LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

OVERSEAS EXCHANGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

DEVELOPING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



Honourable Nanaia Mahuta, New Zealand Minister of Local Government and senior officials, discussing climate change with student protestors during the Society of Local Government Summit in Napier

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September 2019

Pictures, below and on the cover page, were taken during the New Zealand Society of Local Government Managers (SOLGM) Summit in the City of Napier on September 27, 2019. The photograph on the cover was taken outside the Napier Conference Centre and shows the Honourable Nanaia Mahuta, Minister of Local Government with a number of her senior staff, listening to students, and their supporters, whom as part of a world-wide effort and following the lead of Swedish activist, Greta Thunberg, were not attending their schools, but rather protesting what they considered to be inadequate government action to combat climate change.



Napier, New Zealand, 27 September 2019

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2019, I was pleased to be advised that I had been selected to participate in a two-week partnership program between the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) in British Columbia and the Society of Local Government Managers (SOLGM) in New Zealand. The Overseas Exchange Program provides an opportunity for senior executives in local government in both jurisdictions to experience two weeks in the life of their counterpart and learn about best practices in the delivery of services in local government. The experience is scheduled to revolve around the annual conferences of the two organizations; September in New Zealand and June in British Columbia.

The many similarities between British Columbia and New Zealand, such as language, evolutionary history, population, coastal geography, political structures, socio-economic conditions, demographics, rural setting, fisheries and agricultural industries, First Nations heritage and international relationships provide an excellent foundation for mutual learning opportunities. Having said that, there are also significant differences between the two jurisdictions, particularly as it relates to the delivery of services at the local government level with the major one being the governance structure and political framework. Whereas, there are two levels of government in New Zealand, namely the national and the local, there are four such levels in British Columbia, namely: the national, the provincial, the regional and the local levels. This has a direct impact on not only how, but also which, services are delivered by local government.

I was fortunate to be able to see not just the Southlands area of New Zealand, where my Program partner works, but many, if not all, of the major cities of both the south and north islands. The specific learning objectives established as part of the Program were two-fold, relating to developing resilient communities and adaptation to climate change. There is much to learn with any exchange opportunity, simply by observing how other jurisdictions deal with and address different issues. The learning around increasing community resiliency by empowering the public, through community organizations and volunteer groups, to assume the responsibility of operating and maintaining services; and preparation of seismic mapping and building standards, as an initiative of the national government, are noted as significant and worthy of follow up, more detailed review.

INTRODUCTION

In May 2019, based on a recommendation from my boss, the Chief Administrative Officer at the Township of Langley, I made an application to take part in the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) Overseas Manager Exchange program, in partnership with the New Zealand Society of Local Government Managers (SOLGM).

Subsequently, in June 2019, I was extremely pleased to receive the notification from LGMA that I had been successful in my application and was selected to participate in the program in September 2019, to coincide with the SOLGM annual conference (summit), for a two-week period. I was excited to start planning for the experience.

My exchange partner, I was advised by LGMA, was selected to be Mr. Rex Capil, Group Manager, Community and Futures at Southland District Council. While based on our initial email and telephone communications, I had a sense of my good fortune in having been paired with Mr. Capil, the degree to which I had been blessed with this selection became clear and evident when my wife and I arrived at our hosts' home in the City of Invercargill located in the Southland Region in the South Island of New Zealand and one of the southernmost cities in the world.

Rex and his wife Carolyn were the most gracious hosts who took care of our every needs, far beyond the exchange program's expectations, including planning a schedule that comprised visiting most major cities and local government authorities on the South Island. Thanks to Rex and Carolyn, we were also able to visit a number of tourist attraction spots, and experience the beauty of New Zealand, with such places as the unforgettable Doubtful Sound in the South Island's Fiordlands (see appendices).

The theme of the 2019 SOLGM annual conference was "If it takes a village to raise a child...". It was held in Napier, in Hawke's Bay on the east coast of the North Island. It was very well attended with a number of participants from overseas, including Australia, United Kingdom, United States of America and of course Canada. Topics included in the program covered such areas as leadership, disaster recovery, sustainable land use planning and Māori culture in the local government context.

New Zealand (*Aotearoa*) is an island country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. It has two main landmasses: the North Island and the South Island. It has a total land area of approximately 268,000 square kilometres with a 2019 population estimated at 4.8 million residents, affectionately referred to as “Kiwis” after the beloved Kiwi bird, not the fruit of the same name.

Due to its geographic isolation, New Zealand has developed a unique biodiversity of animal, fungal, and plant life. The country's varied topography and its mountain peaks, such as the Southern Alps, owe much to the tectonic uplift of land and volcanic eruptions. The capital city is Wellington, and its most populous city is Auckland.

It is important to note that the governance structure in New Zealand consists of the national (Central) government and the local (Municipal) government. There are currently 78 local government (city and district councils) in New Zealand. Both the central and local government elections generally occur every three years. Whereas there is no fixed date established for the former, the latter is typically held on the second Saturday in October. The last local government elections were held in October 2019 and the next national government elections are scheduled for 2020 and cannot occur any later than November 21.

