC News. Coronavirus: US faced with protests amid pressure to reopen. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52348288>

7 Lund, C., 2020. Quoted by Milne, S., Hendriks, C. and Mahanty, S., ‘From the Bushfires to Coronavirus, Our Old ‘Normal’ is Gone Forever. So What’s Next?’, *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/from-the-bushfires-to-coronavirus-our-old-normal-is-gone-forever-so-whats-next-134994>.

# SOCIAL COHESION: WHAT DO WE MEAN?

Although the concept of social cohesion is relatively widely understood, defining social cohesion has a mini literature all of its own, depending on whether the term is used widely or narrowly, for academic or policy purposes (see appendix).

In this paper, we define social cohesion broadly **as the presence of high levels of trust, a sense of belonging, a willingness to participate and help others, and policies that ensure social and economic inclusion.**<sup>8</sup>

This aligns with the components of social cohesion outlined in Ministry of Social Development papers<sup>9</sup> as:

- **Belonging** involves a sense of being part of the wider community, trust in other people, and common respect for the rule of law and for civil and human rights. New Zealand is home to many peoples, and is built on the bicultural foundation of the Treaty of Waitangi. New Zealand's ethnic and cultural diversity should be recognised, celebrated and valued.
- **Inclusion**, which involves equity of opportunities and of outcomes, with regard to labour market participation, income, education, health and housing. The contribution of good settlement outcomes to social cohesion should be recognised and valued.
- **Participation** includes involvement in social activities, in community groups and organisations, and in political and civic life (voting or standing for election on a school board of trustees). All people should be able to participate in all aspects of New Zealand life.
- **Recognition** involves valuing diversity and respecting differences by all groups, including the host country, protection from discrimination and harassment, and a sense of safety. Diversity of opinions and values amongst the many cultures that make up New Zealand today should be accepted and respected.
- **Legitimacy** includes confidence in public institutions that act to protect rights and interests and to mediate conflicts, and institutional responsiveness. Public institutions must foster social cohesion, engender trust and be responsive to the needs of all communities.

For Māori, social cohesion speaks to the strength of the collective and a sense of identity and belonging (as Māori). When social cohesion is strongly present, it is also likely to be an expression of mana motuhake (here understood as mana through self-determination and control over one's individual and collective identity). Mason Durie's work has focused on social inclusion/ social cohesion, stressing the importance of the ability to live as Māori and on Māori determining the many facets of what being Māori means.<sup>10</sup>

To fully participate means the ability for diversity to be fully embedded in the narrative of social cohesion. It means that these shared values and equitable outcomes (wellbeing, collective security, environmental and social flourishing) are commonly aspired to, and there is confidence that resources are invested in these areas. To do well, one must be well, and to be well, the whenua and our waterways must also be well.



8 This definition is derived from Chan, J., Ho-Pong, T. and Chan, E., 2006. 'Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical for Empirical Research', *Social Indicators Research*, 75 (2), <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.476.5880&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

9 Spoonley, P., Peace, R., Butcher, A. and O'Neill, D., 2005. 'Social Cohesion: A Policy and Indicator Framework for Assessing Immigrant and Host Outcomes', *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/journals-and-magazines/social-policy-journal/spj24/24-social-cohesion-a-policy-and-indicator-framework-for-assessing-immigrant-and-host-outcomes-p85-110.html>

10 Durie, M., 2006. *Measuring Māori Wellbeing*. New Zealand Treasury Guest Lecture Series. <https://treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2007-09/tgls-durie.pdf>

# TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

Trust is a critical component of societal resilience and social cohesion. The initial pandemic response has demanded centralised decision-making, and in New Zealand, this has largely been affirmed by high levels of public trust, resulting in a collective acceptance of strict lockdown conditions. But the profound challenges of the path ahead mean that trust and confidence in decision-making will be critical for continued social cohesion. Transparency around the evidence base for key decisions is critically important for individuals and for business if we are to move from constraint into a future that will be transformed in multiple and indelible ways.

In New Zealand, decision-making and the flow of information supporting key policy decisions have been mostly centrally controlled through the acute phase of the crisis. Over time, however, this may lead to frustrations that could spill over. Emergency powers should be subject to time limits and review, and be proportional to the problem. To maintain trust, the rules should be clear.

