

# Diversity and Public Policy

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*Diversity is a potential source of vitality, creativity and growth. At the same time, diversity can be a source of conflict ...*

Levin and Rittel (1994)

*Diversity is what makes life interesting, but also difficult.*

Workshop participant<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The issues surrounding the nature and impact of diversity – and especially ethnic and social diversity – have attracted growing interest in many countries during the past decade. For the purposes of this discussion the term ‘social diversity’ is used to embrace diversity in values, religious beliefs, life circumstances, lifestyles and other aspects of the human condition.

In the academic world, the literature on diversity has mushroomed, particularly that dealing with the issues of multiculturalism, pluralism, minority and indigenous rights, cultural justice and special treatment (i.e. affirmative action/positive discrimination). There is also a burgeoning literature on the geographic dimensions of diversity, not to mention the increasing diversity of social values and attitudes. For their part, governments across the globe have been taking an increasing interest in the broad-ranging policy issues generated by diversity – prompted partly by changing migration patterns, changes in family structures, ethnic conflicts, the rise of religious fundamentalism and the growing risk of terrorist attacks.

In New Zealand, for example, a comprehensive Diversity Action Programme was launched at a Citizens Forum at Parliament on 23 August 2004. This programme, which is designed to recognise and celebrate cultural diversity and encourage racial and cultural harmony, is a citizens’ initiative facilitated by the Human Rights Commission and the race relations

conciliator. The Citizens Forum endorsed a series of ten steps to strengthen New Zealand’s cultural diversity, including the establishment of an electronic forum, encouraging research on cultural diversity and promoting diversity via the media. Subsequently, on 23 August 2005, a national Diversity Forum on the challenges of cultural diversity was held at Te Papa attended by around 500 people.

Within the public sector, in April 2005 the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and the Treasury hosted a joint workshop attended by officials from 13 government agencies to discuss issues associated with developing and delivering public policies in the context of diverse population groups. The workshop identified a number of issues requiring further attention. These include how diversity is affecting the statistical data required for policy purposes and the necessity for a coordinated, whole-of-government approach if the needs of diverse population groups are to be addressed effectively.

For its part, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) has been undertaking a project on issues relating to diversity since 2002, prompted by a request from departmental chief executives (via the Chief Executives Forum). This has included the holding of workshops and discussions to promote debate amongst policy advisers and decision-makers on the significance and potential implications of changes and trends in social groupings, identities and life circumstances. Particular attention has been given to the consequences of the nation’s increasing economic, ethnic, cultural and social diversity for policy design and implementation. As part of this project, the IPS will be publishing a co-authored book in early 2006 on *The Policy Implications of Diversity*.

<sup>1</sup> This quote is drawn from views expressed at one of two workshops held in September 2002 at Victoria University of Wellington. The participants in the workshops included departmental chief executives, other senior officials, and staff and students from Victoria University

The purpose of this article is to highlight just a few of the issues of importance to policy makers arising from recent discussions and debates in New Zealand over diversity. First, why is diversity of relevance to policy makers? Second, how should governments respond to diversity? Third, how does diversity affect policy implementation and service delivery? And finally, what are the implications of diversity for policy research and evaluation? Clearly, this is a complex area and readers wanting to delve more deeply into the debates are encouraged to read the main report.

## Defining diversity

But first, a few words about meanings and definitions. The words 'diverse' and 'diversity' have multiple meanings and invoke many different connotations and associations. As with numerous other words, the meanings and connotations vary depending on the context. The word 'diversity', for instance, is used descriptively and prescriptively – as a term to depict or explain particular empirical phenomena and as a principle or criterion to guide action and policy.

As a descriptive term, 'diversity' is often used interchangeably with words such as heterogeneity, variety, variegated, multiplicity, multifarious, mixture and difference, sometimes with divisions, divergence, dissimilarity, disparities, polarisation and inequality and occasionally with discrepancy or inconsistency. In keeping with this, a diverse state of affairs is typically contrasted with uniformity, homogeneity, sameness and standardisation, and sometimes with conformity, convergence, equality or consistency. Sometimes diversity is simply shorthand for that which is not the norm.

In recent decades, 'diversity' has increasingly been used as a shorthand way of referring to social and cultural diversity, and more specifically to ethnic or racial diversity. More specifically, as Wood (2003, p.87) has argued, in a North American context "when people speak of diversity, they tend to think first of racial issues. Race remains the focal meaning of diversity ...". While the term 'ethnicity' rather than 'race' is generally used by researchers and policy makers in New Zealand, the situation in this country is probably similar. But of course the word diversity also refers to many other phenomena and is invoked in many other contexts.

