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**Keeping it together:
A comparative analysis of four long-established
intentional communities in New Zealand**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

at

University of Waikato

by

Olive Jones



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2011

Abstract

Through a comparative analysis of four long-established intentional communities in New Zealand, this thesis examines the extent to which each one has sustained, adapted or abandoned its original ideals and aspirations over time. Analysis of in-depth interviews with current and former participants reveals ways that ideological beliefs, organisational processes, and foundation structures have shaped the distinctive cultures that have developed in each community. The relevance of the assertion that long-lived intentional communities share a common purpose and a desire to live beyond mainstream society, and the assumption that longevity and survival can be considered to be the same thing, are challenged. It is concluded that ownership structures for holding land are significant to the longevity of intentional communities, and that the distinctions that once existed between these long-established communities and the larger society that they are situated within have become less clear over time.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to Associate Professor David Swain for the generosity he showed me throughout the period of this research, particularly his willingness to continue to supervise me despite his retirement halfway through this project. I would also like to acknowledge the guidance and support of Dr. Judith Macdonald and Dr. John Paterson, my other supervisors. Thank you to my partner William Farrimond who convinced me in the first instance that I could do this, and encouraged me throughout. Thanks also to the many people who have engaged with me about this topic. Most of all, I wish to acknowledge the people associated with the communities, who welcomed me into their lives, trusted me with their words, and deepened my respect for them and others who strive to realise their ideals through living cooperatively in intentional communities. It is no small task. I hope I have done you justice.

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Preface

This thesis has its roots in a number of questions that have lain in the back of my mind since the 1970s and 1980s – years that saw an intense and widespread interest in communal living by young people throughout New Zealand. The groups that bought and settled land together in those years ranged from rebellious dope-smoking hippies to clean-living vegetarians interested in their spiritual development, and/or personal growth. Some rejected the concept of private property outright, while others divided their land up and bought and sold shares and houses. Some introduced structures, rules, and membership procedures; others refused to impose any kind of regulation whatsoever. As a participant I became increasingly curious about how other communities were faring alongside my own. Did they have the same struggles and issues as our community? Whose system worked best? Was there a blueprint for community living that would guarantee fairness, stability and vitality? As the years passed I realised that despite our differences, intentional communities shared many of the same issues, although each community seemed to have its own peculiar challenges and special character. It intrigued me that the ones I might have predicted would last did not while others I thought would not did.

Now, 30 years on, I have returned to this subject, and those questions, but this time as a scholar rather than a participant. This thesis does not start with a premise or set out to prove or disprove a theory. It is an inquiry into the long-lived communities that have been influenced by what was most commonly referred to as the alternative lifestyle movement of the 1970s and 1980s.¹ I approach this through focusing on four particular long-lived New Zealand communities that have been in existence for more than 25 years. The research identifies significant changes each community has experienced over time, and compares them against the background of their ideological bases, organisational and foundation structures.

¹ This term (and others) is discussed in Chapter 1.

Chapter One: Introduction

According to Metcalf and Christian (2003), intentional communities are characterised by a desire on the part of participants to “carry out a shared lifestyle with a common purpose” (p. 670) in close proximity to others. Despite their diversity, they can be defined by their “visions, values and practices” (*ibid.*) and a desire to live “beyond the bounds of mainstream society” (*ibid.*). During the 1970s and 1980s in New Zealand a variety of intentional communities were established in rural areas. Although the vast majority of those experiments in communal living were short-lived, in contrast to other countries, “an unusually large number” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. xv) of them continue to exist in the present, with stable long-term populations (*ibid.*). The generation that founded those communities are now in their 50s and 60s. Their collectively owned lands have become home to a variety of people with wide-ranging reasons for living in those communities.

Four New Zealand communities

By the end of the 1970s Wilderland Community, on the Coromandel Peninsula, had become the most well-known of the alternative lifestyle communities in New Zealand (Murray, 2001; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 33). It was well-established in comparison to most other communities in New Zealand at that time, having already been in existence for 15 years. The 73 hectares of regenerating hills overlooking the Whitianga harbour were owned by Dan and Edith Hansen but the land was open to anyone who wanted to go there and “learn from whatever occurs” (Wilderland, 1989). Dan’s stated purpose was to provide “the environment, facilities and resources necessary for the whole education and development of people” (*ibid.*). Hundreds of young people, mostly with urban backgrounds, helped establish gardens and orchards, built their own shelter and learned skills of subsistence living. The emphasis was on producing food and crafts which were sold in a roadside stall. Dan was paraplegic and his attitude, energy and innovation inspired many who went there.

A the same time, further south, a group of young people were experimenting with subsistence living on four hectares of leased land that they called Tahuna Farm, in the industrial outskirts of Nelson. They decided that they needed a larger farm to realise their shared desire to support themselves from the land. They were anti-authoritarian, cynical about 'The Establishment' and rejected concepts of capitalism and private property, believing that land should be freely available for all people to live on, regardless of their economic status. They formed the Renaissance Trust to secure land. Although they raised half the purchase price through working collectively and receiving donations, the banks would not lend them money without a guarantor. Dan Hansen from Wilderland offered to act as guarantor and the Renaissance Trust bought a 23 hectare farm west of Nelson called Graham Downs. They moved there with an old Bedford truck and an assortment of horse-drawn caravans and housetrucks. They took draft horses, bees, milking cows, and demolition materials, and started producing food on a large scale. There were no rules; the people of New Zealand were "free to visit, live and commune with each other and the land" (Renaissance, 1977).

Twenty kilometres from Renaissance a well-established community of Christian pacifists had been living collectively for 30 years on a 208 hectare farm called Riverside Community. They too rejected the concept of private property but in stark contrast to Renaissance, they had a clear structure and membership process, and pooled all their income, which was mostly generated from farming and orcharding. But by the early 1970s their numbers had dwindled, existing members were ageing, and the group were aware that they needed to attract new people if they were going to survive. People who expressed interest in joining were not practicing Christians (a requirement for membership); they were almost all associated with the alternative lifestyle movement. The community eventually decided to drop the Christian requirement, and a flood of mostly young 'alternative lifestylers' moved in.

A few years later, in the early 1980s, a fourth group came together and began to experiment with ways of living together in a rented farmhouse while they planned the community they intended to establish. They were predominantly European foreign nationals who were more interested in 'new-age' personal and spiritual

growth and healing than subsistence farming. Some had prior experience of living collectively. They closely observed existing communities around them, examined their legal structures and mission statements, and trialled systems that they might adopt for their own. They established the Tui Land Trust, pooled their savings, and bought 72 hectares of regenerating hillside bordering the Abel Tasman National Park in a remote corner of Golden Bay. Many of the founding individuals had professional backgrounds and accumulated wealth, and the group were able to pay most of the cost of the land at the time of purchase.

In 2011 these four communities still exist. They also form the nucleus of this thesis. They have been selected to represent the communities that were either influenced by, or formed as part of, the alternative lifestyle movement that flourished during the 1970s and 1980s in New Zealand. Their residents mostly live in houses built either by themselves or former community members, set amongst mature orchards, gardens and woodlots on beautifully appointed tracts of rural land. Three of the four communities have a predominantly ageing core population; while in some instances their adult children are choosing to return to these communities to raise their own children (along with other young people who were not raised in community), the resident groups mostly comprise of the generation that created these communities as young adults, and are now in their late 50s and 60s. Although the founders have in most cases been replaced by subsequent members, with the exception of Wilderland, a large percentage of participants have been resident for many years. Some have lived in several different communities. Despite sharing common characteristics – the communities all support roughly the same number of people,² they emphasise ecological sustainability and environmentally sound land-care practices, and are all owned by charitable trusts - they also differ markedly; each community has developed its own particular characteristics and culture, and each faces its own set of challenges.