There are many similarities between British Columbia and New Zealand, beyond the obvious commonality of language, history, evolution as independent states, population and coastal geography. These include political structures and socio-economic conditions, demographics, rural setting, prominent industries of fisheries and agricultures, First Nations heritage and international relationships.

One of the primary reasons for my personal desire to participate in this program, beyond the obvious opportunity to see such a naturally beautiful part of the world and experience the culture, was the potential learning opportunity as it relates to developing resilient communities and adaptation to climate change. Of particular interest were the country’s advancements following the 2011 earthquake in the City of Christchurch on the South Island.

Pictures below were taken in the City of Christchurch and with firstly, the Cathedral showing the effects of the 2011 earthquake; and secondly a commercial building in the business district that remains vacant and unrepaired due to the significant upgrade costs being beyond the private owners' ability to afford. The local and central governments are exploring opportunities to provide such building owners with financial assistance to facilitate remodelling, of reconstruction, of such buildings in order to attract economic development activity to the area.

Christchurch: Cathedral (top) & Vacant Commercial Building in the Central Business District (bottom)





SOLGM Summit Highlights



As discussed earlier, the theme of this year's summit was: "*If it tales a village….*". With that, the plenary sessions as well as workshops revolved around the topic of community well-being. The speakers included authors, academics, economists, non-government activists, indigenous leaders, climate change practitioners and of course elected officials, regulators, local government executives and professionals. Some of specific topics discussed included bi-cultural competency, diversity and inclusion; promoting community stewardship; collaboration; and resource management. Of particular interest was an international panel consisting of local government managers from the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States, discussing challenges of managing diverse communities (please refer to the picture above).

OBJECTIVES

Local governments throughout the world face similar challenges with respect to aging infrastructure, increased responsibilities, public expectations, limited sources of funding and effective delivery of services.

With that, there are increasing opportunities for sharing of learning, knowledge and experience as part of national and international seminars, conferences and symposia, where officials get together to exchange ideas, discuss observed trends, and promote development and application of best management practices. The concept of "think globally, act locally" can be truly said to be a prime motivator of the LGMA / SOLGM Overseas Management Exchange Program.

The three objectives outlined below and listed as learning opportunities can more broadly be categorized under the heading of "Developing Resilient Communities":

- Disaster Management
- Climate Change Adaptation
- Community Engagement

OBJECTIVE 1

Disaster Management:

For the purposes of this report, and as discussed, reviewed and considered in the context of the Overseas Exchange Program, 'Disaster Management' is defined in relation with the two key areas of: a) flood hazard management; and b) seismic analysis.

New Zealand experienced catastrophic earthquakes in 2010 and 2011. Consequently, the country's scientific knowledge and by extension regulatory framework, was increased and enhanced, with thanks to significant investment of resources to ensure future readiness of communities, by the national government.

One example of the developments following the earthquakes of 2010/2011 was the creation of a South Island Alpine Fault Earthquake Response (SAFER) document that aims to improve community resiliency by employing best management practices for better

preparedness for earthquake responsiveness. A fundamental principle of the SAFER framework, is the recognition of the need for a science-based approach in informing land use planning, infrastructure construction and community development decisions. It provides a systematic, proactive, and consistent approach to inter-organizational coordination in emergency planning and management. This is a great point of learning in terms of potential replication in British Columbia. While there are many resources available in British Columbia, produced by the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources, there is no singular repository of such information readily available to local governments to assist in regular decision-making.

Much can be learned from a thorough review of the SAFER Framework document with potential replication within the British Columbia context. This includes preparation of similar documents for various regions across British Columbia, as a central depository of practical information and used ass a Best Practices guide, about building locations and precautionary measures, based on scientific information. Using data, including current mapping and other information prepared and made available by the Geological Survey of Canada and other sources and resources prepared by the provincial government, local, and perhaps more efficiently and effectively regional governments in British Columbia, can, and should, consider preparing Emergency Response planning documents to guide land use and community development plans and initiatives. Such document, based on specific local information would be particularly beneficial in involving local governments and key stakeholders in developing resiliency and nurturing a sense of ownership in emergency responsiveness.

Emergency Management Southland, acting under the authority of the central government, having a mandate similar to British Columbia's Emergency Management BC (EMBC), is the agency responsible for administration of the SAFER Framework as a "living" document. While not intended to provide a detailed 'plan of action', the document provides a clear outline of responsibilities, situational awareness and operational coordination for various agencies, including those operating at the local government level. It has been proven essential, therefore, for such affected local government agencies to

develop area-specific detailed plans and procedures to deal with emergencies, regardless of type, size or scale.

In 2017, the Government of New Zealand introduced a new Building (Earthquake-Prone Buildings) Amendment Act with major changes to the way earthquake-prone buildings are identified and managed. The system provides leadership and direction on how to manage the risks to public safety posed by existing buildings, including those constructed prior to the introduction of certain design standards.

