The Community Outcomes Process and Mediated Modelling

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ABSTRACT

To promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities, the Local Government Act 2002 requires local authorities to produce a Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP). The LTCCP covers a 10-year period and focuses on the preferred future and vision of the community. The desired future is set out in what is referred to in the Act as the ‘community outcomes’.

Local authorities are required to engage the public, different stakeholder groups, central government, and non-governmental agencies in the development of community outcomes. Given the range of people, interest groups, and government agencies involved, local authorities are being challenged to think of effective and innovative ways to bring diverse and sometimes conflicting goals together when deciding community outcomes.

Mediated modelling is a tool that facilitates the involvement of groups of people in planning and decision-making processes. It amalgamates the use of computer modelling and public participation to better promote group learning and communal understanding of complex issues and conflicting goals.

This paper explores the scope for mediated modelling to be used as a tool by local authorities in helping to determine and implement community outcomes.

Introduction

The Local Government Act passed in 2002 (LGA, 2002) included the common themes of placing greater emphasis on consultation, finding out what the community wants (community outcomes), focusing on people’s social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being, planning for the long term, and developing sustainable communities.

To map the path to accomplishing these objectives, local authorities are required to prepare a Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP). The plan has a 10-year focus and is strategic in nature. As such, it requires local authorities and communities to deal in a sustainable manner with the big issues they face.

The LTCCP obliges local authorities to facilitate the process whereby communities decide what important outcomes need to be achieved in the immediate to long term for their city, district or region. The local authority then has the mandate to work in a collaborative way with different agencies and individuals to achieve these outcomes.

This new approach provides communities with greater input into the long-term development of their district or region. For the local authority there are also potential benefits. Knowing what the district or region rates as important helps the local authority plan and align activities with community aspirations; promote better co-ordination and application of resources; and encourage collaboration.

There are, however, issues associated with the process in terms of how community outcomes are set and what processes are in place to ensure that the outcomes are mutually compatible
and contribute to the sustainable development approach that is a purpose of the LGA 2002 (s3(d)). These issues are discussed in this paper and the option of using mediated modelling as a tool to enhance the community outcome process is explored. Mediated modelling is a relatively new process-orientated tool that uses computer-aided modelling to build shared understanding of complex problems and to reach consensus on how to address these problems (van den Belt, 2004). The first section of this paper outlines what the LTCCP is and the statutory requirements local authorities have to determine community outcomes. The next section considers community outcomes that have been decided on by a number of North Island local authorities and what they cover. This is followed by a discussion of some of the problems that have arisen as a result of the community outcomes process. The next section introduces mediated modelling and its potential to be used as part of the community outcomes process. A comparison of mediated modelling and the community outcomes process used by Palmerston North City Council is used as a case study. The final section draws some conclusions.

The Long-Term Community Council Plan

A LTCCP must be produced by a local authority at least every 3 years, and must cover a minimum period of 10 years (s93(3), (7)(a)), LGA, 2002). The LTCCP provides a “form of public statement of the local authority’s intentions in relation to the matters covered by the plan” (s96(1), LGA, 2002). Within the LTCCP, local authorities must describe for their district or region those community outcomes established by the residents of their area. The LTCCP must also explain/clarify how these outcomes have been identified, how the local authority, alone or in partnership, will help further these outcomes, the relationship between the outcomes and other key local authority documents, and the future monitoring and assessment mechanisms that will be used to evaluate progress towards these outcomes (schedule 10, LGA, 2002).

The LTCCP also includes a range of forecasts, financial information and a statement of the intended levels of service provision for groups and activities. The statutory requirement to produce plans and policies in conjunction with the community plus the requirement to facilitate a process that encourages the public to participate in the identification of outcomes illustrates the importance placed on public participation in the LGA, 2002. The LTCCP is the key accountability and planning document for local authority activities, and while the plan may be changed any amendments must be adopted in accordance with the special consultative process.

Community Outcomes

Community outcomes are high-level statements about what a community thinks important for its well-being. Community outcomes can broadly be described as the community’s desired vision in relation to their present and future social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being (LGA, 2002). They generally cover a broad range of topics including health, environment, safety, transport, issues related to the nature of growth or decline, as well as other specific objectives rated important by the community. In a sense, community outcomes provide a means for local authorities to plan for the future of their community; a role that is seen as of increasing importance for local government both nationally and internationally (McKinlay Douglas Limited, 2004; Denters and Rose, 2005). The LGA 2002 requires local authorities to work with their community and other stakeholders to develop their community outcomes. It also requires local authorities to ascertain their role in achieving the outcomes and identify other agencies that can contribute collaboratively to community outcomes.

