

Envisioning Convergence

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Local Community Contexts for Holistic Approaches: Further Comments and Thoughts

Infusing Community Processes with Spirituality

Lani Yamasaki

Working with businesses and non profits has shown Lani Yamasaki the many ways in which an artist or culture and arts professional can help infuse community processes with the values of culture – or as she says, “the *spirit*.” A Native Hawaiian of mixed ancestry, Yamasaki is Executive Director of ‘Ano‘ano Aloha in Waimea, Hawai‘i, a non profit that works to incorporate the arts, sciences, humanities, and sustainable environmental practices in community-based economic development projects. She has also served as an independent Hawaiian culture and arts consultant for twenty years.

The fact that Hawaii’s principal industry is tourism represents both hazard and opportunity for the indigenous Hawaiian community. In recent years, the Hawaii Visitors Bureau has sought to learn what attracts the all-important return visitor. They want authenticity, Yamasaki reports; above all, they “want to understand real Hawaiian culture. The type of return visitors the Hawaii Visitor’s Bureau seeks to attract is fairly well educated and usually affluent. This audience seeks to have a more in depth understanding about Hawaiian traditions and cultural practices which go beyond Waikiki showrooms.”

This has led to a renaissance of Hawaiian culture in the past three decades, but to some surprising commodifications of cultural values and symbols. There is a growing number of people in key positions “that really want to promote Hawaiian culture,” Yamasaki says, “but many times they aren’t well-versed in the cultural traditions so they continue to perpetuate stereotypes, breach protocol, or make outright mistakes.” The word *aloha*, she notes, is a “primary value, which refers to many things – a greeting, love, kindness, mercy, compassion, and affection. There are two words in aloha. *Alo* is one’s presence or being and *ha* is one’s life breath or to breathe upon. Sharing aloha means the divinity of my spirit recognizes the divinity of your spirit.”

In the Oahu phone directory there are three pages devoted to businesses using aloha in their company titles from car dealerships to mortgage brokers. “This is a classic example of how a cherished Hawaiian value has been insensitively culturally appropriated. Our elders teach us to use language responsibly because words are powerful and imbued with life force. If language is misused, it can trigger an adverse response.”

Yamasaki works with corporations and organizations to help them understand the true implications of Hawaiian culture, and to infuse occasions with the spiritual wisdom of her ancestors, who guide her own understanding. "When you bring in elders as the *haku* or guardians of a gathering, it makes a tremendous difference," she says. "People generally become more conscious of their behavior and speech. They make an effort to participate in a respectful manner to all present."

Traditionally organized gatherings begin with a *pule* or prayer and end with a *pule*. This sets the tone for the day and completes the day with a blessing. The *pule* calls for *Akua* (The Creator) and the *aumakua* (ancestral guardians and ancestors) to be present and to serve as witnesses to the proceedings. If the atmosphere is contentious, it helps to pray to *Akua* and the *aumakua*. If there is unresolved conflict, the *haku* are often asked to conduct *ho'oponopono* – a uniquely Hawaiian mediation practice that restores balance and brings about resolution in a matter that is satisfactory to all present. *Ho'oponopono* has gained international recognition as a highly effective mediation practice. It is used by Harvard and was introduced to the United Nations.

"Adaptation is always a compromise," Yamasaki admits, and she's optimistic about the movement to incorporate authentic Hawaiian culture in the community and workplace. Based on a spiritual foundation, traditional Hawaiian cultural values are inclusive and family oriented. As she points out, "this is universally appealing. Earth-based cultures understand that light and dark co-exist to maintain balance in the universe. We're in a period of tremendous spiritual awareness and growth world-wide."

On Community Organizing and Building Critical Mass

Moises Gonzalez

Moises Gonzalez has seen policies that distort culture or degrade the environment too often. The U.S. Forest Service dictum that permits extensive logging on public lands in northern New Mexico, but not full wood gathering for subsistence or indigenous building, seems especially perverse.

Intersecting policy and market forces produce numerous such examples. In northern New Mexico, it's possible to get a permit for subsistence grazing, he notes, but the process and oversight are so onerous people often sell their permits. Before long, rather than subsistence for many, one person holds all the permits. "The reality of economics," says Gonzalez, who is Co-Chair of the Mexicano Land Education and Conservation Trust in Espanola, New Mexico, "is that if you don't relate it to how it intersects with the landscape, there will be negative consequences."

Because policies governing so many situations offer no alternative for those who cannot simply pick up and go elsewhere, Gonzalez has spent much of his life organizing counter-efforts. And he's happy to report that there are instances where land-based practices, local control, and cooperation among economic and community developers and environmentalists have taken hold.