The system is consistent across the country and focuses on the most vulnerable buildings in terms of people's safety. It categorises New Zealand into three seismic risk areas and sets time frames for identifying and taking action to strengthen or remove earthquake-prone buildings. It provides more information for people using buildings such as nationally consistent EPB notices with ratings for earthquake-prone buildings and a public earthquake-prone buildings register (the EPB register). Information on Emergency Management in Southland can be found online at: https://civildefencesouthland.govt.nz/about-us/. More information can be found online, on the New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's website at: https://www.mbie.govt.nz/building-and-energy/building/investigations-and-reviews-for-safer-buildings/new-system-for-managing-earthquake-prone-buildings/

The information gleaned from the documents referenced above can be particularly useful for governments to learn about ways to develop personal capacity and to assist with the empowerment of individuals and communities to understand their vulnerabilities, responsibilities and develop localized plans to respond to emergencies. The main learning from the New Zealand experience with respect to emergency preparedness is one of higher degrees of individual responsibility and preparedness and less of government reliance, as is the case in Canada and British Columbia. Local and regional governments are particularly best positioned to assist with a change in this mind-set and in promoting a culture of preparedness, resiliency and self-sufficiency at the individual and community levels.

OBJECTIVE 2

Climate Change Adaptation

In that the world' climate and environment are changing, there is little dispute. The future trajectory of climate change, it is noted, will depend on geopolitical decisions in terms of seriousness of commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

While due to its nature, the trends will undoubtedly vary across the globe, a sea level rise will have similar implications on coastal communities, such as Southland District and the Lower Mainland region of south coast British Columbia. Unmitigated, changes in sea level rise estimated at approximately 0.3m by 2040 and up to 1.0m by 2090 would have significant impact on major urban centres. How communities around the world are able to prepare and adapt themselves to deal with the implications of this phenomena is where sharing of knowledge and learning can prove extremely useful.

Evidential record of rising sea level in the past has had an impact on human activities and infrastructure in coastal areas, with higher elevations contributing to increased vulnerability and tidal influences, with key impacts generally including the following:

- gradual inundation of low-lying areas and consequential impact on livelihoods, fisheries, forestry, food production and agriculture;
- loss of biodiversity;
- escalation in the frequency of nuisance and damage;
- exacerbated erosion of shorelines and other unprotected and vulnerable areas;
- increased incursion of saltwater in streams and groundwater aquifers, raising water tables in tidally-influenced groundwater systems; and of course
- serious damage to human life and public, public infrastructure and private property.

These impacts will have increasing implications for existing developments in coastal areas, along with environmental, societal and cultural effects. Infrastructure and its levels of service or performance will also be increasingly affected, such as wastewater treatment plants, potable water supplies, and particularly capacity and performance issues with dikes, stormwater and overland drainage systems (particularly gravity-driven

networks). Transport infrastructure will also be affected, both by increased nuisance shallow flooding and more disruptive flooding and damage from elevated storm-tides and wave overtopping.

In this light, use of science-based criteria, standards and best management practices for land use planning and development of sustainable communities is being pursued in both New Zealand and British Columbia. This is achieved by allowing the comparative analyses of the 'business-as-usual' vs. the 'adaptive and modified' approaches to inform decision-making processes. Information about some of the challenges facing the Southland District of New Zealand and the measures contemplated to mitigate such challenges can be accessed on line at the following link: https://www.deepsouthchallenge.co.nz/, promoting an approach to encourage New Zealanders to adapt, manage risk and thrive in a changing climate.

The experience in New Zealand demonstrates the need for governments, scientists, industry stakeholders, individuals and communities to work together to ensure society is adapting to meet the challenges of a changing climate. Climate science can be complex and which makes this collaborative approach even more critical in ensuring success. Local and regional governments are best positioned to bring these protagonists of sustainable communities together, using science to predict climate modelling and enhance social science, to guide planning and policy making, to bring about new research and innovative approaches based on local and regional conditions.

Ultimately, the learning from the experience is that collaboration amongst decision makers, sharing of research, science-based education and engagement of communities and development of best practices are key steps that will help in empowering individuals and assist communities in British Columbia to make decisions in the face of complex changes anticipated in the future related to climate change. Establishment of dedicated departments, positions and functions at the local and regional government level should be considered as a direct method of promoting these approaches in climate change adaptation, as was the case in the New Zealand context.

OBJECTIVE 3

Community Engagement:

The level and intensity of voluntary community engagement in civic activities in New Zealand was, in my experience, significant and impressive. While the rate of most recent voter turnout in local government elections in New Zealand is comparable and moderately higher than those in British Columbia (+/- 40% vs. +/- 35%), the level of active engagement in local affairs was, in my experience, noticeably more pronounced.

Within the Southlands District Council, there is a department consisting of approximately 3 – 4 staff members with the responsibility of communicating with the public and ensuring full participation in municipal affairs and provision of input into key municipal decisions around planning, development and budgets. While this, in itself, is again similar to typical local government operations in British Columbia, the level by which the community takes ownership of certain issues and services was unprecedented.