## Why is diversity of relevance for policy makers?

Why should policy advisers and policy makers take diversity seriously? There are at least three reasons. First, diversity is relevant to the *context* in which policy-making occurs, and thus affects the design, delivery and effectiveness of many policies; second, diversity raises important questions about the *design of public institutions*; and third, diversity is increasingly being advanced as a *policy principle* – if not in New Zealand, then certainly in other jurisdictions.

## Diversity as context

Various kinds of diversity, together with changes in the degree or level of this diversity, have potentially major implications for the policy-making environment. For instance, as social and cultural diversity increases there are likely to be implications for all aspects of the policy process or policy cycle – agenda setting, research, policy formulation, consultation, decision-making, implementation and service delivery, and evaluation.

To illustrate, other things being equal, a more diverse society will mean a wider variety of preferences, needs and aspirations. There will be more and different agendas (or policy demands). And many of the agendas will be incompatible, thus posing harder and sharper questions for policy makers. For instance, how do policy makers foster social cohesion and national unity in a context of increasing cultural pluralism and conflicting values? Further, what are the limits to tolerance? What kinds of diversity are simply unacceptable, and thus not to be tolerated, in a free and democratic society?

The relevance of such questions is evident in many areas of public life. Various cultural and religious traditions, for instance, do not accept that women should have full equality with men. How should the state respond in such situations? To be more specific:

- What kind of head covering, if any, should female students be allowed to wear in school?
- Should female students be required to undertake physical education programmes and dress

<sup>2</sup> This issue was raised in early 2005 when a Corrections Department probation officer, Josie Bullock, refused to sit at the back at a Corrections Department poroporoaki. There has been much subsequent debate in the media about this matter (for example, Rata, 2005).

appropriately, irrespective of their religious convictions?

- Should a woman, for religious reasons, be allowed to cover her face in court?
- Should women be required to sit behind men in poroporoaki being held in government institutions?<sup>2</sup>

Further, there is the question whether customs associated with a particular culture have a place in government institutions and public life more generally. Another issue is whether particular customs should take precedence over individual human rights. For example, Māori and non-Māori alike may practise gender role differentiation in private settings – on marae, in cultural groups, and in places where people agree to operate according to those customs – but whether it is acceptable in the public realm is a question all New Zealanders, not just Māori, need to debate.

Or to take some different examples: how should policy makers respond in a context where there are very diverse views – arising from different religious and philosophical traditions – concerning such matters as the merits of stem cell research, cloning, genetic modification, voluntary euthanasia, the smacking of children, the adoption of children by same-sex couples or the claimed spiritual value of particular sites? Is it acceptable for development projects to be thwarted because the proposals in question are believed to threaten the well-being of a *taniwha* (the existence of which is not open to scientific investigation)?

Equally controversial, diversity may well generate demands for ‘special measures’ or programmes of affirmative action for certain (disadvantaged) groups. Such initiatives have been common in many jurisdictions, especially those with large ethnic inequalities and/or disadvantaged indigenous peoples. Whatever the rationale for, and efficacy of, such programmes – and the debate on this continues to rage (see Bowen and Bok, 1998) – there can be no doubt that preferential treatment is a difficult concept to ‘sell’. The strong public endorsement of the Orewa speech in February 2004 by Dr Don Brash (the leader of the National party) in which he criticised special measures to assist Māori highlighted the sensitivity of such initiatives in New Zealand.

At another level, a more diverse society poses questions about how policies should be formulated. How should

diversity affect the way government departments and agencies consult with stakeholders over the development of new policies and programmes? More specifically, how much effort should be put into consulting with very small ethnic communities (given that there are now many dozens of such communities in New Zealand)? A key point here, of course, is that consultation can be costly – both in time and resources – and can create a very wide set of views that are difficult to reconcile. Against this, as diversity increases there is a risk that smaller minority groups will find it increasingly difficult to have their voices heard and taken seriously.

In terms of policy design, diversity poses other kinds of questions. When and how should the design of policies be changed to meet the needs of more diverse populations? Or, to put it differently, how do we ensure the achievement of similar outcomes (or common standards or common levels of compliance) when implementing policies in a context where the target population is very diverse? Indeed, should we actually seek similar outcomes at all, or should we tailor the desired outcomes to suit the requirements of the different subsets of the target population?