In response to Indian and Mexican-American land claims, Congress authorized a study of how public lands should be managed and preserved. It forced the environmental community to come to the table, and pushed everyone to build a consensus. "It required us all to think out of the box, and now, in principle, there's joint management on some lands. We can build on some plazas and hills, and revert to traditional agriculture." Gonzalez points to Truchas, New Mexico as another example of what local autonomy can accomplish. The community manages its own forest and land, and enjoys genuine community cohesiveness in planning and building its own structures.

The Mexicano Land, Education, and Conservation Trust works with a coalition of forty communities who lead each other by example. To belong, a community must be "internally catalyzed" – no one will come in from the outside to organize. When other communities see them lobbying at the state level, they consider following suit.

To create a voice that can change policy, Gonzalez believes you need to "draw out 100 visionaries in each community," or several thousand people. Then you "need to attach yourself to bankers, leaders, and the business community – make them your allies." Only then will you have the critical mass to have an impact. "If you're on a mission you have to have converts!" he stresses. "It's their ability to convince others that builds a movement."

On Cultural Practitioners as Mediating Forces *Shalom Staub*

It was heartening to see how easily conference-goers from the environmental and economic development fields turned to the concept of culture, or a sense of place, as a way to capture the notion of sustainability, says Shalom Staub, Academic Affairs Fellow at Dickinson College. Moreover, as he listened to talk about culture as a worldview compounded of patterns of thought, meanings, motivations, and behaviors, he realized how cultural practitioners can assist in planning processes for community economic development.

Whether a community is homogeneous or heterogeneous, says Staub, divergent views emerge early. "Hopefully, a community will have a history of listening and building consensus in solving problems." But if it doesn't, cultural practitioners can serve as facilitators, especially if they have conflict resolution skills.

"People have visions for what they want," he remarks, "and often don't know they're talking about the same thing as those with whom they disagree. Unpacking the language to get beyond competing truths helps people dig deeper to get at the basic assumptions and worldview behind what they're saying. When you broaden the field of vision, you create wiggle room where connections can be made and you can find you have something to build on."

Staub cites an experience he had mediating a land dispute. The plaintiffs were suing to gain a right-of-way so they could access their land on a mountainside.

Building such a road struck the defendants as the beginning of the end – i. e., dreaded development. “People had been fighting for so long they’d forgotten the original issue,” Straub recalls. Slowly, as a result of his mediation, they realized they all wanted some version of the same thing: no other houses. “Their greatest fear was subdivision,” says Straub, “and once they saw they could get close to a common vision, they were able to sit down face to face to deal with the details, none of which were insurmountable.”

When conference discussions turned to tourism and culture as a source of economic activity, Straub saw further potential for the work of cultural practitioners. “Studies of cultural tourism – analytical ones, not those tilted toward advocacy – show there’s a real need for both ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’ work,” he reports, characterizing the artifice associated with pseudo-Amish villages near Lancaster, Pennsylvania as necessary. These villages create a buffer that shields real Amish farms from busloads of tourists and allows them to maintain their traditions without interference. Folklorists often tap into what Straub calls this “private sphere of culture” – the beliefs and knowledge that tie people to a place – and can also play a useful role in working with traditional communities to fashion an appropriate “public sphere” for the consumption of outsiders. Recognizing the importance of both the private and public dimensions of cultural performance can be useful in the context of cultural tourism development.

Culture in Economic and Public Policy Debates: Further Comments and Thoughts

On Culture and Place-based Policy in Rural Development

Emery Castle

As chair of the Kellogg Foundation's National Rural Studies Committee, and currently, Director Emeritus of the Oregon State University's Rural Studies Program, Dr. Emery Castle believes we need to change the way policy affecting rural America is made.

At the local level, he reports, it's no struggle to acknowledge how multifaceted culture is, and how thoroughly it permeates our lives. As they plan, communities consider their legacy and the future, and recognize the importance immediately. But at the macro level you run into difficulty. "There's no one at the table representing the viewpoint that culture is an important dimension," he explains. "You run into people whose specialties feature cut and dried techniques they wish to apply without incorporating anything else, so they dismiss it." Even if they do recognize the need to account for culture, he says, they recognize they can't do it in an adequate way and aren't aware there are specialists, like folklorists and ethnographers, who can help.

Advocating for place-based policy is also difficult. Cultural conservation and environmental preservation can be addressed adequately in the context of place, but economic forces are global and national in reach. Rural economics are less well developed than urban and regional economics.