There were many examples of municipal services being provided by volunteers and community organizations, following community initiatives, in response to community demands. Examples of these types of initiatives included dikes, constructed to protect against flooding, trails, foot paths and even roads. These services could not have been provided without the support of local government, but such were typically limited to initial capital costs with on-going operation and maintenance devolved to local community organizations.

Another key example of common acceptance of provision of services not solely by local government, was the significant access road to Doubtful Sound cruises. Not just the cruise itself, but rather the road access having been constructed and being maintained by a private company, Real Journeys, which takes its responsibility for not just operating the road, but also for public education and environmental stewardship extremely seriously.

While the duration of the exchange program was likely too brief to fully appreciate the history, background and details of such concepts for provision of services, it did not appear to have been isolated or accepted by the community organizations with any level

of resistance or reluctance, but rather in recognition of the need and acceptance of the responsibility, should such be the majority will.

This community or volunteer-based approach to provision of services is likely to be perceived as reminiscent of historic approaches in some BC municipalities with smaller populations, more conducive to such approaches. Some municipalities, including the Township of Langley, who have experienced significant growth and heightened community expectation, resulting in their evolution to having sophisticated service delivery systems and structures, it will likely be challenging to obtain large-scale community acceptance for such approaches.

Having said that, with the increasing sense of volunteerism and an aging work force, there is increasing evidence of community based activism, be it “adopt-a” programs or watershed stewardship groups. Municipalities in British Columbia could take advantage of this phenomena, by providing incentives, such as funding assistance or involvement of communities at the grass roots level in the decision-making processes, which was evident in the local government context in New Zealand.

OTHER LESSONS LEARNED

There are, as discussed in the earlier sections of this report, many similarities between the two jurisdictions working together as part of this program. What may be as noteworthy, on the other hand, are some of the key differences.

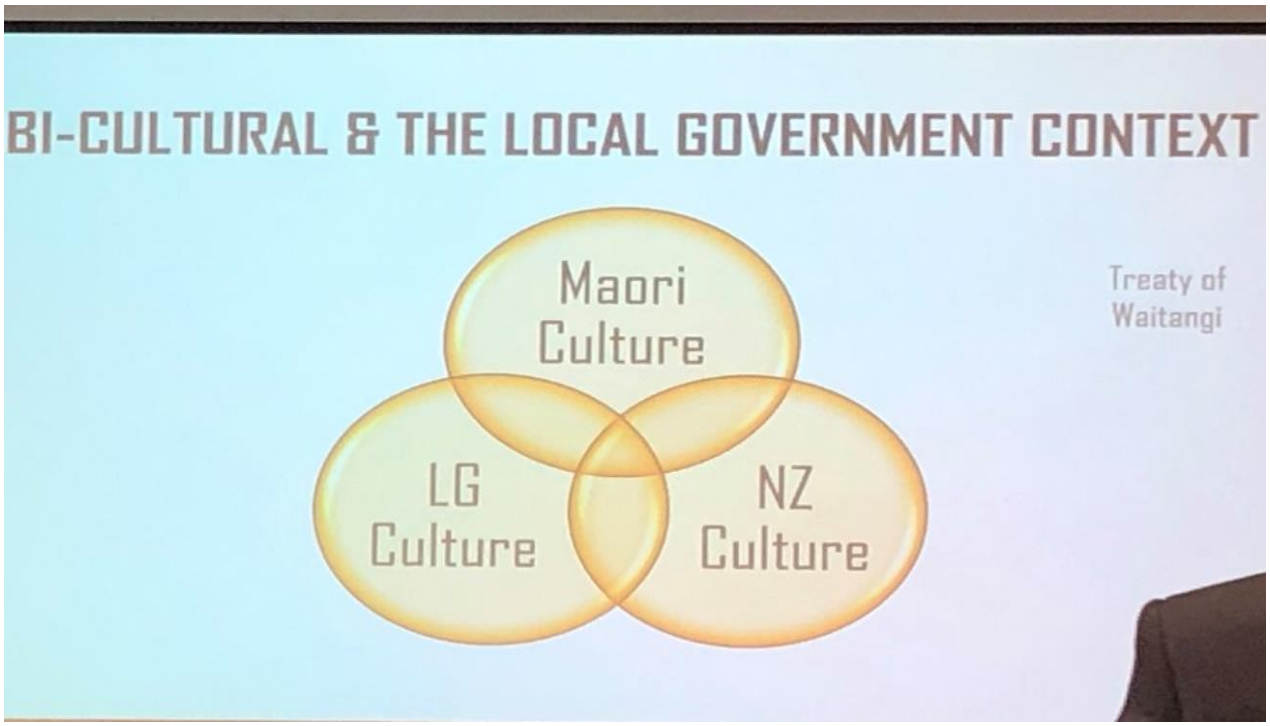
One of those differences, briefly discussed earlier in this report, is the amount of reliance placed on (or empowerment provided to) community associations for delivery of key services, such as construction and maintenance of trails, pathways and roadways. Another difference between New Zealand and British Columbia, referenced previously, is the two-tiered government structure in New Zealand, with local and national levels of governance. This in comparison with the four levels of government in British Columbia, which in addition to the provincial government, includes regional governments with sometimes overlapping areas of responsibility in such areas as affordable housing, air quality and emergency management. The other notable difference was the typical

