



The Shared Societies Project

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Talking points for Dr. Clem McCartney

REALISING THE VISION OF A SHARED SOCIETY

Co-operation is better than conflict.

This is an expression with which it is difficult to disagree. But yet often it is not acted upon. People including leaders chose conflict. They rely on force. They perpetuate division and inequality.

When the Members of the Club de Madrid began to formulate their initiative which became the Shared Society Project they were asking themselves how can co-operation become the norm - inclusion, sharing, engagement between people, support for weaker sections of society, social integration. How can these become not just rhetorical aspirations but real practical politics?

The Members of the Club de Madrid are 76 former Heads of State and Heads of Government and they have access to current leaders and influence but they no longer have power. That is their strength. They are not trying to push other leaders around and therefore they are listened to as people who have been in leadership positions and know the obstacles to bringing about policy changes.

So it was important to work out how to make the concept tangible and realisable how to operationalise it, so that leaders and communities would want to respond to the challenges of creating a shared society. Today we want to share something of how we have gone about doing this

First it was important to find the right concept and a term which would express that concept clearly to communities and their leaders. We chose Shared Society because it seemed to capture the totality of relationships and between people. For us, it encompasses all the things that I have already mentioned: co-operation, inclusion, engagement, support and of course sharing. We sometimes say it is about creating societies where all those living there feel at home. Or that it creates communities, and indeed a world, where it is safe to be different. Where people value difference and recognise that it enriches society.

That is our vision and we know it is a common vision of many. But it is not sufficient to wish for it to happen. Aspiration is not enough. We knew that we had to break the vision of a shared society down into elements and manageable stages so that leaders and communities could see what needed to be done and how it could be done.

We identified 10 characteristics of a shared society and said leaders and communities must make a commitment to promote these characteristics if they are to achieve a shared society. You may already be familiar with them. We have not been prescriptive about how this should be achieved. We cannot be, because each society has to find its own way. But it is clear that these commitments need to be worked at if they are not being worked at already being worked at. What we have done is to identify various approaches which could be taken.

Under each of these approaches we have identified examples of initiatives that have been taken in different parts of the world to act to fulfil the commitments. Like the NGO Committee we want to document what can be done and what has been done.

Some of the initiatives are big; some are small; some are government initiatives; some are initiatives by civil society; some have been very costly; some have cost almost nothing; all can pay for themselves in the peace and stability to which they contribute; some have been more successful than others. Why are they an important part of our project?

We wanted to be able to say to leaders "Look this is what has been done". "Look you can start small". "Look even in difficult, deeply divided societies things have been done."

It is our experience that leaders and others listen and say "These ideals are very fine." But there are all kinds of reasons why nothing can be done. Some are genuine problems but some are simply excuses. In these circumstances it is valuable to be able to point to examples of practice.

We have presented our examples in a simple set of bullet points under standard headings. We do this to make it very easy and quick to grasp the key points of the initiative. What was tried? Who was involved? What conditions were necessary or helpful in order for this to happen? What lessons can be learnt from it?

We are about to launch this on our website and we will also have it in CD format. Not only do we demonstrate that it is possible to take actions which will bring the society together but we offer insights into how it was done so that others wanting to take initiatives have guidance on how to go about it

Our Members visit countries on mission and we try to assist leaders at many levels to identify the nature of the issues they face and the kind of initiatives that would tackle the issues. The format of our materials helps them in that process and can be used in the same way by others

Our Commitments can be used as a checklist which allows leaders to assess which Commitments their society and country has worked at and which Commitments have been ignored and therefore are the areas where problems lie.

A leader may ask our Members for ideas on what can be done. The categorisation of the materials means that they can very quickly draw down an example which is relevant to the circumstances which they are discussing and the bullet point format helps them to home in on the aspects which are of immediate concern.

Our materials are widely available and becoming more so and we continue to add to them in order to give more ideas of how to build a shared society. We are very open to receive examples in this format so that we can make them available to those who can use them.

I have described the way we have gone about the task of putting into practice the creation of a shared society. To do that we are relying on the examples which we can learn from policy makers, practitioners and influential people across the world and in many walks of life.

I am delighted we have one such person with us on the panel today, Doctor Beatriz Merino, La Defensora del Pueblo in Peru.

The concept that we have called shared society is similar to what in Peru has been called interculturality. But what does this concept mean and how is to be operationalised and implemented. In Peru there has been a breakdown in relations between the indigenous people of Amazonia and the government and business interests who have been seeking to exploit the resources of the region. When this came to a head Peru had to think again about what this concept meant.

La Defensoría del Pueblo has been at the forefront of efforts to create interculturality through intercultural dialogue and the protection of the rights of the people and in the context of the process to review these issues I was fortunate to be able to visit Peru in order to advise the Defensoria. I was able to suggest the ten commitments as a way to assess the current situation and to identify what now needs to be done.

Peru offers many valuable insights and we will return to these issues again on Thursday at a side event about which there is information available. There we will talk about the relationship between development and a shared society and whether they can be complementary or in conflict with each other. But today Doctor Merino will talk more about the ways and activities through which Peru in general and her organisation in particular has attempted to create interculturality and a shared society and how the elements I have talked about are a useful way to approach the issues.