As Castle sees it, "the challenge is to tame place-related market failures and relate them to culture and nature." Until such problems are addressed there will be finger pointing and not much policy analysis. He explains: "Environmentalists don't want to go very far in this direction because they can push more easily on comprehensive matters, like water; urban interests are afraid more resources will go to rural areas. Until we can come up with some concepts that demonstrate the benefits of place-based policy in concrete terms, it won't go far." And what would he recommend? "What we really need is recognition and incorporation of the effects of place-based policies that already exist in health, education, and the environment. If we could account for and accommodate these effects, it would really demonstrate something."

On Market Forces, Globalization, and Culture

Lisi Krall

"The traditions of knowledge people accumulate in a place, the strength of relationships they build there over time, the imprinting that goes on in individual lives generation after generation make for an extraordinary element of rootedness expressed culturally," muses Lisi Krall, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Economics at the State University of New York in Cortland. "Unfortunately, the market forces that govern our lives have absolutely no sensitivity to rootedness."

In part, she says, markets are indifferent because they require mobility of resources; of capital and labor. "There are benefits to this mobility, at least in theory. Along with free trade, mobility of resources is supposed to allow us to get more output from the resources we have; that is, to give us economic efficiency. To make things even more confusing, although there is a preoccupation with efficiency, this preoccupation doesn't extend to a general concern about an economic system that grows indefinitely on a finite planet." She believes there's a long way to go before the planet's resources are depleted, but "we nevertheless need to get off the growth paradigm. We should be talking about stabilizing growth, yet it's nowhere in our public discourse."

Krall admits that "people are baffled. They don't know what to do with the complex and contradictory system we have. Economists have done a great job of mystifying the economy, and politicians of totally oversimplifying it." Meanwhile, she notes, it's virtually impossible to make the kind of connections that attach people to place in a globalized market system.

This raises a poignant question for Krall: Are the benefits of globalization worth the cost? She thinks we should ask "What are the benefits of maintaining culture attached to place? We need to look at that. It's an extraordinarily complicated problem and communities all over the United States and the globe are grappling with it – the leveling effects of globalization; the difficult framework it creates in which to move forward and provide an economic base around which 'community' can flourish."

There is a huge literature on alternative economic paradigms and possibilities, Krall notes, but these alternatives threaten entrenched powers. Then, too, having witnessed the USSR's dissolution, the only alternative we know well – socialism – is a frightening prospect to many people. Still, dissenters' thinking might prompt debate that could be socially productive.

Meanwhile, efforts to use renewable resources and produce less pollution are laudable, Krall says, but "in a market economy, unless we put laws in place for all participants, such efforts place those that adhere to them at a competitive disadvantage." But in the end, Krall says, "these are nonetheless insufficient responses to the free market and the environmental and cultural problems it creates."

In a nutshell, she says, “we like boutique capitalism, the Adam Smithian model, but this is no longer the world we live in. The market economy has been remarkable in terms of what it has produced, but its success is matched by a multitude of failures, environmental and cultural degradation among them. It’s a real dilemma. There’s *a lot* of work to do.”

On Regional, Rural Governance in Place-based Policy *Chuck Fluharty*

As Founding Director of the Rural Policy Research Institute, a national public policy consortia supported by Member Universities, the University of Nebraska, Iowa State University, and the University of Missouri-Columbia, Charles W. Fluharty is a passionate advocate of place-based policy. But when he discusses its promise with rural people, he cautions that rural data often masks the tremendous diversity of rural place, circumstance, and geography; and that such policies are often only comprehensible within the context of community and culture. It’s very hard to find “dirt truths” that are actionable across the entire rural landscape.

If we weren’t so “ethnocentric,” Fluharty believes we would find greater cause for hope in models other countries are creating. “The U.K., Ireland, other E.U. countries and Canada are far ahead of us,” he reports, in “creating frameworks that appreciate community, culture, and social cohesion. They’ve done a lot of work on policy, program design, and evaluation, and incorporated indices that include cultural indicators – very elaborate systems that factor considerations of community-based groups, neighborhoods, private-public linkages, and the continuum of creativity and cultural responses, etc., to assure cultural sensitivity and uplift.”