Over the coming weeks and months, many difficult choices will have to be made. Decisions are needed around when and how to loosen constraints on workplaces and social gatherings, what to do when flare-ups occur, how to support businesses and individuals, and when to relax border controls. Trust in the proportionality and appropriateness of the measures taken will be critical to their success. The ability to trust state agents may be compromised for some as a result of historical, material and societal factors.

The Government will need to sustain the very high level of trust that currently exists, not just by communication management but also by greater transparency in what it is doing, making the system more accessible and the accountabilities clear. Trust could erode quickly, especially if post-lockdown recurrences and winter weather threaten the level of disease control achieved thus far.

We are about to enter an electoral cycle in which different views on the performance and decisions of government will inevitably be up for discussion. Such contestation of ideas is healthy in a democracy, and the discourse and debate are needed, but its broader impacts on a fragile society cannot be overlooked. The contestation of views about the longer-term future for Aotearoa-New Zealand needs to be cohesive, not divisive. It is also likely at some stage that there will be retrospective analysis of preparedness and of the decisions made. Some people may aggravate the situation with misinformation, as has happened elsewhere. These processes and the inevitable shift in media focus can undermine trust and promote cynicism and disillusionment.



# COVID-19 AND SOCIAL COHESION

Given the disruption COVID-19 has caused, and will further impose upon society, new policy approaches and governance arrangements need to be considered. Trust, kotahitanga, and mana motuhake are critical as we confront issues of welfare and social and economic participation. Participation matters as much as outcomes in terms of achieving cohesion. There needs to be a holistic approach to policy design and implementation.<sup>11</sup>

## BEARS EVERYWHERE : THE ACUTE PHASE

As New Zealand proceeded to Level 4 of the lockdown, there was evidence of extremely high levels of social cohesion, expressed in this phase by high levels of self-reported compliance with Government-issued instructions and support for the actions taken. Eighty percent of those surveyed by Colmar Brunton felt the country took effective action early on, and 87% “approve of the way the Government is responding to the pandemic” (which compares with an average of 50% for G7 countries who were asked the same question).<sup>12</sup> Ninety percent said they were complying with the Government’s instructions on social distancing. The same survey indicated a spike in patriotism from 47% saying they felt pride in New Zealand in a survey from 3–5 April to 62% on 20–21 April.

This self-reported compliance was supported by material provided by Google, which used location history from smartphones to look at the behaviour of New Zealanders during the lockdown, and provided an opportunity to compare compliance with what had occurred in other countries.<sup>13</sup>

Between Sunday, March 29, and earlier Sundays in the year, this data indicated there had been a drop of 91% in retail shopping (excluding groceries) among New Zealanders. This was higher, and sometimes dramatically higher, than most other high-income countries, with some, such as the USA, having a drop in retail shopping of half that seen in New Zealand.

The way in which New Zealanders acknowledged Anzac Day and the placing of soft toys, notably bears, in windows have indicated a shared sense of purpose and agreement that is extremely unusual outside of periods of war and global conflict. In this high-trust environment, we don’t tend to keep count of who gets what; rather the focus is on getting through the crisis together. These behaviours reflect the concepts of social cohesion and ‘collective efficacy’ among neighbours to maintain the common good of the community.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, available evidence indicates we have experienced a high level of social cohesion, but this will be challenged as the country begins to transition out of the acute phase. Social comparisons will emerge under stress when a greater degree of

transactionalism begins to dominate and people start tracking who gets what, and when. Regions or business sectors may start fighting for scarce resources. Questions can emerge about who regulates and ensures fairness, and social cohesion will come under immense pressure if promises remain unfulfilled.

Already, tensions between economic and health interests are emerging. Sectors are starting to compete for attention. Some are in a hurry to return to a pre-COVID life; others see the opportunity for a major reset. Some have been fundamentally changed and for many, the new normal comes with massive uncertainty. Concerns over the centralisation of knowledge and authority have been expressed.

## UNDERMINING SOCIAL COHESION?

A number of agencies have warned about the challenges of the disruption to normal institutional behaviours and systems and the undermining of social cohesion. For example, the International Labour Organization has recently written:

*... the crisis [COVID 19] can potentially ignite or exacerbate grievances, mistrust and a sense of injustice over access to health services, decent jobs and livelihoods, and drive conflict that could undermine development, peace and social cohesion ... There is thus a need to tackle underlying fragility factors while addressing immediate needs arising from the pandemic.<sup>15</sup>*

Communities come under severe stress during a pandemic. Under these conditions, suspicions may grow that collective social norms are being violated, either by ‘free riders’, who are not abiding by accepted norms, or through institutional action that appears to violate principles of the reciprocity and fairness. If this social contract is breached, this may push the relationship towards higher levels of monitoring, and perhaps a withdrawal of community social licence, cooperation and collective action.