² 30–40 adults, plus visitors and children. In Wilderland’s case, numbers have fluctuated over the years, with numbers dropping to two or three apart from the Hansens at various times. This has especially been the case since the 2000s, including the period of this research. However, Wilderland has the facilities to support 30 – 40 people and has done so throughout its early decades.

The research asks these questions:

- How has each community changed over time, and how have those changes influenced the long term development of each community?
- How have the ideologies, foundation structures and stated purposes of each community driven those changes?
- To what extent have the communities sustained, adapted, or abandoned their original ideals and aspirations?
- What key elements have contributed to the vitality or decline of each community?
- How have the communities balanced individual and collective needs over the long term, and what are the implications of this for culture of each community?
- What, if any, patterns of development and change are common to all four cases, thus making generalisations possible?

As these questions are explored, I also seek to understand how relevant the concept of ‘survival’ is in relation to longevity, continuity and change in alternative lifestyle communities. Can we say a community has survived if it has changed to the extent that it no longer resembles the community it started out as, no longer practices its founding aims and ideals, and/or has none of its original participants? I also question whether it is still appropriate to describe them as ‘alternative’, particularly in light of observations made by scholars such as Bill Metcalf, who asserts that over the last 30 years most alternative communities in Australia have become less communal, radical, and countercultural to the extent that residing in them could be seen as being little different to “living in a pleasant neighbourhood” (2004, p. 52).

This thesis also explores Lucy Sargisson and Lyman Sargent's (2004) assertion that New Zealand's intentional communities possess unique characteristics which set them apart from those in other countries. They suggest that New Zealand has more intentional communities per capita than any other country, and also that many of them have lasted 20, 30 or more years. While Sargent has since modified this assertion, stating that "Australia appears to have more intentional communities per capita than any other country other than Israel [he still asserts that] New Zealand also has a very strong tradition of intentional communities" (2010, p. 65). In relation to the assertion that New Zealand communities appear to be longer-lived "than the norm" (Sargent, personal communication, 23 July 2010), Sargent wrote that he and Sargisson did not come up with a reason for this that they were comfortable with but "one thing [they] noticed [was] that the legal status of the land frequently made it difficult for the land to revert to private ownership" (*ibid.*). The four communities in this study are all owned by charitable trusts, and the implications of this form of legal entity as a way to hold communal land for their long-term survival is discussed in this thesis.

Alternative communities in New Zealand

While plenty has been written about the proliferation of intentional communities in other countries, most notably North America and Western Europe, during the 1960s and 1970s (for example, Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Cock, 1979; Gardner, 1978; Houriet, 1971; Kanter, 1972, 1973; Kephart, 1976; Melville, 1972; Metcalf, 1996; Miller, 1999; Oved, 1988; Rigby, 1974, 1974b; Shenker, 1986; Zablocki, 1980, 1971), much of it was either generated during the period when most communities were still young, or refers to both the movement and communities retrospectively. Less scholarly attention has been paid to those communities that have endured into the present. While the movement was also widespread in New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s, it has remained largely undocumented outside of Lyman Sargent's scholarship. He and Lucy Sargisson note this dearth of material in their 2004 academic survey of more than 50 intentional communities in this country and claim their book *Living in Utopia:*

New Zealand's Intentional Communities to be “the first substantial study of intentional communities in New Zealand” (2004, p. 7).

Although they were highly visible and attracted plenty of public attention during the 1970s and 1980s, intentional communities in New Zealand have largely remained unnoticed in the wider public arena in the decades since. This aligns with Timothy Miller’s speculations about long-lived North American communities. Miller suggests that they are “more numerous than many would suspect, because communities tend to be quiet, shunning the publicity that was often so disastrous in the early days” (1999, p. 230). ‘Disastrous publicity’ refers to intense media and public interest that was generally superficial and salacious, and inclined to focus on sensationalised aspects such as nudity, promiscuity and marijuana use.³

Another possible reason for a low profile could be that they have gradually been assimilated into the wider communities they are situated within and are no longer seen as peculiar or overly different from their neighbours. Not only have their inhabitants matured, but many practices once considered off-beat, hippie or weird, such as organic approaches to agriculture and alternative and renewable energy technologies, have, over time, become more widely accepted as concern about climate change and resource depletion increases and as mainstream farming has grown to embrace greater diversity and environmental concerns. Indeed, there is now a thriving organic industry in this country, an emphasis on projecting a ‘clean green’ image internationally, and a wide recognition of the desirability of developing renewable and/or alternative sources of energy. As well as this, New Zealand society has changed considerably from the conservative provincial culture that was prevalent in the 1970s, to become more multicultural and accepting of diversity. Rural areas have undergone transformation as land use has diversified, and developments such as rural smallholdings (commonly referred to as ‘lifestyle blocks’) and rural housing developments have blurred the boundaries between farming and rural lifestyles as well as the divide between urban and rural living. In

³ See, for example, the documentary *Dirty Bloody Hippies* (Salmon, 2010) which exposes attitudes and behaviours of the participants in the alternative movement as well as the wider conservatism that characterised New Zealand society during the 1970s and 1980s.

light of these changes, the extent to which these intentional communities can still be considered to be an ‘alternative’ to the mainstream is discussed in this thesis.⁴

Sargisson and Sargent also assert that New Zealand communities are “striking because they often contradict what the literature on intentional communities leads us to expect” (2004, p. xv). For instance, they state, not only do anarchist communities appear to last in New Zealand, contrary to those in other countries, but they also tend to have stable long-term membership (*ibid.*). Two of the four communities in this study (Renaissance and Wilderland) have been frequently labelled anarchistic by outsiders. In the process of examining and comparing these communities some insights can be drawn in relation to Sargisson and Sargent’s claims.

Motivation for this research

In 1999, Timothy Miller pointed out that in North America, “a generation has elapsed since the communes of the 1960s era burst onto the scene” (p. xiv), yet the topic “that once attracted a veritable army of scholars and popular media reporters, now surfaces only in an occasional Sunday supplement where-are-they-now? sort of piece” (*ibid.*). Miller’s realisation that “an immense body of lore, facts, and anecdotes had not yet been made available to the public” (1999, p. xv) led him to embark on *The 60s Commune Project* in North America, to collect some of this material. He concludes that “what happened communally between 1960 and 1975 has not run its course” (1999, p. 243) as “hundreds of communes founded during that period ... are very much alive today” (1999, p. 242). Miller intends to add a third volume to the collection that “tells the story of the remainder of the century” (1999, p. 243).

Now, as the first decade of the 21st century draws to a close, this research aims to contribute to the telling of that greater story through providing an analysis of four New Zealand alternative communities that have traversed the decades of the last quarter of the 20th century, and also remain ‘very much alive today.’ It documents

⁴ The appropriation of alternative values into the dominant paradigm is discussed in the concluding chapters.

some of the significant changes that these communities have experienced throughout their lifetimes, and analyses the impact of those changes on the evolution of each community. While Miller refers to the period from 1960 to 1975 as encompassing the peak of the movement in North America, the contemporary communal movement in New Zealand gained momentum a decade later.⁵

The decision to conduct this research was influenced by several factors including an awareness of the dearth of material that focuses specifically on New Zealand communities. Like Miller, I was conscious that an immense body of stories, facts and anecdotes that represent an intense and fascinating social experiment in this country remains unrecorded.⁶ I do not claim that the four particular communities examined here are representative of all intentional communities in this country. There are many other long-established communities that share different forms of organisation, belief systems and ownership structures, and have distinctive characteristics that are not represented here. This study is not concerned with this wide range of intentional communities. It is specifically focused on rural intentional communities that were either established as part of, or strongly influenced by, what was most commonly referred to as the alternative lifestyle movement that was prevalent during the 1970s and 1980s in New Zealand. The communities included in this study were selected for several reasons: they share certain characteristics that make comparisons possible, including being located in rural areas, having similar sized populations and strong links to the alternative lifestyle movement of the 1970s. Their lands are also all owned by charitable trusts. They are also diverse enough to enable comparisons to be made that are relevant to the broader category of intentional communities; that is, they encompass different approaches to, and degrees of, economic sharing, organisation, work expectations, and spiritual or personal belief systems.