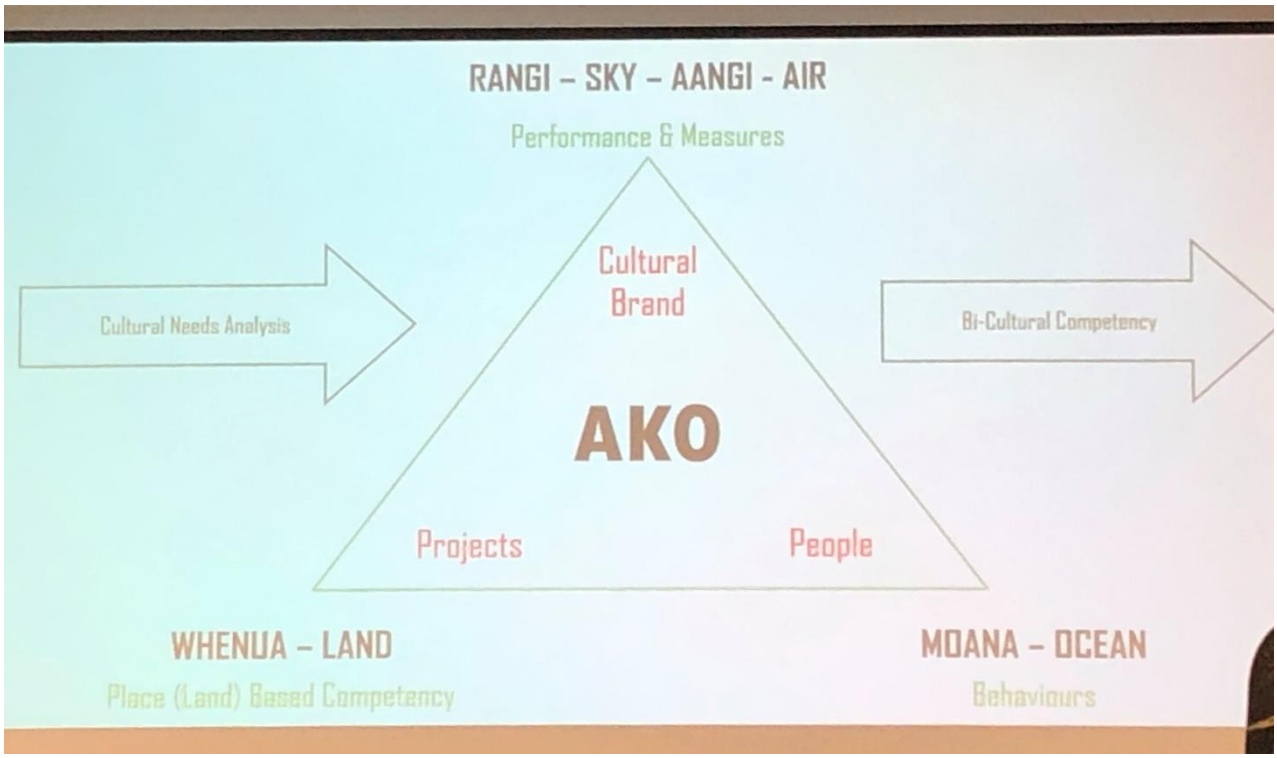
services provided by local governments in New Zealand as opposed to British Columbia, which does not generally include protective services, such as fire and police, which not only play key functions in the local government setting in British Columbia, but are also typically two of the highest cost drivers.

Finally, there is a notably and significant more collaborative relationship between local government and the indigenous peoples in New Zealand, with many local governments, if not all, having specific advisory roles on staff, with the responsibility of raising public awareness about the Maori culture, integrating same into municipal services, liaising and strengthening relationships with the indigenous people. Based on the brief experience and exposure, that there is much that can be learned from New Zealand in this area. Steps that may be considered to be taken in this regard by local or regional governments in British Columbia include the creation of positions for education and training, establishment and nurturing of relationships and incorporation of ideas, where appropriate, with respect to First Nations cultures and traditions.

This relationship has real meaningful impact on the community building efforts of local government in that it allows for more than sharing of knowledge by the indigenous peoples. It provides for potential adoption of principles, such as protection of environment, as natural life style elements, as has been practiced by the indigenous peoples for millennia with a focus on caring for the water and the land – looking after the needs of future generations.