The advantages associated with this approach include: clearly expressed outcomes of what the community wants provide the mandate for future local authority action; debate is stimulated
on local needs and priorities in terms of the present and future well-being of the community; this debate in turn informs and guides the setting of local authority, government agencies and community priorities; working to achieve the outcomes can provide a rationale for partnerships between agencies; participation in local affairs is encouraged and the community has a method/means to monitor progress towards improving community well-being.

Local authorities are required to carry out the process of identifying community outcomes for the intermediate and long-term future of their district or region not less than once every 6 years (s91(1), LGA, 2002). While local authorities are legally required under the Act to involve the public in the formation of the community outcomes, they have discretion over the means by which they choose to undertake the community outcomes process.

The act is very clear that the role of the local authority is as a facilitator in the identification of community outcomes, and that the process is centered on communities discussing their desired outcomes and their relative importance and priority (McKinlay Douglas Limited, 2004, p.15).

Desired outcomes are community based and the local authority does not necessarily have to agree with them. “Outcomes are a community judgement and therefore belong to the community not to the local authority” (Local Government New Zealand, 2003, p.39). A local authority does, however, have to consider the extent to which community outcomes are promoted in their decision-making (Wilson and Salter, 2003) and how the local authority will contribute to the outcomes the community has identified (Local Government New Zealand, 2003).

How Community Outcomes have been Determined

After an initial transition period all local authorities need to adopt a LTCCP for the period starting 1 July 2006 LGA (LGA, 2002) s 280. In the transition period, most local authorities have relied on previous consultation they have undertaken for strategic planning purposes to the determine community outcomes. Working towards the 2006 deadline, some local authorities have undergone extensive consultation exercises that local authority officers have acknowledged as unsustainable in the long term (Burke, 2004). A plethora of tools and techniques have been used for this purpose. Large numbers of people have been surveyed, taken part in focus groups, being visited by roadshows, or sought out in malls, libraries, festivals, schools, and markets. Public meeting and forums have been held as some local authorities view meetings as a ‘transparent method of demonstrating consultation’ (Burke, 2004, p. 24). If there is low attendance or concern about lack of representation then stakeholder meetings, follow-up focus groups and telephone surveys have been carried out. Other local authorities have concentrated on bringing together community groups and agencies, feeling discussion with residents and special interest groups provides a way for community members to talk about outcomes and priorities in depth and provide detailed feedback.

In some areas local authorities have taken a regional approach (e.g., Canturbury, Taranaki, Southland) to setting outcomes. Working groups across local authorities have been formed, and the desired outcomes have been set at the regional level. This approach has resulted in local authorities within a region having very similar community outcomes (e.g., Stratford and Taranaki Regional Council). Local authorities supporting a regional approach feel that partnerships with central government agencies have more potential to be efficient and provide consistent results than a series of approaches from individual local authorities. Agencies likely to be part of the process include Work and Income, District Health Boards, Housing NZ, Land Transport New Zealand, Ministries of Health, Education, Culture and Heritage, Police, Child Youth and Family, Statistics New Zealand, Ministry for Social Development, Ministry for the
After the consultation stage the recorded views and desires of the various individuals and stakeholders are grouped into ‘themes’. In a few cases the community outcomes process has been facilitated by an independent party, but the process has usually been carried out by local authority staff. Themes have been developed into outcomes. In some instances, draft outcomes are filtered through a reference group or taken directly back to the community for further comment. Others local authorities simply use the submissions process on the draft LTCCP for feedback.

**Analysis of Community Outcomes**

The following table (Table 33) contains an overview of the community outcomes of North Island regional, city and district councils. In total, the community outcomes, as set out in the LTCCP of 43 of the 57 local authorities, have been analysed. Those included were local authorities with their LTCCP and community outcomes available on the internet. Some of the outcomes pertain to those included in the current LTCCP, others, for example, Auckland Regional Council, are the outcomes being developed for inclusion in the LTCCP for the 2006 onwards. Six community outcome themes have been found to be key concerns and considerations for the territorial authorities. These fall under the headings: economy, infrastructure, natural environment, built environment, institutional needs, and social/cultural goals.

