

Epilogue

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From this adventure of studying the Palmerston North community, we might ask, what have we learned from the point of view of human ecology? A number of conclusions are evident.

First, this small community, Palmerston North, New Zealand, is incredibly diverse. The range of groupings or sub-communities is enormous, so that few residents would be familiar with all the groups described here, let alone the many others that were not included. Diversity makes for richness and variation, and in the long run, a much more interesting community.

Throughout, hierarchies and power structures are evident within each grouping, and also, overall in the larger community. Most people most of the time make decisions for their own self. A few make decisions that affect many others as well as themselves. Finally, a few have so little power that virtually all decisions are made for them. The range of power, as measured by decision-making, is again, enormous.

A third feature clearly evident is that people do belong to many and varied groups. They join, work with others, associate freely and frequently, and gain their own identities from their diverse memberships. Even though some children are isolated in schools, or adults are relatively alone by virtue of being unemployed, from broken homes, or with disabilities, the vast majority is securely tied to a variety of groups and organizations. The context and geographical surround provides one limit or boundary to this community, although given e-mail, plane travel, and television, any solid barrier between Palmerston North and the rest of the world is literally impossible. Yet, face to face contact takes place within these geographical spaces, and that contact builds relationships over time.

The perspectives vary, but the common links found by each author about their particular group and its relationships to other segments of the community are present. Indeed, the Palmerston North City Council (PNCC) serves as the clear center of the power structure, and the focal point for funding decisions, sanctions, rules and regulations, encouragement, control, and more. All roads here do not lead to Rome,

but to the PNCC, located strategically at The Square – the center of the city. No one chose to study the City Council itself, but each author who examined a grouping within this city became aware that the Council does have a commanding role throughout all sectors. The power and decision-making control by the City Council can and does affect virtually everything and everyone. As well as relationships to the seat of power, however, the inter-relationships between individuals and groups, and between groups and other groups, is also rich. The sense of community derives from these many and positive links between people and groups, throughout the Palmerston North city and Manawatu region of New Zealand.

The ties and bonds of the local community to the national government and the rest of New Zealand, or for that matter, the larger world, have not been studied here. Obviously, these links are multiple and numerous. Like local communities elsewhere, Palmerston North struggles under the burden of taxes, trans-national corporations, political elites, and international groupings. However, Palmerston North does receive back at least some benefits and has some strategic advantages from its diverse connections to the larger world.

At the other level, the role of psychology typically focuses on individuals and individual behaviour. In this study, however, these students, authors, and colleagues have searched for and found the community dimension, thereby surpassing psychology as traditionally taught and conceived. Too, they have found and adopted an ecological point of view, noting the contexts and environments of people and groupings, examining the inter-relationships, and observing the power of collectives. The descriptions evolve into analyses of the ecology of this community.

In summary, Palmerston North, like many other communities, offers a rich and varied feast for those who gain perspective from theories and literature, then go forth, explore, observe and record, and then analyse and report what they find.

As a city, Palmerston North is probably as good as it gets, for the size is not too great to bring about transport, overtaxing, and serious crime problems, and yet, it is not too small to be viable and meaningful to residents and visitors. Unlike some other cities or countries around the world, Palmerston North is not facing disaster or collapse (Gregory, 2001, 233). The positives outweigh most any negatives for nearly all residents.

In fact, the vast majority of people in town are flourishing, with satisfactory services, businesses, educational and health facilities, and working solutions to the problems that occur. A relatively tiny minority from primary school onwards through to those caught up in gangs, or involved with alcohol and drug abuse, and those without friends in rest homes may be hurting and unhappy. Sure, improvements could

help these people, and others, but that is for the future, and for those with ideals and hard work to back up their visions and dreams. As we have explored, evidence of those who are making improvements is plentiful. I believe that, fortunately, just as my students who worked hard and become colleagues in the process, so too will people of Palmerston North work hard and create new and stronger opportunities for themselves and for all the members of their unique community in the future.

REFERENCES

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