As well as these factors, more pragmatic reasons for choosing these particular communities include my own prior knowledge of them. Three of them are situated

⁵ Sargent refers to “the so-called Sixties” (2010, p. 30), pointing out that “the actual dates vary from country to country” (*ibid.*). The period is most often considered to encompass 1965 to 1975.

⁶ This awareness emerged as a consequence of my own involvement in the communal movement in this country. My involvement is explained in Chapter 3.

in the North West corner of the South Island, while the fourth is on the Coromandel Peninsula in the North Island.⁷ While all four communities express similar core philosophical beliefs in their foundation documents, referring to fostering the spiritual, physical and educational advancement of people, and of practising environmentally sustainable land management techniques, they also contrast markedly in their organisational structures and application of those core philosophical beliefs. Each has evolved its own particular culture and faces challenges peculiar to that community. This thesis identifies some of the ways that the application of those different philosophical and ideological systems impacts on the social, economic and personal development of a community over the long-term.

Terms and definitions

Bader, Mencken and Parker refer to “a bewildering variety of terms” (2006, p. 75) that researchers use interchangeably in relation to the study of intentional communities. Sargisson and Sargent list twenty which they point out is “almost certainly incomplete” (2004, p. 2). They explain that while the word ‘commune’ has the advantage of being widely recognised as directly associated with a particular context, time and culture, both scholars and communal groups have come to prefer the term ‘intentional communities’ because they consider it to be more neutral and inclusive (*ibid.*). This inclusiveness reflects the diversity of communal groups which encompasses religious communities, kibbutzim, monasteries, eco-villages, cohousing ventures, spiritual, environmental, and co-operative communities, as well as more recently, lifestyle villages, and gated communities (another list that is most certainly incomplete). ‘Alternative lifestyle’ was the term commonly used by both participants and outsiders during that time. This thesis refers to them as intentional and alternative communities interchangeably, and often for the sake of brevity shortening it to ‘communities.’ The people who live in them are variously referred to as members, residents, participants and communards.

⁷ Like the Rainbow Region of northern NSW in Australia, these two regions have been especially popular amongst alternative lifestylers and back-to-the-land homesteaders since the 1970s commune movement began.

Although the word ‘commune’ is a useful descriptor in that it situates the subject in a particular time and context that is widely recognised, it has two main associations. This first is that it is most commonly associated with the open-land communes of the 1960s-era. However, because of their high level of visibility and accessibility, many of those communities drew inordinate amounts of attention from the mass media and “came to represent, in the popular mind, an image of what all, or most communes were like” (Zablocki, 1980, p. 52). Thus, “many communitarians, desiring to distinguish their living group from the stereotype, insisted that they were not really a “commune.” Terms such as “collective” or “community” were preferred (Aidala & Zablocki, 1991, pp. 104 - 105).

The other association that ‘commune’ assumes is a high degree of sharing. It is used in reference to “income-sharing intentional communities such as Twin Oaks in the United States, Niederkaufungen in Germany, and most Israeli kibbutzim” (Metcalf & Christian, 2003, p. 671). Communes in this sense “provide members’ basic needs (food, shelter, monthly stipends and so on), and members work in one or more community businesses” (*ibid.*). Most alternative communities do not practice this degree of sharing, therefore cannot accurately be described as communes, although Riverside Community, which shares income and asset ownership, qualifies. Although most New Zealand alternative communities in the present are neither open-land nor income-sharing, I do occasionally refer to them as communes, particularly when engaging with the literature that uses the term, and when discussing the establishment of alternative communities during the 1970s when the term was in common usage.

Just as there is there is no universally agreed upon definition of what the overarching term ‘intentional community’ encompasses, neither is there consensus on what ‘communal’ includes or excludes. Freisen and Freisen (2004) write that “intentional communities are characterised by face-to-face relations, and while they frequently embrace communalism as an ethical end in itself, apart from its instrumental value, they are not necessarily communal” (p. 15). One generalisation Timothy Miller believes *can* be made about intentional communities is that those who populated them in the 1960s and 1970s were “overwhelmingly white and

predominantly middle-class” (1999, p. 170). Hugh Gardner also makes this observation in *Children of Prosperity: Thirteen Modern American Communes* (1978). Zablocki, however, describes as a “persistent myth” (1980, p. 4) the notion that “commune membership is almost exclusively middle class in background [suggesting that] [t]his is certainly not the case ... except in the sense that anyone who is young, white and functionally literate is labelled middle class” (*ibid.*). Both these perspectives would appear to be relevant to New Zealand communities. I consider that for the most part, alternative communities in this country were founded by people who fall within Miller’s and Gardner’s definition of young, white, and middle class (assuming they are from ‘professional’ and privileged family backgrounds, with access to a tertiary level of educational achievement). However, once established, many communities in New Zealand attracted others who reinforce Zablocki’s rejection of the validity of ‘middle class’ to describe participants. At Renaissance, and at Wilderland in the 1970s, for instance, young people with minimal educational qualifications or skills, who might be more accurately described as opportunists belonging to an urban underclass, were attracted to the cheap and unregulated environment those communities provided. Miller wrote of the middle class people in American communes that while:

Racially they were overwhelmingly white ... the likely explanation is that ... they were trying to divest themselves of goods they deemed meaningless and bourgeois - voluntary poverty. ... Whereas non-whites were disproportionately have-nots and were searching for a share of the material good life they had never enjoyed (2002, p. 343).

While Miller differentiates on the grounds of race in the North American context, I argue this observation also applies in the New Zealand context, but in terms of class or socio-economic status rather than race.

Sargisson and Sargent identify the core key features of intentional communities to include a common purpose and some form of geographical separation from the dominant society (2004, p. 5). They add that “size is not a reliable criterion” (*ibid.*) given that there are “embryonic communities and communities in a temporary lull or terminal decline” (*ibid.*). Bader, Mencken and Parker (2006) drew on data collected by the Federation of Intentional Communities (FIC), to develop a database of 550 communities in North America. The FIC asked its members to

identify what they considered to be the essential elements of the term ‘intentional community’ and Bader *et al.*, formed this definition from the responses:

They are all composed of a group of people, not all of them related, that have chosen to live together on a shared piece of property. Members choose this living arrangement to manifest a certain shared lifestyle that differs from the dominant culture (2006, p.75).

Alan Butcher, a former member of East Wind and Twin Oaks communities in the USA, suggested that “essentially, any association may call itself an ‘intentional community’ by common agreement” (Butcher, 1996). But he differentiates between these groups and others that might form without establishing such an agreement, which he describes as circumstantial communities. These are similar to nations, cities, towns or neighbourhoods where individuals live in proximity by chance, and may or may not actively choose to be part of the association imposed upon them (*ibid.*). Jonathan Andelson (2002) also makes a distinction between an intentional community in which “members actively strive to forge ... a shared identity” (p. 131) and a circumstantial community, where members “may in fact develop little if any sense of shared identity” (*ibid.*). Butcher makes a further distinction between intentional communities in which members are motivated by a commitment to shared goals and those where participants are motivated by opportunistic or self-interested reasons rather than a commitment to a greater vision or ideology. He points out that “both intentional and circumstantial communities can at times function as the other depending on their degree of common agreement and common action” (1996).

This study demonstrates that not only can intentional and circumstantial communities at times function as the other, but also that these elements can simultaneously or interchangeably operate within a single community, with a tendency for long-term members to move from a highly committed ‘intentionality’ where they actively engage in shared goals, to a more self-interested circumstantial position. Further, I argue that not all participants will remain solely motivated by either a commitment to shared goals or opportunistic or self-interested reasons over the long-term, particularly as some people leave and newer people join and the emphasis shifts. This is discussed in Chapter Eight along with an exploration of the cyclical nature of change in long-lived communities, and the implications of

new people joining a community which has a strong resident body of long-established members.