He thinks there are several reasons the U.S. lags behind: “we are very ‘new’ to this landscape as ‘a people,’ and believe we were the first here (which, of course, we weren’t). We’ve enjoyed an expansive spatial freedom and, therefore, we haven’t had to address and resolve the difficult issues with which many older cultures have been forced to grapple. Finally, we are only now coming to a ‘sense of true place,’ as we lose the potential for continued continental expansion, and as we grow to recognize that our idealized rural past has vanished. There has also been a hollowing out of civic culture – the center – by the left and right which has kept federal, regional, and local levels of policy in tension.”

Still, Fluharty reports, as the federal government continues to relinquish decision making and funding obligations to lower levels of government, a rural “new governance” framework is actually emerging, in which the public, private, nongovernmental, and philanthropic sectors are building a more integrative, coordinated framework for place-based policy. These developments are critical, as the center of our civic culture continues to erode, and citizens feel less and less able to influence public sector actions on their own behalf.

The Appalachian Regional Commission, in existence since the War on Poverty, is one regional effort that has been moving toward incorporating social, cultural, and

community concerns and opportunities, while promoting cross-sectoral, place-based policies. Other regional entities are also emerging, such as the Regional Authorities in the Great Plains, Black Belt (Southeast), and Delta regions.

Other new “intermediary” organizations are taking up this mantle, and working to incorporate cultural considerations into regional approaches. Among these, rural community colleges and regional universities are addressing their increasing responsibilities to develop the human and social capital of the regions which they serve. For example, True North Community College, a unique cluster of five rural community colleges in northern Minnesota, is reinventing how these educational institutions can incorporate cultural affinity, heritage, and tourism in addressing community and economic development. And with the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in the offing, there may be more such opportunities. “So there is some very real public sector innovation happening,” he concludes. “But, as usual, the non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) and philanthropies will play an indispensable role in supporting the development of new innovations in the public sector.”

On the Role of Foundations

Nancy Fushan

Many foundations recognize the interconnectedness and interdependence of culture, environmental concerns, and sustainable livelihoods on an intellectual level, says Nancy Fushan, a Program Officer at the Bush Foundation in Saint Paul, Minnesota. They’re just not sure how best to support rural communities in integrating the three. “At Bush,” she admits, “while we continue to address these concerns within individual grant making areas, we are now trying to learn how some of these communities operate in order to more effectively and comprehensively work across our grant making programs.”

The Bush Foundation’s initial attempt to work on an interdisciplinary basis has been in the area of Ecological Health. Fushan’s colleague Jane Kretzmann, who oversees the area, observes that any broadly-defined program must ultimately be realized in communities that vary widely – and that requires a nuanced approach. Her program seeks to help people and organizations develop ways “to treat ecological health as an interdependent system, rather than as isolated problems to be solved.” Key principles include community action, social equity, knowledge, and incentives to balance social, economic, and environmental concerns. The program also seeks interdisciplinary approaches and emphasizes integration across topic areas such as promoting clean and renewable energy, encouraging best practices in farming, and improving water quality.

In the past two years, a few of the projects have included cultural components. For example, the Illusion Theater, a Minneapolis-based ensemble that focuses its work on challenging social issues, is collaborating with public agencies and environmental groups on a production and education project to reduce lead poisoning. They intend to mount productions that involve youth as actors and

educational peer counselors to raise awareness among children, families, and landlords in urban and rural communities. The Foundation also approved a grant to the organization Trees, Water & People to plant shade trees and train Indian youth to install solar collectors on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota to reduce energy costs in homes, to increase the water supply for tribal bison herds, and to offer new employment opportunities. When the trees were planted last year, there was a community celebration featuring traditional Lakota rituals. Organizers hope that connecting the project to Lakota cultural values may build greater community ownership of the initiative.

Other Minnesota-based funders have developed grant making programs and processes in small towns and rural areas around particular issues of interest. McKnight Foundation in Minneapolis established regionally-based Initiative Funds in the 1980s to address a range of issues in rural communities. The Blandin Foundation of Grand Rapids and Northwest Area Foundation, also of Saint Paul – have committed to working in selected communities over long periods of time with the intention of strengthening civic participation, leadership, improving the region's economic well-being, and/or reducing poverty. While colleagues from some other foundations are also currently engaged in interdisciplinary program development, notes Fushan, it's too early to tell whether the new programs flowing from that work will focus on interconnecting culture, environmental concerns, and sustainable livelihoods

Fushan thinks, "Bush's initial funding of interdisciplinary projects within Ecological Health is part of a long-term learning process that may lead to broader and more effective work in rural areas of our region." She imagines sharing ideas with others, especially other foundations in regional meetings, or at gatherings of affinity groups like Grantmakers in the Arts or the Environmental Grantmakers Association. "The more ideas, the better!" she says.