**Table 33** Common Community Outcome Themes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Theme</th>
<th>Concerns and Considerations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Most communities are keen to see their area with buoyant, thriving economic activity and growth. They want their locality to look after those carrying out business and welcome new business. Economic growth is desired for both the employment opportunities it presents and prosperity it provides. Some local authorities qualify these goals with a desire for ‘sustainable’ growth or growth where the negative impacts are managed. Napier City Council would like a ‘sustainable, resilient, innovative economy’. For Kaipara District Council, economic goals were seen as supporting community aspirations, with the goal being ‘a diversified and sustainable economy that supports the well-being of communities and residents’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Quality infrastructure sufficient to meet growth and development opportunities was frequently articulated as a desired community outcome. It was regarded as important that land use was supported by safe and efficient infrastructure and transport services. Infrastructural requirements included reliable and efficient communications systems and affordable recreational and social amenities. The need for energy to be used in a sustainable manner was voiced by a few local authorities, with the Bay of Plenty Regional Council desiring infrastructural development that was sensitive to the natural environment. Protection from hazards was mentioned by only two local authorities – Northland Regional Council and Thames-Coromandel District Council.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>For most communities clean land, water and air were essential goals in terms of future outcomes. Many others listed as important the need to protect endemic biodiversity. Protecting and enhancing coastal areas, headlands and estuaries as well as ensuring public access was also frequently sought as a future outcome. The need to ensure natural resources were protected, developed and enhanced for future generations was a common theme. The specific outcome of ensuring healthy soils was mentioned only by the Manawatu District Council. The need to keep animal and plant pests are under control was more commonly mentioned.</td>
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### Outcome Theme

<table>
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<th><strong>Concerns and Considerations</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Needs</strong></td>
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<td>A number of local authorities noted that partnerships and collaboration between central, regional and local government need to be structured in a way that is efficient and gets results. Others saw the need for communities, government and business to work more closely together. Democratic processes that allowed people to participate and have confidence in the decision-making process were seen as important. The need for Treaty of Waitangi principles to be incorporated and recognized in government decision-making was frequently mentioned.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Built Environment</strong></td>
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<td>A quality built environment, as well as the need for development to contribute to the natural and built local heritage, were desired by many communities. The need to contain sprawl and provide a range of affordable accommodation and housing was also stated. A built environment interconnected by a sustainable transport system was desired.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social and Cultural Goals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcomes of a social and cultural orientation were the most numerous. The desires for communities to be safe, healthy, motivated and active were frequently articulated community outcomes. Ensuring a full range of affordable health and social services were available locally and provided by the various government agencies in an integrated way was a common desire. One of the most frequently expressed outcomes was the need for educational and training opportunities in communities. This was seen as necessary for community well-being, as well as a means of providing the levels of skills needed by employers. Acknowledging and respecting cultural diversity was an important outcome most communities felt was necessary. Making provisions for special groups in society such as youth, the elderly, and the disadvantaged was also desired. The Auckland Regional Council had a specific outcome that “Maori are succeeding socially and economically, and contribute to decision making.” The need to respect and support the cultural values of tangata whenua was frequently expressed, as was the desire for people to have a sense of belonging and working together, pride in their region, a sense of identity and a positive community spirit. Opportunities to participate in the workforce as well as recreational, sporting and cultural activities were also wanted. The need to value the contribution of unpaid community work to social cohesion was expressed by the Horowhenua District Council. Managing population growth was also seen as an issue for the Kapiti District Council and Auckland Regional Council – both areas that have experienced rapid recent growth.</td>
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### Issues Associated with Community Outcomes

Analysis of the community outcomes process as it has been carried out to date has highlighted a number of potential or existing issues of concern for communities and local authorities.

**Local Authority Influence**

While local authorities have put considerable effort into engaging communities in the process, outcomes are arguably still influenced by local authority staff. This is due to the considerable role local authority officers’ play in collecting and collating information and using this to determine the final high level outcomes. In 2004, a report published by Local Government New Zealand stated that the potential exists for biases because “… generally, it has been local authority officers who have been responsible for developing the process, undertaking the consultation, recording what was discussed at public meetings, writing up and analysing public input, and developing outcomes statements…” (McKinlay Douglas Limited, 2004, pp. 28-29). Ways in which outcomes can be compromised include:

- Local authority officers consciously or unconsciously allow their own preferences and understanding to influence their interpretation of public views
- Local authority officers filter information, interpreting what they hear in terms of their own knowledge, understanding, use and interpretation of language
Engagement with local authority-led processes may vary among different community sectors.