The multi-dimensional nature of intentional communities is revealed by Keith Melville:

If one of the hallmarks of the counterculture is its diversity, diversity itself is certainly one of the characteristics of the communal movement. As in any discussion of the counterculture in general, the hardest task in discussing the communes is to distil the details, most of which are unique to a particular group. Certainly there is no single model of community. The forms that communes take are often complementary but sometimes contradictory (1972, pp. 23 - 24).

Perhaps the essence of why it is so difficult to define community lies in the observation of one of the participants in this study:

One of the conclusions I've come to is that you know community when you come across it. In a sense [people] call a thing a community before it is one. It has to have the feeling you have for other people that makes it that way. ... You feel like you've got more in common with other people than just being people living on the same piece of land (Pete, personal communication, 19 February, 2009).

Pete's views provide one answer to a question asked by an American communitarian: "A piece of land that's simply thrown open to anyone who wants to live there, or a place where each family lives entirely in its own house but the land is jointly owned: shall we call these places 'communes'?" (quoted in Miller, 2002, p. 328). While I concur that there is no single model of community, I believe that it is possible to make comparisons that enable patterns to be revealed and generalisations to be made, particularly over time. The advantage of examining long-established communities in the present over Melville and others who wrote about them in the 1970s and 1980s is significant. The fact that the communities examined here have survived for several decades not only makes it possible to identify causes of, and responses to, change over an extended period of time, as well as patterns that emerge from particular practices or emphases, but also to identify what in fact *has* survived, what has been adapted, and what has not. Whether these communities have essentially survived as they were founded or have changed to the extent that they no longer resemble the communities they began as is central to this study.

The fact that intentional communities are disparate, unpredictable and constantly changing, along with their participants, reflects a lack of consensus about what intentional communities actually are (or are not). Metcalf and Christian refer to a “broad range of communality ... that makes it difficult for researchers to agree on definitions and boundaries, and even on whether some groups should be regarded as intentional communities” (2003, p. 675). They write that, “Intentional communities are notoriously difficult to classify precisely, but in general they can be categorised by their cultural orientation, as exemplified by their vision, values and practice” (2003, p. 670).

The value of studying intentional communities

Numerous scholars have acknowledged that studying intentional communities enables insights into wider social processes. Abrams and McCulloch suggest that “any given commune may be seen as a concentrated expression of some particular values” (1976, p. 2). Zablocki sees them as useful natural laboratories, because:

Many communes are experimental attempts to build social order upon a basis of love. Others are attempts to live anarchistically, without any constraints on individual behaviour. Still others are attempts to subordinate all individual will to a single general will (1980, p. 2).

Bader *et al.*, also consider communes to be excellent examples of natural experiments in social organisation because they provide an environment in which it is possible to “view the effects of changes in authority structures, the breakdown of internal ties, and other key social phenomena” (2006, p. 73). Barry Shenker, a sociologist with a long involvement in the kibbutz movement, suggests that as distinct social groups interacting with their environment, communes serve as micro-versions of larger societies, and can therefore provide case studies for examining wider social phenomena (1986, p. 4). He suggests a further useful aspect of studying communities is their potential for demystification, given that “they often evoke a powerful and emotional interest [in outsiders] from vicarious admiration and idealism to irrational hostility - frequently tinged in both cases with a degree of sexual fantasy” (1986, p. 5). As Bill Metcalf, Australian sociologist and communitarian observes, “the ‘alternative reality’ is far more prosaic than one

might have assumed” (1986, p. ii). However, he also points out that “alternative lifestyle research has implications not only for understanding counter-cultural social phenomena and the sociology of deviant subgroups, but also for such wider societal issues as social structure, power and authority” (1986, p. 3).

Context: The counterculture

Most writers about intentional communities in North America and Western Europe describe their rapid and widespread proliferation throughout the decade from 1965 to 1975 as a period of extraordinary and unprecedented social change spearheaded by a generation of young people. Zablocki (1980) identifies three key events that occurred in North America in 1964 that he believes “heralded ... a decade of general radical and countercultural activity” (p. 50). These were the Vietnam war, the civil rights movement, and a food stamp bill, established as part of an anti-poverty programme, which meant that “one could drop out without danger of going hungry” (1980, p. 51). Other pivotal influences he refers to include the availability of birth control pills, the Beatles craze and rock music, and the widespread use of psychedelic drugs, actively promoted by Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert.

In his 1995 introduction to the second edition of his 1969 text *The Making of a Counterculture*, Theodore Roszak reflects that the one aspect of the counterculture that he believed deserved more emphasis was music:

Music inspired and carried the best insights of the counterculture – from folk protest ballads and songs of social significance ... to the acid rock that became the only way to reflect the surrealistic turn that America was to take at the climax of the Vietnam War. ... There should have been a chapter here on Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Joan Baez, Jimi Hendrix, The Who, the Rolling Stones, Peter, Paul and Mary, the Grateful Dead (1995, p. xxxiv).

Along with the influences of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, Yaacov Oved includes political assassinations, which “motivated idealistic, middle-class young people to rebel against the bourgeois society in which they had been raised. Their objective was not partial reform, but rather the reconstruction of society” (2000, p. 274). For some, a withdrawal from that bourgeois society into

rural communal living was an attempt to experiment with alternative approaches to social and economic organisation. However, as Metcalf and Christian (2003) and Miller (1998) remind us, the communal movement, while new insofar as the scale and speed in which it happened was unprecedented, was not a new phenomenon. Miller points out that “[w]hat happened after 1960 was clearly related to earlier communitarianism, contrary to what some have argued. ... The past was resurrected repeatedly as thousands of new communes sprang up” (1998, p. 199 - 200). Nevertheless, despite this resurrection of earlier communal attempts:

The hippie portion of the sixties-era communal scene was largely ahistorical in the sense most of its participants knew little about the communal past into whose lines they were stepping, but the early founders ... had a wide variety of connections to earlier communitarianism and collectively in diverse venues. ... When Lou Gottlieb of Morning Star, for example, deeded his property to God, he was re-enacting what had been done a decade or two earlier at the Glen Gardner community in New Jersey and nearly a century before that at Celestia in Pennsylvania. ... Communitarianism after 1960 certainly took off in directions all its own. But the seeds of a remarkable wave of communal living that would capture the imagination of a generation were assuredly sown in the American communal past (Miller, 1998, p 199-200).

The sheer rapidity and scale of the movement attracted widespread attention. Miller described the wave of new communes during this era reaching “tsunami-like proportions” (2002, p. 334). Hugh Gardner describes the movement as a “generational revolt the likes of which [the US] and perhaps the world, had never seen before” (1978, p. 4):

Everything that happened in America in the three hundred years before 1965 was dwarfed by what happened in the five short years that followed. By 1970 there were at least twice as many rural communes in America as there had been throughout all previous history (1978, p. 3).

This popularity was by no means confined to North America. By 1974, communes had “sprung up” (Rigby, 1974b, p. 4) in and around most of the major cities of Europe.

Miller believes the “1960s-era counterculturalists were romantics” (2002, p. 329). More significantly, he points out, the movement occurred at a time when “Western culture had defeated scarcity. ... An abundantly productive economy produced so many goods and services that those willing to live on its leftovers could actually

do very well” (2002, p. 334). This made it possible to abandon the economic demands of urban living and to experiment with living in rural communal enclaves. It also goes some way to explain the willingness of many young people from well-off families to experiment with voluntary poverty in communes.