Furthermore, what specific types of diversity count (or should count) for policy purposes? What characteristics of a population or group actually matter and when are differences important and why? Is religious belief as important, or as relevant, as gender and ethnicity? How much within-group diversity is there and to what extent should this shape the formulation and design of public policies?

Answers to such questions are likely to be highly context-dependent. For example, a particular social difference or cleavage may be of little political importance at one point in time, only to become highly salient at another. Factors that may influence the political salience of social differences will include changes in the distribution or relative size of the respective population subsets and widely-reported, ‘critical’ events that draw public attention to particular differences (e.g. major acts of violence by, or against, members of an ethnic minority). While changes in population distributions and proportions are, at least to some degree, possible to predict (e.g. based on demographic trends and migration flows), ‘critical’ events typically are not.

There are other reasons, too, why diversity is of relevance to policy makers. Increasing diversity of certain kinds

(e.g. income disparities, health inequalities or religious pluralism) may well generate demands for a government to take action to halt, or reverse, this state of affairs. For some citizens, greater ethnic diversity may be regarded as a threat to their particular culture or sense of national identity. Alternatively, there may be concerns about the fiscal costs of meeting the needs of certain immigrant groups (e.g. non-English speaking refugees). In short, certain types of diversity, and in particular changes in the nature or degree of diversity, may create political pressure for government intervention.

## Diversity and institutional design

Another set of questions that diversity poses for policy makers is the design of public institutions. At the political level, for instance, there is the issue of whether there should be separate seats in the legislature (and/or at the local government level) for specific ethnic communities. In New Zealand, there has been separate parliamentary representation for Māori since the nineteenth century. In recent years, this has become increasingly contentious, with the National and ACT parties at the 2005 general election calling for their abolition. Against this, the Māori party campaigned on a platform to have these seats entrenched – and succeeded in winning four of the current seven seats. Given the composition of the new Parliament, it is highly unlikely that either group will achieve its ambitions. But there can be no doubt that the matter will remain of high political salience.

Within the public service, social diversity has contributed to the creation of specific population-based ministries. But the practice in New Zealand has been far from consistent, and the effectiveness of such ministries remains a matter of contention. Currently, there are three population-based ministries:

- Te Puni Kōkiri (The Ministry of Māori Development);
- The Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs; and
- The Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Also, within the Ministry of Social Development there are a number of separate population-based sub-groups, including the Office for Senior Citizens, the Office for Disability Issues and the Ministry of Youth Affairs, while there is an Office of Ethnic Affairs within the Department of Internal Affairs. Additionally, there are a number of non-departmental bodies that are designed

to serve the needs of particular population groups, such as the Children's Commissioner, the Families Commission and the Māori Language Commission.<sup>3</sup>

Against this, there are no separate agencies with a specific mandate to consider the needs and interests of a number of distinctive population groups, namely Asian peoples, other 'new settlers' and refugees. And while there is a Ministry of Women's Affairs, there is no separate agency for men. It may well be that the case for establishing additional population-based agencies is weak, while others may have outlived their usefulness. Nevertheless, in considering the overall design of the machinery of government there is an issue of whether, and under what circumstances, there is a case for establishing a population-based agency, as opposed to having organisations based on specific functions, services or policy objectives. At present, there appears to be no agreed set of criteria for addressing such matters.

## Diversity as a policy principle

Diversity is also of relevance to policy makers because it is sometimes advocated as a policy principle or criterion, particularly in relation to the practices of specific institutions. For example, the achievement of a more diverse staff is often advanced as a desirable goal within both public and private sector organisations, and diversity has been promoted as an important criterion for the selection of students by many leading universities, especially in the United States (see Barry, 2001; Kymlicka, 1995; Bowen and Bok, 1998). Indeed, it has been suggested that the attention, weight and significance attached to diversity has given it the hallmarks of an ideology (Wood, 2003, p.92). Against this, critics of the diversity thesis – as it is sometimes called – maintain that diversity is a subsidiary and contingent ethical principle and that it is only valuable to the extent that it represents an expression of human endeavour, ingenuity and individuality, and/or contributes to human well-being.