The pictures below were taken during a bi-cultural workshop attended at the SOLGM Conference in September 2019 in Napier



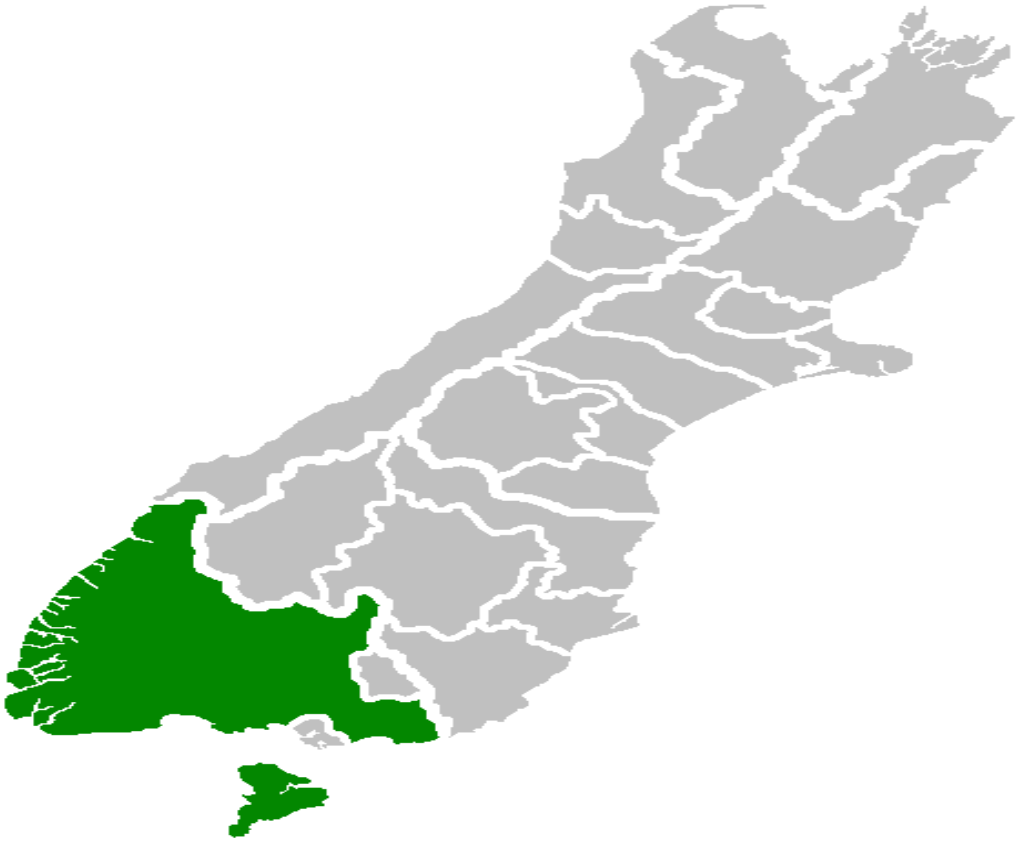


APPENDICES

PLACES VISITED

Other than the City of Invercargill, where my Overseas Exchange Program partner works and resides, and the City of Napier, where the 2019 New Zealand Society of Local Government Managers' Summit was held, the writer was able to visit most major cities in New Zealand, with the exception of the capital City of Wellington.

Southland Regional District



This was the place where my host and Overseas Exchange partner works, is a relatively large and sparsely populated are of the South Island. The Regional District covers Gore District, and Invercargill City, which has an independent Local Government Council. It has a land area of approximately 30,000 km^2, and a population of approximately 30,000 (excluding Invercargill).

Picture below shows my host Rex Capil with two of the staff in the communications department of the Southland District Council in Invercargill



Auckland

We arrived in Auckland on September 14, 2019 and were able to enjoy this beautiful, multi-cultural City, and many of the surrounding islands over a couple of days, prior to the official start of the program with our arrival in the City of Invercargill late in the evening of Sunday September 15, 2019.

The City of Auckland, with an estimated population of approximately 1.5 million, is the most populous urban area, is home to approximately 30% of the entire population of the country of New Zealand. As a resident of the Lower Mainland area of British Columbia, it reminded me of the natural beauty and rugged coastline of the south coast of B.C. Fisheries and tourism are two of the major economic development drivers.

Picture below is a view of the Auckland harbour and its downtown business district.



Davenport

We were able to catch a ferry, for a short and convenient trip to the Island of Davenport, a harbourside suburb of Auckland, approximately 20 minutes north of the City.

It was and interesting flight from the northern most tip of the North Island to the southern most tip of the South Island, in that there was a heavy rain storm with high strong winds threatening the trip's feasibility. Nonetheless, with a few hours delay, the flight was able to land at the scheduled destination of Invercargill without having to be detoured, as predicted by airline officials as a possibility.

Invercargill

Invercargill is the southernmost and westernmost city of New Zealand and the commercial center of the Southland District, with a population of approximately 55,000. From there we were able to take a flight for a day trip to Stewart Island.

Stewart Island

The third largest island in New Zealand, lying approximately 30 km south of the South Island, Stewart Island is home to only about 500 permanent residents.