An imbalance of resources between a local authority and other stakeholders may mean that background information, the options considered, and the focus chosen could unintentionally be driven from local authority perspective rather than by the community itself (McKinlay Douglas Limited, 2004).

That such bias is possible can be seen from the outcomes for Hutt City, who consulted with community groups, organisations and individuals and sent out a questionnaire. However, according to the LTCCP, “The initial Outcomes were based on Council employees’ understanding of what the community might want for a sustainable future. Research participants were then given the opportunity to list their own Outcomes” (Hutt City Council, n.d., p. 10).

Implementation

As can be seen from the previous section, community outcomes are generally expressed at a high level. Most are vaguely phrased and need to be clarified through some mechanism to make them practicable. While setting high-level outcomes has not been a problem it is envisaged that this may not be the case at the implementation phase (McKinlay Douglas Limited, 2004). Currently there is no way to determine whether or not outcomes can be implemented, and whether or not this process can be carried out in a way that does not cause conflict and tension (Burke, 2004).

Multiple Objectives

Another issue associated with the community outcomes process is the setting of multiple objectives based on the assumption that all are attainable simultaneously. Outcomes can be viewed as somewhat ‘utopian’ without some means of assessing how realistic it is to be aiming for goals that, for example, maximize economic growth at the same time as providing clean air, water and land for the well-being of the community. Community outcomes therefore contain conflicts and tensions that will need to be resolved if sustainability is the number one goal.

Priority Setting

Most local authorities have not set priorities for achieving their high-level outcomes. This is potentially another source of disagreement. Economic competitiveness is a key concern of local authorities and most actively seek economic growth (Cheyne, 2004). Many stakeholders would argue that economic development is necessary to provide the essential resources for social well-being and the rating base to fund local government expenditure. As such it should take precedence over social and environmental considerations. Others would say that social objectives such as good health in the community depend on a high-quality environment, and this outcome needs to be placed ahead of economic progress. Such differences in philosophy are not addressed by high-level outcomes that are not integrated, and the compromises and tradeoffs that need to be made are not transparent. Disagreements are likely to occur in terms of the mechanisms used to achieve outcomes and the setting of priorities.

An additional concern is that the different agencies required to work together have particular mandates that may be incompatible/divergent. Their ability to work collaboratively with other agencies will therefore be an issue (Burke, 2004). Stakeholders groups need to understand both the objectives of others, and the barriers and restrictions placed on their activities by institutional structures, legal requirements and resources. There are also issues regarding the scale at which community outcomes should focus. Central government agencies may prefer to work at the regional level especially in Auckland. However, local authority outcomes may
differ from regional outcomes and working at the regional scale does not promote local solutions to local problems (Burke, 2004, 12).

**Integrated Planning and Decision-making**

Achieving community outcomes requires a holistic approach to planning and decision-making. Some local authorities have made a conscious effort to ensure links are maintained between the different areas of their organization by appointing leaders chosen from within teams to meet and coordinate outcomes. The LGA 2002 has in this way facilitated a more holistic approach to operational management (Burke, 2004). While feedback from the initial stage indicates breakdowns in local authorities of the silo mentality, this approach also needs to be extended to other groups in the community. There is a need for tools to help with an integrated holistic approach as there is a limit to the amount of information and variables individuals and groups can consider simultaneously. The need to develop skills and information technology systems is seen as critical (Burke, 2004).

**Data availability**

There are currently few mechanisms to allow local authorities and agencies to align planning processes and share information. Waitakere City Council has collaborated with different organizations for over 20 years but still sees the need for improvement (Burke, 2004). In addition, much of the information collected by central government agencies is not available at the territorial authority level. These data will be needed to determine whether outcomes have indeed been achieved. The LGA 2002 puts the onus on local authorities to determine ways of measuring success, but this generally requires trend and baseline data against which success can be measured. In many instances such information is not readily available. Some local authorities, for example, those taking part in the Quality of Life project, are well advanced in data collection to measure trends in relation to the four well-beings. However, many others only have statistics available at a regional level or for areas that do not match local government boundaries. This is a national problem that needs to be addressed in a coordinated manner.