As an ethical principle, diversity is defined, applied and justified in a number of different ways. A relatively common argument is that diversity is desirable because it "enhances the quality of life, by enriching our experience, expanding cultural resources" (Falk quoted in Kymlicka, 1995, p.121). The basic proposition, in

<sup>3</sup> There is often an overlap between these population groups.

other words, is that diversity creates of more varied, vibrant and interesting world. In so doing it expands the lifestyle options and choices available to individuals, families and groups. Examples include the positive impact of a diverse cultural environment on the choice of restaurants, exhibitions, musical performances, sporting fixtures and other leisure activities. Related to this, it is argued that diversity brings various aesthetic and educational benefits, thereby enriching human knowledge and understanding and enhancing overall well-being.

Alternatively, an analogy is sometimes drawn between the case for biodiversity and the case for social diversity. In the same way that diversity in the natural world enhances the resilience of ecosystems and their ability to adapt to change, so too it is argued that social diversity creates the conditions for greater social and economic resilience. For instance, faced with rapid technological or environmental changes, some patterns of social organisation may be more adaptable, and thus durable, than others. Societies with more varied social arrangements may thus prove to be more resilient and sustainable (in some sense) than those that are relatively homogeneous. In the business world, it might be argued that firms with more diverse staff, including having a range of cultural backgrounds and language skills, may be more flexible and thus better able to 'read' and adapt to changing market conditions both internally and within the international market place.

To the extent that diversity enriches human life and/or contributes to greater societal resilience, it might be contended that governments should encourage various kinds of diversity. For instance, it is sometimes argued, on the basis of the diversity thesis, that governments should give particular attention to promoting and fostering the interests of minority groups, such as indigenous and cultural minorities. Likewise, it is suggested that state funding for the creative and performing arts should be biased in favour of artist endeavours that attract only limited followings. The aim, in this context, is not simply to encourage and reward those of high artistic talent but also to nurture and keep alive a wide range of artistic pursuits and traditions.

Yet even strong supporters of the diversity thesis generally acknowledge that diversity is not an unqualified good, and that the principle of diversity, however defined and specified, is not universally applicable. Diversity may be valuable (and thus a desirable objective

or outcome) in some circumstances, but not in others. A key question, therefore, concerns the circumstances under which diversity is morally relevant and the conditions under which the pursuit of *more* diversity is an ethical imperative. These are questions that policy makers cannot ignore.

Finally, in New Zealand, discussions concerning diversity and its relevance for public policy necessarily intersect as some point with the Treaty of Waitangi. Previous issues of the *Policy Quarterly* have already dealt in some depth with the nature, role and significance of the Treaty for contemporary policy-making (see Ladley, 2005; White and Ladley, 2005), so we will not discuss this matter in detail here.

## How should governments respond to diversity?

The question of how governments ought to respond to (increasing) diversity raises many issues. First, some types (or levels) of diversity are, at least partly, the result of government policies. For instance, migration policies affect the ethnic and cultural mix of a population. Likewise, tax and social policies influence the pattern and distribution of income. Thus, to some extent they are matters over which governments have a (modest) degree of control.

Second, changes to the nature and level of diversity may be an unintended (and possibly undesired) outcome of a particular government invention or policy setting. Migration policies, for instance, are not usually motivated primarily by considerations of diversity. However, they may well contribute to changes in the population mix that have significant implications for other areas of government policy, such as education, health care, housing and social services.

Third, attempts to influence one particular type of diversity may well affect another type (or types). For instance, efforts to facilitate a more diverse range of services in the interests of extending consumer choice may generate a more diverse range of outcomes (e.g. in terms of quality or standards).

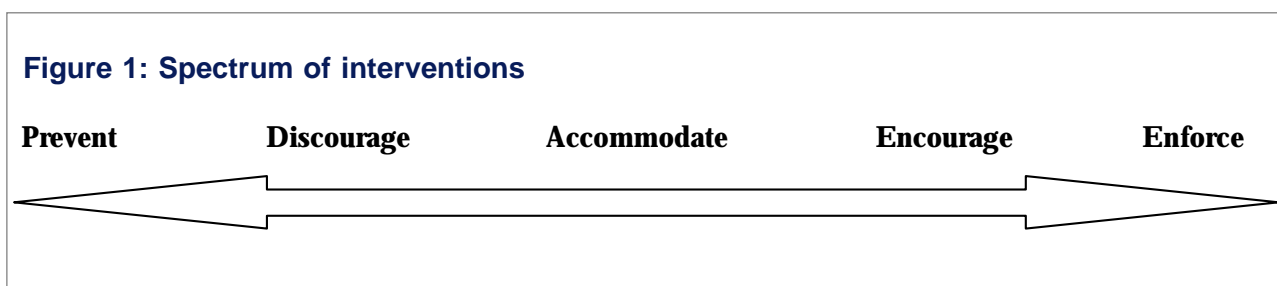
Fourth, with respect to the specific policy options available to governments, responses to diversity can range from enforcement at one extreme to complete prevention at the other, with neutral or tolerant responses in between, as depicted in Figure 1. The response in a particular context is very likely to reflect