The Island forms part of the geographic area of Southland District. Approximately 95% of its land mass is protected as National Park. The alderman representing the Island, Councillor Bruce Ford, was kind enough to show us around the Island, including the not-so-environmentally-friendly diesel-generated power plant that is uniquely operated by the Southland District Council; the sewage treatment area servicing the Island; and solid waste recycling area.

The original Māori name of Stewart Island, *Te Punga o Te Waka a Maui*, positions Stewart Island firmly at the heart of Māori mythology. Translated as *The Anchor Stone of Maui's Canoe*, it refers to the part played by the island in the legend of Maui and his crew, who from their canoe, the South Island, caught and raised the great fish, the North Island. Having said that, Rakiura is the more commonly known and used Māori name. It is usually translated as *Glowing Skies*, possibly a reference to the sunsets for which it is famous or for the aurora australis, the southern lights that are a phenomenon of southern latitudes.

From Stewart Island we took a short (10 min) water taxi boat ride to Ulva Island, which is a nationally protected bird sanctuary. The picture below shows one of the many beaches on Ulva Island with different colour sand and landscape type.



The Trip to Stewart Island was with a short flight on a single-engine 6 passenger plane ride of approximately 30 minutes in duration. It was definitely a worthwhile visit, not just from a tourism or sight-seeing perspective, but rather demonstrating the wide and varied nature of the Southland Regional District's geographic territory.

Dunedin

Home to the University of Otago, named after the region of Otago in the inlet of Otago Harbour on the South Island, approximately 200 kilometres northeast of Invercargill. We took our time driving there along the scenic coastal highway, which took approximately 4 hours, spent a few hours around the University and the harbour and drove back to Invercargill the same day.

Picture below taken on the scenic coastal route from Invercargill to Dunedin, looking south towards the South Pacific Ocean.



Te Anau and Manapouri

We were accompanied by our gracious hosts Rex and Carolyn on our trip to Te Anau, which was a leisurely drive of approximately 3 hours in duration.

Te Anau forms part of the Southland District and one of the most popular tourist attraction locations because of its proximity to the Fiordland National Park on the west coast of the South Island near Lake Te Anau and a short 10 min. drive from Manapouri Lake, where parts of the movie Lord of the Rings were filmed, where we enjoyed a fantastic ride on a jet boat and drank the lake water (see picture below).



Doubtful Sound and Fiordland National Park

An absolute “must see”. This is one of the two (the other being the more popular and busy Milford Sound) cruise experience opportunities. At approximately 40 kilometres long, Doubtful Sound is the second longest, and with a depth of up to 421 metres, it is the deepest of the South Island's fiords.

In comparison with Milford Sound, it is more widespread, with the cliffs not as dramatically tall and near vertical. However, the u-shaped profile of the fiord is obvious, in particular on the two innermost of the main fiord's arms and the hanging side valleys along the main fiord. We were fortunate in that our hosts had arranged for an overnight cruise, including dinner and breakfast, which allowed us to experience both the sunset and sunrise.

It was interesting and impressive how the private company that offers the cruises, Real Journeys, not only maintains the access road, but uses the opportunity to educate their guests about the geography, history and the natural biodiversity of the area.

Queenstown

The “tourist capital” of New Zealand, Queenstown, located near Lake Wakatipu, boasts the fastest growing municipal region of the country with a current population of approximately 15,000 and an average annual growth rate of over 5%, which is unmatched throughout New Zealand. Very much of a ski resort, this City reminded my very much of Whistler, British Columbia. The hospitality sector, with the many bars, restaurants, hotels and souvenir shops, were clearly the main source of employment.



Christchurch

The City of Christchurch, located approximately 600 km north east of the City of Queenstown. We took a flight to this City, took about an hour or so. This provided us with excellent learning opportunities about developing resiliency, as the scene of the 2011 earthquake that claimed the lives of 185 souls, with a magnitude of 6.3.

Napier

Napier was the host City for the 2019 New Zealand Society of Local Government Managers (SOLGM). It is located on the east coast of the North Island in Hawke Bay. We flew to this City directly from Christchurch. See SOLGM Summit Highlights below.

Taupo; Rotorua; and Hamilton

These were the three main Cities visited on our drive from Napier back to Auckland to catch our flight back home.

Of particular note was the City of Rotorua, which is world-famous spot, known for its geothermal activity, including geysers, pools, and hot springs. It is located in the heart of the North Island in the Bay of Plenty with a resident population of about 60,000 and heavy reliance on tourism and related activities. The sulphuric odour of the natural springs and associated steams provide a unique and distinctive welcome to this unusual City. We were able to spend an hour or two relaxing at one of the spas with an outdoor private pool with natural hot spring water in a beautifully natural setting.