Whilst these problems and others exist, it is important to acknowledge that the changing expectations and requirements of local authorities under the LGA 2002 introduce the opportunity for a new set of approaches, ideas, and challenges that will take time to develop. The LGA 2002 has created a new context for local authorities to work in that is broader and deeper and opens ways for innovation (Burke, 2004). The remainder of this paper explores the utility of mediated modelling to address these issues.

**Mediated Modelling**

Mediated modelling is an internationally emerging tool used to facilitate the involvement of groups of people in planning, decision and policy-making processes. Mediated modelling amalgamates the use of computer modelling and public participation to promote group learning and communal understanding of the complex issues societies face. An array of computer models can be used in the mediated modelling process, including animated games, brain storming, cognitive mapping, optimisation modelling, and system dynamics modelling. The objective of the modelling is for groups to work together to identify the key relationships and issues affecting their community and build these into a systems model that can then be used in an interactive way to test alternative courses of action. “Mediated modeling is based on system dynamics thinking but emphasises the interactive involvement of affected stakeholders in the learning process about the complex system they are in” (van den Belt, 2004, p. 3). An important aspect of system dynamics is the construction of computer-based simulation models that serve to increase understanding of complex issues. The integration of social, economic and environmental concerns into models that are interactive and contain
feed-back loops enhances understanding of the dynamic behaviour of a system that is important when designing alternative solutions (van den Belt, 2004). According to van den Belt (2004) the key process steps in mediated modelling are:

Agreement by key participants on the software, the ground rules, and the questions that need to be addressed.

The development of a qualitative model during a number of workshop sessions through a process of discussion. A system approach that allows participants to look at an issue as a team, and which builds understanding. The aim is to decide the key variables that define most of the systems behaviour. Views are summarized on a projected computer screen in the form of a systems dynamic model. This is an abstract, simple representation of reality. The qualitative models identify the key data sets required.

The modeller cleans up the model between workshops and may meet with small groups, individuals or outside experts to agree any changes made to the model.

Development of a quantitative model that provides learning opportunities from simulating ‘what if’ scenarios. This model requires data sets that combine information from different organizations.

While mediated modelling provides a framework to build capacity, understanding and networks among stakeholders, other approaches also need to be considered. Cole and Maxwell (2005) argue that mediated modelling only contributes some part to the complex picture of achieving a sustainable future, and that using a transdisciplinary framework may be more advantageous.

Mediated Modelling and the Community Outcomes Process

The LGA 2002 requires local authorities to ‘discuss’ with communities when identifying outcomes. There is no definition of ‘discuss’ in the ‘Interpretation’ section of the Act. The general definition of ‘discuss’ is to have a conversation about; to consider by talking over; to debate (Collins, 2003). The LGA 2002 gives a local authority the right to decide for itself the process it uses to work with communities to identify community outcomes, and generally the procedure is for council staff to consult with individuals or interest groups. There is, however, limited ability for different organisations and groups to ‘discuss’ their concerns and capabilities with each other. Organisations and groups involved in the community outcomes process cover a range of interests – Maori, community groups, non-government organisations, business, central and local government, ethnic groups, and interested individuals. Given that local authorities under s91(3)(ii) have “to secure if practicable, the agreement of those organisations and groups to the process and to the relationship of the process to any existing and related plans”, such interaction would be valuable.

Mediated modelling provides a means for organizations, groups and individuals to come together and construct a model that identifies the variables that contribute to problems, show their trends, and allow ‘discussion’ of issues. It involves a consensus and model-building process that explores pragmatic questions such as:

- How the world works in a certain domain or worldview.
- What would constitute a more desirable state of the world or vision of the future?
- What policies will lead to that better state, given how the world works?” (van den Belt, 2004, p. 11).