views about the benefits or otherwise of the type of diversity in question. If the benefits are seen to be extremely valuable or fundamental to national identity, for example, then the response may be strong legal enforcement. By contrast, where diversity is considered harmful, either to individuals or society as a whole, then the responses will endeavour to minimise or constrain its extent or its effects. In between, there are a number of other responses, which could include encouraging, discouraging or tolerating diversity. In addition to the possible options depicted along the continuum in Figure 1, in some cases the government may decide that a mix

the implications of social cohesion, the speed of implementation, and the likely effectiveness of the intervention.

### The implications of diversity for policy implementation and service delivery

Greater diversity has obvious implications for the provision of publicly-funded services – whether these take the form of accident compensation, housing, counselling, child care, education, health care, income



of responses is needed. Alternatively, diversity may be deemed irrelevant for policy purposes.

In determining the appropriate course of action, it is important to bear in mind that there are likely to be differences of view, both within New Zealand and beyond, about the benefits or otherwise of diversity. Some types of diversity are widely regarded as positive, some are widely regarded as negative, while yet others are strongly disputed. Examples of these different views are highlighted in Table 1. Moreover, in deciding an appropriate response to different types of diversity, a range of criteria need to be considered, including the fiscal costs, considerations of fairness or equity,

support (and other kinds of financial assistance) or social work services. In short, as the community becomes more socially diverse, so too do the concerns, needs, preferences and aspirations of clients (or service users).

Greater cultural diversity has implications for such matters as:

- the nature of the information supplied to users (e.g. the number of languages into which material needs to be translated);
- the cultural appropriateness of the services being provided;
- the knowledge, cultural competence, skills and attributes of staff;

**Table 1: Views on different types of diversity in New Zealand**

Positive	Disputed	Negative
Wide range of consumer goods	Family types (same sex relationships, etc.)	Age-related mortality (premature mortality amongst some groups)
Choice of television channels	Diversity of sources of migration	Extremes of income
Choice of ethnic restaurants	Different types of religious fundamentalism	Ethnic differences in educational achievement
Choice of tertiary education provision	Differing cultural attitudes towards women	Extremes in housing standards

- the range of services (and choices) available to users; and
- the kind of consultation undertaken.

Plainly, the implications will vary significantly across different policy domains: the massive increase in international students in tertiary education organisations since the late 1990s generates rather different challenges to those posed for social policy as a result of increasing family diversity. As a general rule, however, greater diversity can be expected to require more *flexibility* in the nature of the services provided and the manner of their provision. Hence, a uniform or one-size-fits-all approach is most unlikely to be satisfactory.

What precisely this means in relation to the kind of flexibility built into programmes will depend on the services in question. Nevertheless, service providers may well require more discretion over what kind of assistance is supplied so that the services can be tailored to suit the specific requirements of different clients (or client groups). In some contexts, this may entail a form of case management, rather than standardised, rule-based approaches.

In practical terms, such approaches are likely to require not only additional training and cultural sensitivity, but also the recruitment of different types of staff (including, for instance, translators and interpreters, and staff from a more diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds). While this will probably impose somewhat higher costs on providers, particularly in the short run, over the longer term organisations may become more effective and efficient and the quality of the services can be expected to improve.

Equally, greater diversity (or new forms of diversity) may entail more reliance upon private providers (or perhaps a wider range of such providers). This, of course, raises all the usual questions surrounding contracting, governance and accountability. Alternatively, consideration may need to be given to whether greater diversity provides a justification for the devolution of certain responsibilities to a lower level of government (or at least a larger role for local and/or regional government in the actual delivery of certain services).