There is already evidence of the economic and social consequences of COVID-19 in New Zealand, everything from the substantially increased demand for food parcels from organisations like the Salvation Army to the anxiety that comes from not knowing whether you will have a job or a business in a few weeks’ time.

We are particularly concerned about the economic effects of what is happening. There will be a rapid rise in unemployment from pre-COVID levels (<5%), with estimates certainly peaking well above 10%.<sup>16</sup> For some sectors, unemployment may be temporary, but the disruption will still be very painful given that the associated economic downturn will inhibit consumer

11 Chan, J., Ho-Pong, T. and Chan, E., 2006. ‘Reconsidering Social Cohesion : Developing a Definition and Analytical for Empirical Research’, *Social Indicators Research*, 75 (2), <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.476.5880&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

12 Colmar Brunton, 2020, *COVID Times*, <https://static.colmarbrunton.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/COVID-Times-24-April-2020.pdf>.

13 *New Zealand Herald*, 2020. ‘COVID 19 Coronavirus : How Google Has Been Tracking Kiwis During Lockdown’, [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=12322518](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12322518).

14 Sampson R.J., Raudenbush S.W., Earls F. Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*. 1997;277:918–924

15 ILO, 2020. *The Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Fragile Settings: Peace and Social Cohesion at Risk*, [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/recovery-and-reconstruction/WCMS\\_741158/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/recovery-and-reconstruction/WCMS_741158/lang-en/index.htm).

16 Treasury Report T2020/973: Economic Scenarios – 13 April 2020 <https://treasury.govt.nz/publications/tr/treasury-report-t2020-973-economic-scenarios-13-april-2020>

spending. For others, the impact may be long-lasting – for example, in the tourism and travel sectors. This may be partially offset by new jobs anticipated in other sectors, such as logistics, and the supply of office requirements for those working remotely.<sup>17</sup> It is expected that these job cuts will disproportionately affect the young, and Māori and Pasifika, especially those in the informal or temporary labour market. Māori have historically experienced disproportionate adverse effects of infectious diseases after European colonisation, and have expressed concern that they have been inadequately involved in decisions that affect them in the current crisis. They have been proactive in taking their own initiatives. Under conditions of crisis, we see innovation and adaptation from some of the most disadvantaged groups. It is essential to recognise and acknowledge leadership here and for resources then to flow to support them, otherwise fatigue and scarcity will embed further economic and social deprivation. Marginalisation disrupts the possibility of enhanced social cohesion by its very nature.

Similar comments apply to Pasifika communities, both in terms of some of the community initiatives already in evidence, and that need further support and recognition, and in relation to the marginalisation faced by these communities that will be emphasised by the pandemic.

The challenge now is to consider how social cohesion might be addressed and enhanced in a post-COVID-19 New Zealand.

## UNDERSTANDING WHO IS VULNERABLE

Societal wellbeing and cohesion depend on recognising the scope of vulnerability. The COVID-19 crisis has brought into stark relief the position of those who were already in social and economic difficulties. These range from those who experience poverty and limited options (educational, financial, employment), the disempowered, minorities and victims of violence to the mentally ill and already institutionalised. There is likely to be a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable segments of society, with the likelihood that existing inequality will worsen.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, there are many more who are going to struggle as a result of the impact of COVID-19. These might be the newly unemployed (those who might be referred to as the ‘unexpected’ unemployed), those who were part of sectors most affected such as tourism, or those in small and medium enterprises who are unable to maintain the financial viability of their business. These groups may face anxieties they have never considered possible. They may feel stigmatised and isolated, face status degradation and, perhaps for the first time, a period of welfare dependency. Anger and resentment, stress disorders and depression, alcohol excess and expanded drug use, family breakdown, and suicidality can be expected in this group. They may have limited knowledge of how to access help, and embarrassment (whakamā) may stop them seeking it.