To answer such questions, the modelling process requires groups to share their knowledge and understanding of specific issues and how they believe they or others in the group can
contribute to its solution. Whether or not mediated modelling can contribute to the community outcomes process that local authorities are required to undertake has not yet been rigorously tested. A preliminary attempt to assess its ability has been made by comparing the capacity of mediated modelling to enhance public participation within the community outcomes process with the methods used to determine community outcomes for Palmerston North. Six key participation characteristics have been used as a benchmark for this assessment:

- **Transparency** – a participation process is required that reveals the underlying assumptions, beliefs and values behind public involvement that are likely to increase shared learning, raise awareness of subjectivity, broaden stakeholder perspectives, and help legitimize the process (Rowe and Frewer, 2004).
- **Building consensus** – both enables the creation of the shared definition of the problem and promotes cooperation in the development of solutions (Chess, 2000; Rowe and Frewer, 2004).
- **A diverse range of participants** – to take into account more effectively the range of communal interests (Enserink and Monnikhof, 2003; Rowe and Frewer, 2004).
- **Consideration of interrelatedness of planning issues** – enables people to consider the complexity of issues, it helps better define the problem and solution sought (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004).
- **Conveyance of the wider public good** – promotes wider public views and issues to be considered in decision making rather than a narrow parochial approach (Forgie et al., 1999; van den Belt, 2004).
- **Fairness** – a diverse range of people are entitled to have an opportunity to speak and participate (Rowe and Frewer, 2004).

**Palmerston North’s City Council Community Outcomes Process**

The PNCC community outcomes process involved a number of steps. The process was planned by Council staff, and agreement on the process was reached by stakeholders and Council. Information on trends and current knowledge was used to identify ‘what sort of city people want’. From February to April 2005, PNCC initiated wide community consultation as part of their community outcomes process. The Council used a range of consultation and promotional techniques to engage people and promote feedback on community outcomes, including: interactive website promotion, submissions, displays, presentations, mail outs, information packs, school visits, radio interviews, and interviews with the ‘person on the street’ at shopping centres and on suburban buses. This information was collated by Council staff into outcomes. These outcomes were filtered through reference groups for confirmation and incorporated into the Palmerston North City Council Long Term Council Community Plan 2004/5–2013/14. The following list considers this consultation process in relation to mediated modelling, and the six assessment criteria identified:

- **Transparency** – Because PNCC’s consultation is based at individual and interest group level and because the community outcomes are developed in house, the process between opinions and outcomes is a black box. The wider community may not be able to understand how the outcomes have been derived from their input. Although they have the right to make submissions (using the Special consultative procedure (LGA 2002 s(83)) on the draft LTCCP, submitters have the same issues as with the annual plan submission process (Forgie, 2001). In contrast, if people and groups had had the opportunity to come together to describe and explain their visions for the future and construct a model that shows interrelationships and how these interrelationships would impact on specific outcomes, how the final outcomes decided on would be more transparent. The increased level of understanding, however, will only pertain to those involved in the process. The development of a quantitative model and making it operational would also have a black box component.

- Mediated Modelling/PNCC’s community outcomes process
Building consensus – Because PNCC’s current community outcomes process does not allow for dialogue and discussion amongst diverse community groups, it does not build consensus about what the community outcomes should be. While dialogue is a valid option in itself if this opportunity were presented to participants, mediated modelling would provide a means to structure discussion. If mediated modelling was used in a forum to determine outcomes, stakeholders could then discuss and debate future outcomes, and build consensus about what these outcomes should be and how to prioritize them.

✓ Mediated Modelling

Diversity of Participants – PNCC’s process involved a diverse range of participants, and, through surveys and interviews, they successfully consulted parties who might have otherwise not taken part in shaping Palmerston North’s community outcomes. While participants have a more active involvement in the mediated modelling process, mediated modelling could not have directly involved such a wide group of people as was involved in PNCC’s process.

✓ PNCC’s community outcomes process

Considers interrelatedness of planning issues – Because PNCC discussion forums were for specific interest areas, group discussions were likely to remain in the context of these issues, and consequently were less likely to consider the interrelatedness of wider planning issues. In contrast, the modelling used in mediated modelling enables groups to conceptualise the community-wide context of planning issues.

✓ Mediated Modelling/PNCC’s community outcomes process

Conveys the wider public good – The PNCC system of asking a diverse range of people for their input, while positive in that it allows people to express their views, gives them no responsibility for determining how their desired outcomes can be achieved or for considering the broader implications of their demands. Mediated modelling requires participants to consider the broader public good and provides a visible means of vetting the quality of input provided by citizen engagement.

✓ Mediated Modelling

Fairness – PNCC’s current community outcomes process can be argued to be fairer than an outcomes process based on mediated modelling, as it allows for a wider range of participants to take part in the process. Furthermore, the separate interest group/stakeholder workshops undertaken by the Council enable consultation to be appropriately fashioned to the cultural and social needs of the interest group being consulted.