Both contracting out and devolution pose issues pertaining to social justice, especially if there is any

suggestion that different groups of the population (perhaps on an ethnic or regional basis) are receiving more favourable treatment than others without this being clearly justified on the basis of need (or desert). Reliance on a greater range of providers and more varied forms of provision can raise other kinds of issues, not least the problem of ensuring that services are appropriately integrated or joined-up, so that individuals are treated as *whole persons*. This is important on a number of counts – firstly, for minimising the compliance and other transaction costs faced by service users, and secondly, for ensuring that those with multiple needs receive the appropriate forms of assistance.

Diversity poses a number of other challenges for service delivery. One of the key features of the increasing diversity of New Zealand society is the fact that often-used social categories and distinctions no longer seem to be appropriate, or at least they fail to recognise the complexity and variegated texture of social reality. To take but one example: suppose that, for the sake of argument, individuals can be divided neatly into two distinctive ethnic groups with similarly distinctive cultural perspectives. Next suppose that the aim is to make some types of service delivery culturally appropriate. Now, this may be possible if individuals are dealt with separately and *individually*. But note the complications that arise when the service is focused upon *families* rather than individuals. Families, after all, matter. They are a fundamental social institution. But, due to the relatively high rates of ethnic intermarriage in New Zealand, they often comprise individuals from different ethnic backgrounds.

Interestingly, in this regard, the Family Court is investigating ways to become more sensitive to the needs of Māori families. This is appropriate and overdue. Yet many of the couples in strife consist of an individual who identifies himself or herself as ethnically Māori and the other who does not. Hence, while one parent may feel they “have no exclusive rights to possession of their children – they hold them in trust for the whānau, and the wider hapu and iwi” (Law Commission, 2004, p.3) – the other parent may not. Differences in cultural values could even be part of the reason for separation for some couples. Similarly, reducing Māori infant mortality is an important goal. Yet, a policy of “by Māori for Māori” may not always be appropriate in those situations where the mother of

the Māori infant identifies herself as ethnically non-Māori. Reflecting the difficulties of defining families rather than individuals by ethnic group, Statistics New Zealand (2004) has already abandoned the ethnic classification of both households and families.

Finally, and related to this, diversity raises important issues about the relative merits of targeted versus universal forms of social assistance. At first sight, it might appear that the greater the degree of diversity the greater the potential merits of targeted or selective forms of assistance, whether these be targeted on the basis of income (and/or wealth) or on the basis of other attributes (e.g. age, ethnicity, etc.). Paradoxically, however, the greater the diversity of the population, particularly in terms of family circumstances, the more difficult it becomes to target social assistance (and other forms of social support) in an equitable, efficient and effective manner. For instance, the Labour-led government in 2004 announced a major package of proposals – *Working for Families* – to improve the incomes of low-income families, particularly those where one or more parent is involved in paid employment. In order to target assistance in a manner deemed to be effective, the package needed to take into account many different considerations and ended up being highly complex, thus adding additional complexity to an already complicated system of social assistance. Given the increasingly varied nature of work and family arrangements, it could be argued that a simple, universal child benefit, of the kind introduced in the 1940s, might well be a more appropriate way of providing social assistance. It would minimise administrative and compliance costs. It would guarantee a high take-up rate. And it would help avoid the high effective marginal tax rates (and related incentive problems) associated with targeted forms of social assistance.

### **What are the implications of diversity for policy research and evaluation?**

The tools used by researchers and policy makers have a major influence on how we conceptualise, measure and report diversity. Moreover, diversity influences the types of policy research and evaluation that are, or should be, carried out in New Zealand, and the manner of carrying out such research and evaluation.

Understanding diversity has implications for the type of data collected, what methodologies and disciplinary approaches are used to analyse these data and who might be involved in the research process.

In New Zealand, a considerable amount of time, effort and money goes into collecting quantitative data in the form of official statistics, administrative data gathered by government agencies and data collected by the research community. Much effort also goes into continually improving and expanding data collections. Yet, despite our existing rich datasets, in order to better understand diversity new approaches are sometimes needed.

Particular types of data can disguise the complexity of people's lives. For instance, in measures of poverty it is well known that longitudinal data provide a better understanding of the dynamics of poverty. Some people have only a short period in poverty, while for others this is a state they cannot easily escape. It is important to understand this diversity of experience when considering ways to reduce poverty. However, a shift from cross-sectional to longitudinal studies is costly and creates a major response burden for respondents.