17 Australian research has estimated the jobs which are most at risk and the likely loss of employment in various sectors. In terms of the closures ordered by government, the industries most impacted (with the number of jobs at risk in Australia in brackets) are: cafes, restaurants and takeaway food services (689,800), real estate services (130,200) and sports and physical recreation activities (114,000) while the industries most at risk with the fall in discretionary and durable spending are tertiary education (255,200), adult, community and other education (208,400) and retail clothing, footwear and personal accessories (151,600). Borland, J., 2020. ‘Which Jobs Are Most At Risk From Coronavirus Shutdown?’, *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/which-jobs-are-most-at-risk-from-the-coronavirus-shutdown-134680>.

18 Secretary General, United Nations, 2020. *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity*, <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>.

19 Linda Tuhiwai Smith (paraphrased).

It is important to recognise that we do not fully understand all the implications of the COVID-19 crisis, and that many of the impacts will become apparent only as the months or years pass. We are concerned about the long-term implications of the pandemic and what might occur in relation to different generations, including intergenerational implications, such as limited or no labour market participation over generations in the same family/whanau or household. For young people, the generational conflicts may grow and be compounded by eco-anxiety fuelled by the climate crisis. It will be critical to include young voices in the decision-making processes to enhance their ability to imagine their own futures. *Our rangatahi will serve in the future – how they serve will depend on how we invest now.*<sup>19</sup>

## MOVING FORWARD

It is important to recognise that a number of the existing institutional arrangements, policies and processes could prove to be a major barrier to addressing COVID-19 impacts. In no particular order, we would point to the following as potential barriers to developing appropriate responses in a changed world:

- **Electoral cycle:** if previous periods of disruption are a guide, then the impacts and the need for very different responses from governments will play out over a decade or possibly longer. The three-year electoral cycle may be a major impediment to developing policies that will address these medium- and long-term effects.
- **Top-down control:** we would argue strongly for co-production and co-determination in terms of developing responses that are both sensitive to the different needs of communities and stakeholders, none more so than Māori (mana motuhake), and which use the expertise of these communities. It is critical that communities be encouraged to develop their own forms of resilience. It is important that the Government supports, empowers, and encourages community-led resilience initiatives in order to enhance social cohesion.
- **The re-emergence of political or economic self-interest:** we would argue that the COVID-19 crisis and the reset that may follow require bipartisan action, with an invitation to those who might be otherwise politically (in the broadest sense) at odds to set aside some of these loyalties and interests in favour of the common interest. Fragmentation at this point would be extremely counterproductive.

To overcome these institutional barriers, and in order to encourage those factors that will contribute positively to social cohesion, we would suggest the following:

- **Transparent and responsive leadership:** the crisis has indicated the importance of leadership (and language), and while it would be unrealistic to assume this will continue in the same way as we emerge from the crisis, New Zealanders



have responded well to the leadership style adopted during the acute phase. There may be an expectation that elements of this style should be continued.

- **Institutional engagement:** this is a particular challenge for central government agencies as they seek to develop policy responses and service provision. If the tendency is to revert to business as usual, including bureaucratic and largely invisible processes of policy development and decision-making, then we might expect frustration and anger at what emerges. We would argue that these agencies be instructed to co-produce policies, not simply to consult in an often-tokenistic way with communities and stakeholders. Ruptures such as COVID-19 change (or should change) the way governments operate.
- **Regular and transparent information flows:** the crisis has indicated the importance of communicating information that allows communities and stakeholders to understand the issues and impacts, which can then influence their behaviour, their knowledge of what has happened or is

needed, and their participation in co-production processes. Misinformation is a real threat, as is a sense of less than transparent communication.

- **Evaluate:** given the need for very different policy options and initiatives, and ways of delivery, it is critically important that evaluation is built into policy development and delivery. This allows the most effective initiatives to be assessed, and if the evaluation is a critical and regular part of policy, then those policies can be changed at any point to something more effective.
- **Measuring impacts on social cohesion:** when the original work was done on social cohesion in New Zealand in 2005–06, it became obvious that many of the indicators required to assess whether social cohesion is present or the degree to which it was increasing/decreasing/staying the same were missing. Measurement helps maintain goal and delivery effectiveness.

## CONCLUSION

As we transition to a post-COVID-19 world, it is critical New Zealand and New Zealanders consider the factors influencing the nature and degree of social cohesion – and how to enhance social cohesion as a reset is undertaken. To return to the definition offered earlier, what will this reset do to enhance a sense of **belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy**?

This suggests a number of questions requiring honest inquiry as we move ahead.