While the genesis of the contemporary communal movement was the phenomenon that has been most broadly described as the counterculture (Gardner, 1978; Gurvis, 2006; Pepper, 1991; Zablocki, 1980), some writers accuse historians writing about the 1960s-era of tending to approach the subject using an, “Iliad-like narrative [of] easy to follow big moments” (Braunstein & Doyle, p. 7), such as Albert Hoffman’s discovery of LSD, Tim Leary’s coining the term, ‘turn on, tune in, drop out’, Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, the ‘summer of love’, and the Manson Family murders (*ibid.*). Rather, Braunstein and Doyle suggest, the communal movement, like the counterculture, was “an inherently unstable collection of attitudes, tendencies, postures, gestures, ‘lifestyles’, ideals, visions, hedonistic pleasures, moralisms, negations and affirmations” (*ibid.*). Further, the people who identified with it “defined themselves by what they were *not*, [and it was] more of a process than a product” (2002, p.10). Abrams and McCulloch reinforce this, arguing that “to say what the commune is, is to reify and falsify it; it is the experienced realities of all who are involved in it which can *perhaps* be rendered in a narrative but not analysed” (1976, p.10). They illustrate the problematic nature of attempting to define and analyse communal living by describing an interview a researcher conducted with two members of a commune. When asked questions about their economic arrangements, attitude to group marriage, and how they collectively dealt with emotional issues, the communards’ response was repeated exhortations that it was not possible to generalise because “sometimes it happens one way, and sometimes another” (1976, p. 9).

While this demonstrates the difficulties associated with generalising about communal living, it can also be argued that whether things happen one way or another, it *is* possible to discern patterns or general tendencies, particularly over time. This description of an unsatisfactory interview could have more relevance to the methods and approach used by the interviewer, and the relative youth of the community under study than demonstrate the impossibility of drawing conclusions

about such areas as economic arrangements, attitudes and collective approaches to issues.

Abrams and McCulloch also accuse academic writers of “making and perpetuating a myth of communes” (1976, p.3), citing Musgrove (1974); Cohen (1974); Zablocki (1971); Kanter (1972); Speck (1972); Melville (1972); Rigby (1974a) as being responsible for writing about them in such contexts as utopian, countercultural, or alternative, and in doing so, making it difficult to “conceive of communes as level headed, quietly enjoyable practical projects” (1976, p.3). While these are valid points, Abrams and McCulloch’s views also reflect academic debates about conducting social research that were prevalent in the 1970s, when an emphasis on quantitative and verifiable ‘scientific’ methods were being challenged, and social scientists felt a need to justify their methods in light of this. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) refer to a “crisis of representation” (p. 3) that qualitative research experienced during the 1970s.⁸ These important methodological tensions are discussed in Chapter 3.

Many writers emphasise the short-lived nature of the 1970s and 1980s surge of interest communal living. Yaacov Oved identifies some key political events and internal shifts that triggered a change and marked the decline in its popularity:

The change occurred in the 80s: Reaganism in the United States, Thatcherism in Britain, and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe created a conservative, anti-utopian climate. During these years, attacks by local authorities also played a part in the withdrawal from the communal way of life in the majority of communes founded in the 1970s. Yet it should be noted that in addition to these external factors, there were also numerous internal ones. Cumulative personal fatigue resulted from intensive activity and the pressure of communal living arrangements. Some, who had come to the communes to find refuge and a remedy for their personal woes, left the communes once these issues had been resolved. Finally after two decades of a life with no prospects for improvement, the 60s enthusiasm for creating an alternative society began to wane; in its place arose the temptation of returning to personal careers in the society they had abandoned (2000, p. 277).

⁸ This is discussed further in Chapter 3 (p. 61).

Miller adds that:

The tenor of the times changed; ... the war in Vietnam wound down and the military draft ceased, taking a good deal of wind out of radical politics. For better or worse, idealism took a beating. The books that guided a generation had once been about rejecting materialism and seeking higher consciousness, but those titles were replaced with new ones about manipulating others and winning at all costs. Somehow the great promise of the 1960s era and of communal living just didn't make it – not completely, at least (1999, p. 227).

Gender roles / the division of labour

I suggest that the 'cumulative personal fatigue' that Oved refers to played a significant part in the decline in interest in communal living that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s in New Zealand communities. Despite the notion that alternative communities liberated women and men from traditional gender-roles, the realities of life in rural communities tended to be somewhat different. Peter Cock makes a distinction between the gender politics of urban and rural communal groups in the Australian context, believing that while urban collectives were "at the forefront of experimentation with the restructuring of gender roles and the transformation of male consciousness" (1985, p. 13), those (mostly urban-bred) individuals who "went bush" (*ibid.*) were thrust into a pioneering situation where "survival required a reliance on existing division of labour" (*ibid.*). Urban groups had the fundamental advantage of established facilities and better living conditions. The demands that rural groups faced does not only refer to the minimal technology and frequent absence of electricity in their foundation years, but also the demands of managing land, creating shelter, building an infrastructure, and generating income in a rural setting. Eleanor Agnew writes:

In most cases the back-to-the-land story can be told collectively - a person goes to the land to be self-sufficient and free, the freedom loses its luster when the poverty grinds, the person and his or her spouse divorce and the person slides back into the mainstream, gets a professional job or entrepreneurial gig, and remarries" (2004, p. ix).

While there was a general questioning and rejection of traditional gender roles in rural communities, as Miller (1999) points out, in reality, women took on roles that were traditionally men's work (such as building and labouring), whereas men did

not seem to take on women's roles (such as washing, cooking, cleaning and caring for children) to the same extent. This is illustrated by a communitarian who said:

Even though we had complete freedom to determine the division of labour for ourselves, a well-known pattern emerged immediately. Women did most of the cooking, all of the cleaning up, and of course, the washing. They also worked in the fields all day – so that after the farm work was finished, the men could be found sitting around talking and taking naps while the women prepared supper. ... Of course the women were excused from some of the tasks; for example, none of us ever drove a tractor. That was considered too complicated for a woman (Kit Leder, quoted in Miller, 1999, p. 213).

Peter Cock writes that, "Feminists have tended to view alternative lifestyles as an escalation of the suppression of women by locking them into the hardships and drudgery of the traditional gender division of labour, reinforced because of the seekers' rejection of labour-saving devices" (1985, p. 13). Certainly, the pioneering nature of many of the 1970s communities in New Zealand emphasised the division of labour on this basis; gender roles were exacerbated by the non-mechanised and labour intensive lifestyle that was reminiscent of the lives of early 19th century pioneers in this country. My own experience of communal living at Tahuna farm and Renaissance bears this out. Washing clothes at Renaissance in the early years, for example, involved lighting coppers to heat water, and washing by hand with scrub-boards, mangle and concrete tubs. During those years, as was the pattern in many alternative communities of the era, there were numerous babies and small children and washing nappies was a time-consuming process undertaken almost solely by women. Jill recalled her early experience at Renaissance:

I used to wash my nappies every second day. Sometimes I'd go over to the mainhouse and use the facilities there, even though to begin with it was only tubs and a wringer - but quite often I washed by hand at home. We would lug water up from a little creek in buckets. Ray set up the copper in the garden. He'd ... light the copper and make sure it was going. He was very good at that sort of thing. ... But I'd do the washing. That took all morning. I got quite sick; I lost a hell of a lot of weight. ... I remember trying to prop the washing line up ... it was very heavy because we had no wringer, and I just couldn't do it. I had no strength (Jill, personal communication, 21 April, 2006).

The presence of large numbers of single mothers with small children in New Zealand communities partly reflected the casual attitude to relationships (and birth

control) that was prevalent during the early years of communal living, and partly reflected the availability of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) which was introduced in 1974, giving single mothers a degree of economic independence.⁹

The subsistence communal lifestyle also meant home, social environment and workplace were one and the same. For many, this was a positive aspect of living with others and most parents referred to the stimulating and rewarding experience of raising young children in a communal setting. Cock writes that a “rediscovery of the hearth” (1985, p. 13) enriched participants through “providing more scope for personal expression and skill development through emphasis on growing and preparing with others one’s own food, shelter and clothes” (*ibid.*). In the present, most members of long-established rural communities in New Zealand enjoy well-appointed housing and higher standards of living than the founding groups experienced in the early years when they went without electricity and labour-saving technologies. The implications of this difference are discussed in later chapters.