PREPARED PRESS RELEASE

Canadian manager soaks up Southland experience

A local government manager from Canada found plenty to think about during a visit to Southland. Ramin Seifi, from the Township of Langley in British Colombia, spent two weeks in the District in late September as part of an exchange programme. His Southland counterpart, Southland District Council general manager, community and futures Rex Capil will visit Canada in June next year after being awarded a New Zealand Society of Local Government Management (SOLGM) Managers Exchange.

Mr Seifi, general manager, engineering and community development in Langley, said he had been eager to experience Southland. "This was an opportunity to come and see another part of the world and it's good to learn from my counterpart, so to speak, from another municipality in a totally different part of the world to see how similar we are in some aspects and how different we are in other aspects," he said.

While here, Mr Capil hosted Mr Seifi for an extensive tour of the District, from Doubtful Sound to Stewart Island/Rakiura. Mr Seifi visited Emergency Management Southland and attended a Council Finance and Audit Committee meeting.
The township of Langley is one of 22 district municipalities in the Metro Vancouver Regional District.

Mr Seifi's dual role as manager of infrastructure as well as community development is quite unusual in local government anywhere in the world. Both are massive portfolios of responsibility, but Langley's view is quite holistic in that it assumes that one cannot be properly managed without impacting on the other. "It's a function of the rapid growth that we've seen in Langley in the lower mainland itself,'' Mr Seifi said. "The population is currently two and a half million people out of five million people in the entire province. The lower mainland is a conglomerate of 22 municipalities. Half the population resides in 10% of the land mass. "Probably a quarter of the growth is happening in Langley, which translates to about 3% per year for the past 25 years and expected to remain at 3% on average over the next 30 years. Huge issue.

"With my role of being responsible for not just managing that growth but also making sure we have adequate infrastructure to support that growth it helps us quite a bit to bring the planners and the engineers together and allow them to see issues from each other's perspective."

Mr Seifi noticed some common issues and challenges shared by his area and Southland District, notably ageing infrastructure and climate change. Langley is about 150 years old, quite a young community by Canadian standards. While their expensive infrastructure assets such as water and waste treatment facilities, roads and bridges are still potentially 30 years away from needing replacement, Mr Seifi said at this stage there wasn't a fund set aside to pay for this. "We do think about it but there are so many pressing issues that prevent us from setting money aside."

Canada has four levels of government – federal, provincial, regional and local, which is where Mr Seifi's responsibilities lie. The municipalities in the Metro Vancouver Regional

District share ownership of the region's more expensive infrastructure, while the Township of Langley government agency Mr Seifi represents manages local infrastructure. Langley was an environmentally conscious coastal community, he said. It relies heavily on fisheries, "so every water course that ultimately leads to the ocean must be kept pristine".

Specific areas of interest during Mr Seifi's time in the south included climate change, seismic effects on building standards, emergency planning and public engagement.
"I don't think there's any dispute as to the reality of global warming – how do we deal with it is the big question," he said. "We need to develop resilient communities so one of my focuses is on how to deal with floods that we're getting more and more of, global warming, earthquakes, disaster management – things of that nature."

Climate change was manifesting itself in a number of ways in his community. Weather patterns had changed, with more frequent storm events – so-called 100-year storms were happening every five years, and there was more erosion of rivers.
The 200-year flood level of the major river artery that runs through Langley, the Fraser River, has risen by almost 1.2 metres in the past 20 years. "You can imagine what that does to the planning of a community, not only in terms of approvals for building but also in terms of flood bank management."

A particular area of interest for Mr Seifi during his visit was Southland District Council's positive relationship with local iwi. He has forthright views about the differences in interaction between the governments and indigenous people of Canada and New Zealand. "Somebody from the federal government in Canada should make arrangements to come and meet with somebody from the central government in New Zealand because you're much more advanced in that area than we are. Our relationship with our first nations is not unfortunately as good as yours is from my perspective.
"It is much more co-operative, collaborative, much more respectful and much less confrontational than what we have, despite numerous attempts over many years.
"The role lies with central government. Local government plays no role except to try to work with our first nations within our jurisdiction.''

Mr Seifi said the thing he would "ponder and reflect upon" most following his visit here was Southland District Council's relationship with its community, and how local government here did not feel the need to take on "all the control and all the responsibility". "It's good to delegate. It may not work in all local government settings and it takes time for that relationship and trust to be built. It also means devolving control and we have to realise that if you want a committee to take care of a certain asset you have to give them the control. You can't dictate a level of service and then say 'you take care of it'. It goes both ways. "I don't know if we're ready for it, but if it happens it will be a total shift in thinking."

Local Print Media Report

Southland News



Southland District Council community and futures group manager Rex Capil with Township of Langley engineering and community development general manager Ramin Seifi - who has been visiting Southland during the past week.

Discussions between farmers and environmentalists about water regulations is a hot topic in Canada's local government, similar to Southland, a visiting official says.

Township of Langley, British Columbia engineering and community development general manager Ramin Seifi is visiting the region as part of the New Zealand Society of Local Government Managers Exchange programme. He has spent a week observing how local government operates here. Environmental and agricultural issues in the region seem to be similar to Langley, Seifi says.