✓ PNCC’s community outcomes process

The strengths of the mediated modelling process include its capacity to build consensus and promote transparency through the process, as sought by the LGA 2002. This is due to the open dialogue required for participation during the model-building process, and the subsequent collective learning that helps build consensus within a group as understanding increases. Mediated modelling also provides a means for different groups and agencies to ascertain their role in achieving community outcomes. Mediated modelling enables the interrelatedness of social, environmental and economic planning issues to be considered by stakeholders, allows groups to consider the wider public good, and prioritise outcomes. While both approaches can contribute to conveying the wider public good the mediated modelling process would be more transparent to those involved.

The PNCC process has the ability to involve a wider range of participants more readily and is fairer in the sense that more views can be heard. Mediated modelling, because of its technical nature, may appeal more to people with a logical/mathematical inclination rather than other types of human intelligence such as intra- or inter-personal. Open forum participation may
also not be appropriate for all community groups and stakeholders. As a consequence some individuals and groups may be excluded or under-represented.

While it is apparent that there are strengths in using mediated modelling to enhance participation in the community outcomes process there are also weaknesses. Nevertheless, this does not mean that mediated modelling cannot complement the current local authority community outcomes processes. Mediated modelling would be particularly useful in supporting PNCC’s community outcomes process by creating a forum where consensus can be built, implementation mechanisms developed and the priority of community outcomes determined. This forum could be used in particular to meet sections 91(2)(a) and 91(2)(b) of the LGA 2002, which requires the Council to provide opportunities for communities to ‘discuss’ their desired outcomes in terms of the present and future social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of the community, and the relative importance of these outcomes. This may be of particular value in determining the role of central government agencies in contributing towards community outcomes. Central government stands to be one of the principal beneficiaries of the legislation if better cooperation/collaboration improves the effectiveness of policy making and service delivery (McKinlay Douglas Limited, 2004).

**Conclusions**

Without some means of advancing the implementation of community outcomes, the LGA 2002 and the LTCCP are not going to make significant progress towards achieving sustainable development in New Zealand.

Using the criteria for effective participation, the assessment has shown that aspects of PNCC’s community outcomes process are fairer, are more able incorporate a diverse range of the public, and consequently are better able to convey the views of a wider public. Nevertheless, a role for mediated modelling within the community outcomes process has emerged. It can promote transparency within the community outcomes process as sought through the LGA 2002, further the interrelatedness of community issues to be considered by the stakeholders and community in the development and implementation of community outcomes, create a forum for building consensus in determining and prioritising community outcomes, and provide a means to illustrate the trade-offs involved in decision-making.

Mediated modelling could be most effectively incorporated into the community outcomes process at two stages. First, after seeking wider public input to establish draft outcomes, the mediated modelling forum could be used to meet s91(2)(b) of the LGA 2002, which requires local authorities to “allow communities to discuss the relative importance and priorities of identified outcomes to the present and future social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of the community”. Such a forum would provide a means for community groups and individuals to debate alternative community outcomes as well as build understanding of the types of barriers to sustainable future that exist in the community.

Second, given that local authorities have “to secure, if practicable, the agreement of those organisations and groups to the process and to the relationship of the process to any existing and related plans” (s91(3)(ii)) mediated modelling could be used as a means of integrating the actions of the different organisations and groups involved to make desired community outcomes a reality. While there are advantages associated with using mediated modelling as a participatory tool, local authorities may benefit most by using it as a means to develop relationships with central and local government and agencies and to prioritise outcomes. It provides a tool to look at issues in an integrated way and has the potential to provide the strategic breakthroughs that are sought from the LTCCP process.
“If the community outcomes process is to realise its potential, all participants will need to focus on ensuring that, whatever process they use, it:

- Enables strategic thinking rather than inhibits it through an over emphasis on process.
- Emphasises that the process belongs to the community, and not to any one stakeholder or group of stakeholders.
- Accepts that, whilst improving “business as usual” is an important part of the outcomes process, the real gains will come as it enables strategic breakthroughs-quantum shifts in performance in promoting one or more of economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing” (McKinlay Douglas Limited, 2004, p.6).

Exploring new techniques such as mediated modelling, will be necessary to encourage community and stakeholder leadership in the development of community outcomes and to increase community ownership of these outcomes. Such public endorsement will allow local government to advance community aspirations and sustainability goals rather than be restricted to the limited roles of service provider and regulator.

References