My relationship with the communal movement

As stated in the preface, my interest in the subject of alternative lifestyle communities stems from my own previous involvement with communal living. From 1976 until 1992 I lived communally, first at Tahuna Farm, in Nelson, which was the precursor to Renaissance Community, then at Renaissance from 1979. I also spent a year (1983) living in an Australian alternative community called Nmbngee, situated in the Rainbow Region of northern New South Wales. This region, with its concentration of alternative culture (Metcalf, 2004), is “known around the world as role models in the development of alternative lifestyles” (Irvine, 2003, p. 63). Like many of the people who lived communally during the 1970s and 1980s, I engaged widely with other communal groups (particularly within New Zealand). The social networks that existed then (and continue to exist) between participants were fluid, with many people moving freely between communities, both as visitors and residents. Communities also served as cheap,

⁹ The Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) was introduced for the purpose of supporting single mothers regardless of whether the father was contributing financially to their support.

welcoming, and socially stimulating places to stay for travellers at a time when there were few youth hostels and many young people, both New Zealanders and foreign nationals, travelled the world for extended periods. Metcalf refers to travelling the “famous hippie trail” (2004, p. 15) across Europe and Asia to Australia in 1970, as one of “a community of travellers” (*ibid.*). New Zealand’s intentional communities hosted a steady stream of those travellers who arrived unannounced on a daily basis.

While the majority of the people who identified with the movement in New Zealand then no longer live communally, many still identify with the alternative values associated with it, and continue to reside in the same rural district or nearby towns, practicing the same self-reliant approaches to land management and food production. One such person still considered herself to be an “an alternative lifestyle” (Heather, personal communication, 29 April, 2006) despite having lived solely with her immediate family on privately owned land for many years. Several informants have likened this relationship to belonging to a tribe.¹⁰ Despite living elsewhere since leaving Renaissance Community in the early 1990s, I have maintained contacts with many of the people with whom I shared that communal experience, as well as other people associated with community living, and the extended network of people who still reside in the district and continue to be part of a wider network of alternative-orientated people.

¹⁰ Sargisson and Sargent consider that Māori communalism influenced the communal movement in New Zealand. This is discussed in Chapter 2 (p. 48).

Chapter Two: The Literature

Approaches to studying intentional communities

In 2004, when three Berkeley researchers, Boal, Watts, and Winslow set out to write a history of the communal movement in the United States, they assumed (like Miller, 1999), that scholarship about the contemporary commune movement of the 1960s would be, “a well-plowed field” (as cited in Cockrell, 2006, para. 3). They were surprised to find that while the United States has a “long, well documented tradition of communitarian living projects – the Amana Society, the Hutterites, the Oneida Community and the Shakers being but a few examples, ... a history of the 60s communes movement has barely been approached” (as cited in Cockrell, 2006, para. 4). I would add that those communities that were established as part of that movement, and continue to exist in the present have received even less scholarly attention. Watts speculates that the “long neglect” of serious assessment of the contemporary commune movement “is wrapped up in the effort to denigrate it” (as cited in Cockrell, 2006, para. 5). He refers to an initial negative reception he and his colleagues received from many former communards they approached to participate in the study, who later explained their defensiveness as being connected both to “the tacit sneer whenever the word ‘commune’ is pronounced” (*ibid.*).

Conversely, when Miller sought out people who had lived communally during the 1960s era (as well as many who still do), he found that both former and current communards “are more accessible than they used to be now that they are neither constantly besieged by the curious nor generally regarded as freakish aberrations” (1999, p. xiv). These contrasting experiences not only serve to further illustrate the diverse and varied nature of the movement and responses of its adherents, but the ambivalence of participants towards research could help explain why surviving communities have not received much scholarly attention.

Given that the vast majority of the communes formed during the 1960s era were short-lived, it is understandable that most literature refers to the movement as a

short-term phenomenon, confined to a particular era. But a further important point that Boal *et al.*, make is that many aspects of that movement have had a lasting impact on the wider society. They point to the legacy of such wide-ranging influences as organic food, environmental awareness, protocols for meeting and decision-making, sexual politics and child-rearing practices that were developed in alternative communal settings, being incorporated into mainstream practices (Boal, Watts, & Winslow, 2004). This illustrates how boundaries between alternative and mainstream culture become blurred – while commentators observe that long-lived communities are becoming more mainstream, mainstream culture also adopts and assimilates more alternative elements.

This is reflected in Hugh Gardner’s reference to the rural communes of the 1960s being the “‘antennae’ (as Ezra Pound once said of artists) of incipient cultural change” (1978, p. 250). In his 1978 study *The Children of Prosperity*, Gardner writes that, “More by what they represented than by what they actually did, the communes dramatically illustrated the lack of community, personal fate control, and political efficacy in modern society” (*ibid.*). He credits the commune movement for setting a “ripple” (*ibid.*) in motion in society through “its revolt against specialisation and careerism in the interests of a greater self-sufficiency and personal growth” (*ibid.*). Gardner asserts that despite the vast majority of Americans living in urban environments,

The polls say that 75 percent of us would rather live in rural or small-town settings. This imbalance between the way we aspire to live and the way we actually live may ultimately be the most important issue of our age and the rural communards of the 1960s were the people who set it in motion (*ibid.*).

Gardner’s views, to an extent, reflect the optimism that characterised the communal movement at the time he was writing. His conclusion that, “‘Small is beautiful’, the new wave is telling us today, showing many signs of being the future leadership of our country” (1978, p. 251), along with his assertion that communards succeeded in “inspiring a new interest in rural living that will be with us for a long time to come” (1978, p. 250), have not become widespread mainstream practice, and urban living remains the predominant lifestyle choice of the majority of Western populations.

Timothy Miller's book, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (1999), which provides an overview of the movement in North America, includes a section about "communal survivors" (pp. 228 – 230). His study is based around material gathered through interviews with more than 500 people involved in the alternative movement during the 1960s and 1970s in North America. Miller writes:

Although not as many communes exist today as did in the early 1970s, several thousand of them still do operate in the United States – more, almost certainly, than at any other time in American history other than the 1960s era. Thus, the 1960s-era surge of community has had a lasting impact (1999, p. 228).

Miller adds that just as the reasons for the disbandment of communes can be endlessly debated, so can the reasons for the survival of the ones that have lasted. He points to changes and revisions within communities reflecting growing maturity, observing that many secular communes have become "somewhat decentralised... giving members a good sustainable mix of freedom and togetherness" (1999, p. 228).

Benjamin Zablocki and Rosabeth Moss Kanter are considered to be key contributors to the field of communal studies. Both "advanced a general analysis of communes as a type of social enterprise which could claim to be rooted in sociological theory of the most sophisticated kind" (Abrams and McCulloch, 1976, p. ix). Both linked longevity with the notion of success or failure. However, Abrams and McCulloch claim that both Zablocki and Kanter's theories did not reflect their own experiences of contemporary communities in Britain. In their study *Communes, Sociology and Society* (1976), they assert that it is not possible to develop overarching theories about communes because they are constantly changing and dependent on the relationships that exist between the particular people who are resident in them at any one time. Thus, while they assert that "communes always do have a design in hand ... the nature of that design is not necessarily caught in fantastic meanings imputed to communes by outsiders" (1976, p. 4).

Zablocki was interested in exploring the concept of charisma and social bonds to explain solidarity and longevity within communal groups. In *Alienation and Charisma: A Study of Contemporary American Communes* (1980), he applied network analysis theories to an in-depth longitudinal study of 120 contemporary communes in North America and developed a theory of alienation and charisma to explain key elements he considered to motivate people to live communally. Charisma, in the sense that Zablocki applies it, he readily admits “will probably take some willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader” (1980, p. 10). Rather than presenting the concept in the more widely recognised sense of the meaning, referring to a form of authority exuded by a particular individual with a strong ability to lead others, charisma, for him, involves the generation of a collective state that arises from a combination of individual willingness to be lead, a shared system of beliefs, and an ability as a group for “the participants to be fully or partially absorbed into the collective self” (1980, p. 10). For him, “the concept of charisma cannot be separated from the concept of alienation” (*ibid.*) which he identifies as stemming from a sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, estrangement from self and culture, and social isolation (1980, pp. 8– 9). Alienation from society leads to the state of charisma generated in community.