At times, a greater use of qualitative research can inform policy makers about the real diversity that exists underneath relatively simple quantitative measures. Despite the potential value of qualitative research to shed light on people's reasons and choices, as well as to assist in interpreting quantitative information, researchers and policy makers have struggled to find ways of bridging the worlds between deep and rich qualitative research and wide but reductionist quantitative research. Often the quantitative researchers see qualitative research as unrepresentative, while qualitative researchers find simple measures misleading of the true complexity of life. Nevertheless, recent scholarship highlights promising methodological solutions to these problems (Wolf, 2004).

Analysing social problems from a variety of disciplinary perspectives may also assist in the recognition of diversity. Increasingly, multi-disciplinary, multi-method research is being promoted in the social sciences. But this requires large, complex and expensive projects. There is always going to be a tension between funding a few large, long-term projects and funding a more diverse set of smaller research projects. Diversity in social science approaches may be as important as diversity in other areas of life. Given



the small number of public research funders, and the very limited research resources in New Zealand, there is not much potential for diverse projects, premised on quite different assumptions, methodologies and analytical techniques, being supported.

However, there are some relatively simple ways of ensuring diversity in the data, and the underlying populations, is identified by all researchers. These include:

- not focusing on averages but on distributions;
- not overly emphasising small differences in the data; small differences can quickly become group stereotypes;
- giving more attention to ‘controlling’ for variables – for example, considering the independent effect of, say, age, ethnicity and gender from education when considering employment outcomes; and
- creating and analysing ‘fuzzy datasets’ (e.g. Ragin, 2000). This allows a person to be ‘more in’ or ‘more out’ or ‘barely more out than in’ of a group rather than being assigned either in or out of a group.

However, even some of these relatively simple ways of ensuring diversity is identified require researchers to be able to handle more complex quantitative data. As discussed in many reports on social science in New Zealand, this requires a higher level of skills in institutions such as universities and policy-making agencies. It also means that researchers need to be able to present results in terms of ‘simplified complexity’ rather than ‘overwhelming complexity’ to diverse audiences.

Finally, there is a strong view within parts of the New Zealand social science and policy-making community that diversity of *researcher* is of great importance when undertaking social science research. In recent decades, three key target populations for policy research in New Zealand have been women, Māori, and Pacific Peoples.

The idea that, if at all possible, Māori should play a key part in researching Māori, that women should ideally be involved in researching women, and that, where possible, Pacific Peoples should be involved in Pacific research has been promoted in New Zealand by some social scientists. If research on women has been traditionally dominated by men, and research on Māori and Pacific Peoples has not included researchers from within these groups, on one measure there has not been

a diversity of researchers. Yet, there is also the potential to reduce diversity of approaches and methodologies if the identity of the researcher becomes the key consideration in the research process. Perhaps even more importantly, however, the call for the characteristics of the researcher to closely match the characteristics of those being researched often focuses on variables that are not easy to define and, when defined, often disguise much heterogeneity.

While defining women seems relatively easy, defining Māori, Pacific Peoples and New Zealand Europeans and other ethnic groups gets more difficult. Issues of ethnic intermarriage, multiple ethnicities, multiple ancestries and questions of whether ancestry or culture defines an ethnic group, add some major complexity in these processes. The issue of who should research whom would become even more difficult if issues such as class, education, sexual orientation and power relations within groups were brought into the analysis. For example, there is a wide diversity of lived experiences and viewpoints within ethnic groups and amongst women. There can be unacknowledged complexities in the identity of both those doing the studying and those being studied.

## Conclusion

The policy implications of diversity range widely. For many of those involved in the policy-making process, the primary challenge posed by diversity relates to the greater variety of preferences, needs and aspirations that have to be taken into account in the design and delivery of public services. In practical terms, this raises questions over whether, how and the extent to which the goals and parameters of the policy may need to be changed to accommodate a more diverse range of users, and how the needs of different groups can best be met.

At a more fundamental level, however, the subject of diversity resonates in important ways with broader questions about national identity and the role of the Treaty of Waitangi in public life. To the extent that New Zealand is becoming more diverse, especially in cultural and ethnic terms, then the character of the society is changing. This in turn is altering, albeit often in subtle and complex ways, how New Zealanders view themselves (and others). And

this, of course, affects the context in which policy debates are structured, the nature of the discourse, the range of voices wishing to be heard and the nature of the demands upon the political system.

Diversity thus affects the context for public debate about a wide range of vital issues. Whether directly or indirectly, it takes us to questions that lie at the heart of contemporary New Zealand politics and society.

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