- Will there be new vulnerabilities that add to those already experienced by individuals, family/whanau and communities? Will the levels of belonging, inclusion and participation be reduced, thereby affecting levels of social cohesion? Or can we sustain a high level of cohesion?
- In a much more constrained world – economically and socially – will there be more or less recognition of those who are the most vulnerable?

- Will the confidence of New Zealanders in their core institutions and government during the acute phase be replaced by cynicism and reduced levels of trust in these institutions in the medium- to long-term?

A cohesive, safe and COVID-free country can add much to its global reputation, which can help project New Zealand's place in the world, with flow-on effects for our economy. To achieve this, we need to build on the aspirational hopes and positivity that characterise much of New Zealand society and which have been apparent during the acute phase of the crisis. We believe this country has demonstrated a high level of social cohesion on various occasions. We now need to explore and develop different and innovative responses that will strengthen this tradition.

### THE AUTHORS

**Distinguished Prof Paul Spoonley** is from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Massey University, and is an associate member of Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures.

**Distinguished Prof Sir Peter Gluckman** is Director of Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures.

**Dr Anne Bardsley** is Deputy Director of Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures.

**Prof Tracey McIntosh** is Co-Head of Te Wānanga o Waipapa (School of Māori Studies and Pacific Studies) at the University of Auckland and an associate member of Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures.

**Ms Rangimarie Hunia** is Chief Executive of Ngāti Whātua Orakei Whai Maia and a Board member of Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures.

**Dr Sarb Johal** is a clinical psychologist with considerable experience in disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

**Prof Richie Poulton** is Director, Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health & Research Unit and an associate member of Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures.

# APPENDIX

## DEFINING SOCIAL COHESION

The academic and policy literature contains multiple definitions of social cohesion.

Some of the most interesting work – and some of the most relevant to New Zealand – has come from Canada where, early in the 1990s, there was considerable Canadian Government investment in social cohesion as a central policy goal. This arose from concerns about the need to ensure social cohesion in a culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse society. But the concept is appropriate in a variety of policy settings.

A key Canadian contributor was Sharon Jeannotte, who defined social cohesion as “the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity within Canada, based on a sense of trust, hope and reciprocity among all Canadians”.<sup>20</sup>

The OECD defines social cohesion as: “A cohesive society [that] works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility”.<sup>21</sup>

The Council of Europe regards social cohesion as the “capacity to ensure the well-being of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding marginalisation” which is built upon the following:<sup>22</sup>

1. Reciprocal loyalty and solidarity
2. Strength of social relations and shared values
3. Sense of belonging
4. Trust among individuals of society
5. And the reduction of inequalities and exclusion.

Work has been done on considering social cohesion in a New Zealand setting.<sup>23</sup> Like the Canadian work, this was in the context of exploring the concept in relation to the growing ethnic and immigrant diversity of New Zealand. Social cohesion was initially defined in a New Zealand Immigration Service statement.

*New Zealand becomes an increasingly socially cohesive society with a climate of collaboration because all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy.*<sup>24</sup>

A definition used especially in the policy domain is that of Chan, To & Chan 2006;

*Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioral manifestations.*

The definition we have used reflects these considerations and, like Chan et al (2006), focuses on a definition appropriate in policy and lay understandings

20 Jeannotte, M. S., 2003. “Singing Alone? The Contribution of Cultural Capital to Social Cohesion and Sustainable Communities.” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 9: 35–49. doi: 10.1080/1028663032000089507

21 OECD. 2011. *Perspectives on Global Development 2012, Perspectives on Global Development*. OECD Publishing.

22 Council of Europe, 2008. *Report of High-Level Task Force on Social Cohesion: Towards an Active, Fair and Socially Cohesive Europe*.

23 Spoonley, P., Peace, R., Butcher, A. and O'Neill, D., 2005. 'Social Cohesion: A Policy and Indicator Framework for Assessing Immigrant and Host Outcomes', *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/journals-and-magazines/social-policy-journal/spj24/24-social-cohesion-a-policy-and-indicator-framework-for-assessing-immigrant-and-host-outcomes-p85-110.html>.

24 New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004. *A Future Together: The New Zealand Settlement Strategy in Outline*, New Zealand Immigration Service, Wellington



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### **Professor Sir Peter Gluckman**

Director, Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures

Phone: +64 21 775 568

Email: [pd.gluckman@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:pd.gluckman@auckland.ac.nz)

[www.informedfutures.org](http://www.informedfutures.org)