Rosabeth Kanter’s study, *Commitment and Community* (1972), referred to extensively by later scholars, identifies six mechanisms that she believes exist in communes and serve to build a sense of commitment in members which in turn contributes to their long-term survival. She asserts that these mechanisms that produced commitment in members (sacrifice, investment, renunciation, communion, mortification and transcendence), were evident in the long-lived communes in her study. Both Kanter’s theory of commitment, and the notion that long-term survival is itself a measure of success, along with the term of 25 years (or a generation) being a measure of longevity, were, “widely adopted without further analysis” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. xiii) by communal studies scholars of that time. However, these ideas have since been extensively debated and dismissed by others who question the validity of testing her theory using a comparison of several 19th century American communes which had survived for more than 25 years with others that lasted for a short time. Hugh Gardner points

out that, “All her successes, in fact, were authoritarian religious sects, and most of the failures were secular anarchies” (1978, p. 244). Further, when Gardner set out to see if Kanter’s theory of commitment “was in fact, a perennial theme in communal movements” (*ibid.*), one of his “most peculiar findings” (1978, p. 245) was that “communal sharing, supposedly the essence of what communes are all about, was not related to survival at all and in fact seemed to shorten group life spans” (*ibid.*). He considered that communities “fared better when they accepted conventional American values like private property, the profit motive, and individual self-reliance” (*ibid.*) Sargisson and Sargent also point out that many communities that were founded in the 1960s and 1970s have now passed their 30th anniversaries and do not demonstrate Kanter’s commitment mechanisms.

Bill Metcalf writes that “books about communal living usually either attempt to tell in great detail the story of one specific communal group ... or try to provide a quick overview of many groups” (1996, p. 7). While difficulties associated with theorising about communes are often exacerbated by outsider researchers, insider accounts are also problematic. Those that attempt to tell the story of one specific group are often personal biographical accounts. They risk being flawed by a sense of loyalty, or the writer’s desire to show their community in its best light (Sargisson and Sargent, 2004, p. 2). This is also the case with accounts written by communards who visit and write about other communities. An example of this is Hinton’s (1993) publication *Communities: the Stories and Spiritualities of Twelve European Communities*. Hinton, herself a long-term member of a Christian community, explains she set out “not to probe or analyse, but to listen to the stories and ... share a moment in time” (p.7). While such accounts provide sympathetic and informative descriptions of communal life, they generally lack an analytical or scholarly perspective.

Other approaches to telling the story of one specific communal group take the form of ethnographic accounts written by outsiders who spend an extended period of time living within a community as a member. Using participant observation, they have the potential to provide an in-depth historical overview and rich detail of life in a particular community, from an outsider’s point of view. Michael Holzach’s (1993) ethnographic account, *A Year Amongst the Hutterites* is an

excellent example of this. Holzach immersed himself completely in the separate worlds of two Hutterite communities and presented a sensitive and evocative account of the culture of those communities.

Approaches that survey large numbers of communities frequently take the form of travelogues, where the author visits numerous communes and gives a personal account of the experience. These accounts to an extent reflect the ease of visiting and participating in a range of communal groups in the years when the movement was at its most intense. Robert Houriet's *Getting Back Together* (1971) is one such example. Houriet not only presents an evocative account of his involvement the lives of an eclectic mix of communes during a year he spent travelling through North America, but brings the spirit and exuberant energy of the time to life with humour, anecdotes, and the vernacular of the times. Tim Jones and Ian Baker's *A Hard-Won Freedom* (1975) presents the same effect, capturing the spirit of community building in New Zealand in its early years. Hugh Gardner's *Children of Prosperity* (1978) is a further example, adopting an impressionistic style of writing that vividly evokes the communal experience during the peak of the movement.

Sargisson and Sargent's text *Living in Utopia* (2004) also surveys a large number of communities, but takes an academic rather than personal approach. Sargisson did the fieldwork, visiting more than 50 intentional communities during 2001, offering a brief summary of each one, while Sargent conducted the archival research about the movement in this country. The result is a comprehensive directory of communities in this country. The communities are grouped into three categories: religious, cooperative and environmentalist and within these are sub-categories that group them further. Sargisson and Sargent explain that they classified the communities thus because:

Existing categories for organising communities were not going to be useful in this case... it did not help us to explain the similarities and differences that cross these divides. We opted then for an approach that was based in the communities' understandings of their own aims. Why do they exist? What do they aim to achieve? (2004, pp. 160 – 161).

The distinctions they draw between cooperative and environmental communities seems fairly arbitrary, and the inclusion of each community's self-selected abbreviated core values (such as cooperative, education cooperation, sustainability, holism, mutual support), do not really serve any useful purpose as they are vague and meaningless terms on their own and cannot be described as core values. However, the text provides a comprehensive overview of both intentional communities and the alternative movement in this country, including a historical context and a comprehensive discussion about conflict and longevity in communities.

Intentional communities as 'successes' or 'failures'

Sargisson and Sargent refer to “what might be called a myth of scholarship” (2004, p. xiii) that assumes a community can be deemed a success if it has lasted a long time, and point out that for many communards, longevity “is not a primary goal” (*ibid.*). They cite scholars such as Fogerty (1972), Wagner (1985) and Pitzer (1989) who include longevity as just one of a criteria for success, including whether a community saw itself as successful in its own terms (2004, p. 162). Donald Pitzer's theory of developmental communalism emphasises communal living and ownership of property as part of an extended developmental process, including a tendency to move through various forms of organisation and emphasis including conversion to more private forms of ownership if this is deemed to work better for its participants than communal ownership. This perspective contrasts with Kanter's theory of commitment and her view that a community can be deemed a success if it has survived a period of 25 years, and having failed if it did not. Developmental communalism also takes into account that people create or join communities to achieve particular goals, and that they might leave, and communities may disband, when those values or goals are realised. From this perspective the success of communal groups lies in their ability to serve the needs of their members rather than fulfil any overarching criteria of success or failure. Barry Shenker also considers that success is self-defining:

A small group of ten people setting up a commune which disbands after two years may have achieved all they wanted: in their terms they were successful. Yet some communal societies exist for long periods. For them

persistence and growth are ends in themselves ... from their own point of view they too are successful (1986, p 5 – 6).

Krishan Kumar (1991) cites an American sociologist of the 1890s, Henry Lloyd, who believed that communities that managed to overcome social and physical problems deserved to be called “the only successful ‘society’” (1991, p. 76), regardless of how long they had achieved this for. Metcalf agrees. He considers that:

There can be many measures of success for intentional communities, including the personal growth experienced by members, the moral example set by a group that rejects the corruption of the surrounding world, and the cultural creativity of people who share a remarkable spiritual or aesthetic sensitivity (2003, p. 703).

However, Metcalf adds that, “perhaps the most compelling measure is the sheer ability of the community to survive” (*ibid.*). The concept of survival, however, like success and failure, is also problematic. This is apparent in discussions about Wilderland and Renaissance communities later in this thesis. The physical evidence of survival is apparent in the continuous collective ownership of a piece of land which people reside upon. Survival also is evident in the ongoing existence of a particular group of people who share a lifestyle and a common purpose. These are two quite different ways of looking at what survival means in relation to long-lived intentional communities and returns us to the question at the beginning of this thesis. That is, can we say a community has survived if it has changed to the extent that it no longer resembles the community it started out as, or if the resident group has changed completely? If the land remains secure and settled because it cannot be sold, can this be considered to be a minimum definition of survival? Participants in a session on success in a 1993 meeting of the International Communal Studies Association (ICSA) suggested that in the process of considering what constitutes success, it was important to consider the extent to which communities are capable of changing over time to adjust to the changed needs of the community, its members, and the wider society (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 162). These questions are central to this study.

William Bainbridge (2003) identifies other factors that he believes contribute to the survival of communes, including the previous acquaintance of members (2003,

p. 704). He writes that “the strength of social bonds between members is important” (*ibid.*). However Bainbridge also points out that, “Intense relations between a few members of a community can produce a subgroup that is the basis of a schism splitting the larger community” (2003, p. 704). This is evident in the case of Renaissance (discussed in Chapter 4), with ideological divisions developing between the core founding group and a group of later arrivals.

The question of whether a community has in fact survived because the land continues to be owned by a community group long-term is also explored here. When a piece of land is legally ‘locked’ in such a way that it cannot easily be sold (as is often the case with land owned by charitable trusts), particularly when no individuals are able to gain any financial benefit from such a sale (also the case when land is owned by charitable trusts), it is highly probable that such properties will continued to be inhabited indefinitely. However, it does not necessarily follow that continued habitation assumes that such places can continue to be described as communities in the sense that community is defined here, particularly if we accept that the people in them must “carry out a shared lifestyle with a common purpose” (Metcalf & Christian, 2003, p. 670). It is also relevant in cases where, as Metcalf observes, alternative communities have become over time more like rural neighbourhoods.

Utopianism

The concept of communities as utopian

The notion that a group must share a common purpose in order to be described as intentional communities, and assertions that many cannot be described as alternative in the present, are both linked to the assumption that intentional communities have at their core a desire to be different from, and to foster an environment that is better than, the broader society they are situated within. Utopian thought is concerned with notions of an ideal society and provides a particular framework for thinking about alternative societies and ways of life (Schaer, Claeys, & Sargent, 2000). Lucy Sargisson points out that “a considerable amount of controversy surrounds the term ‘utopia’ within the field of utopian studies” (2007a, p. 2). She explains that this partly reflects the range of disciplines

that it encompasses. It also reflects the different interpretations that scholars apply to the term. Sargisson challenges two common interpretations of utopia in an exploration of two 'green' intentional communities. The first interpretation views the concept of utopia "negatively (as unrealistic, unrealisable, excessively wishful thinking). ... The second views utopias as perfectionist: seeking to provide perfect blueprints that map the road to the good life" (*ibid.*).

Sargisson emphasises the paradoxical nature of the concept of utopia, referring to its origins; the term was coined by Thomas More in his satirical novel *Utopia* (1516), and the word "forms a pun on three Greek terms: 'eu' (good), 'ou' (non, no or not) and 'topos' (place)" (2007a, p. 18). Thus, "utopias remain always, in a truly literal and etymological sense, good places that are no places. They are good places at which we never arrive" (*ibid.*). It is this concept, Sargisson suggests, that makes utopia an "entirely appropriate term" (*ibid.*) to apply to intentional communities because they are "living responses to feelings of discontent about the modern world, they articulate the desire for better ways of being and explore ways to bring this to life in the here and now" (*ibid.*). In this sense, communities represent "utopias in process," providing,

a space inside which members can explore the good life. This exploration often involves deep experimentation with the self as members seek self-improvement, self-development, and/or self-transformation in a search for a different ontological relationship with the world (2007a, p. 396).

The concept of utopia as a process rather than a realisable state or place is central to its association with communal groups. Ruth Levitas (1990) refers to it as representing an "imaginary state of ideal perfection" (p. 3). She too emphasises the notion that it is not so much an attainable state, as something to aspire towards. She suggests that "utopia is about how we would live and what kind of a world we would live in if we could do just that" (1990, p. 1). Valerie Fournier (2002) enlarges on this, writing that utopianism is,

about movement and processes rather than 'better states'; about journeys rather than destinations; it is about opening up visions of alternatives rather than closing down on 'a' vision of 'a' better society'. ... Thus utopianism cannot end with a critique of the present, nor even with the construction of a better future; it cannot end at all (p. 192).

The separation of aspiration from destination is important. I suggest confusion about this distinction is partly why many long-established communards tend to resist the notion that their communities are utopian and are reluctant to consider their motivation, or relationships with them, in these terms. The idea, expressed by Kanter, that “utopians believe that tension, conflict, and disharmony derive from the environment, from social conditions outside the individual, not from sources within him” (1972, p. 33), further contributes to the ambiguity that exists around different interpretations of the concept of utopia. Many communards would be the first to argue that tensions, conflict and disharmony derive from within individuals. Others would add that they do not consider that their communities are attempts to create a better state or society.

While Kanter was referring mostly to religious 19th century communities, the implication is that it applies to all intentional communities. One long-term communard who rejects the notion that alternative communities are utopian points out that a lot of the communes that were started during the 1960s and 1970s in New Zealand were “anarchist experiments where doing your own thing was more acceptable than any ideology” (Jenkin, personal communication, 6 March, 2011). In explaining his own motivation for living communally during the 1970s, Jenkins expresses a dystopian view of the world: “Three other members and myself (sic) foresaw some drastic changes coming to the world. Famine and war we thought were imminent. We were survivalists, and we imagined Moonsilver [the community they formed] to be our mountain hideaway” (Jenkin, 20011, p. 24). Kanter described many 1970s-era communes as nonutopian because they lacked “ideology or programs for social reform [and] resemble an extended family more than a utopian community. ... They develop from friendships rather than groups welded together by shared ideology” (1972, p. 167). Kanter also considers that unlike 19th century communes, which she believes were “looking ahead, anticipating the future and building on their concept of history” (1972, p. 168), nonutopian communes are nostalgic, “looking behind them towards a romanticised past” (*ibid.*). While theorists might argue that there is a big difference between simply wishing for a better way of life and actively pursuing a different way of living to achieve that, the point that some communards consider themselves to be survivalists creates a problematic relationship with utopianism. They are more

aligned with Kanter's description of nonutopian communities which lack an ideological basis.

Daniel Greenburg argues that:

For 99% of our evolution as a species we lived in tribes, knowable communities in which we 'belonged'. In fact, it is our present day absence of community that is abnormal. ... Intentional communities are experiments in how we can create a sense of community and shared values within our present day world. They are not utopias, but to the extent that they succeed in creating holistic and healthy environments in which children can learn and grow, they may have much wisdom to offer as we move to a post-industrial society (2003, p. 681).

Sargent acknowledges that "most people living in communities reject, or are at least uncomfortable with the label utopian" (Sargent, personal communication, 23 July, 2010), but he still maintains that they are utopian because most of them demonstrate utopian elements: "intent, and in almost all cases, a vision of a better way of living" (*ibid.*). Sargent speculates that unease on the part of communards towards being labelled utopian is probably because they see it as representing too high a standard to live up to. Kanter's views that utopian thought "idealises social unity, maintaining that only in intimate collective life do people fully realise their human-ness" (1972, p. 32) may well contribute to the unease on the part of communards, particularly for those who do not aspire to sustain close relationships with fellow participants. Despite this reluctance expressed by some communards to their communities being described as utopian, most communal scholars accept that communes are utopian, based on the notion that "intentional communities are groups of people who are dissatisfied with life as they know it, share a vision of the good life, and aim collectively to realise this" (Sargisson, 2004a, p. 321).

Freisen and Friesen refer to a "utopian need" (2004, p. 9) that exists in society – comprised of a desire to create a society which fosters such values as freedom, equality and democracy. For some people, they suggest, forming communes is a way to manifest this need, especially as "philosophical consensus can be better implemented by encompassing all facets of daily living" (2004, p. 27). As well as acknowledging there are many factors that motivate people to live in community, from a sense of dissatisfaction with life and a perception that communal living

offers a more meaningful or interesting way to live, to a desire to improve society by demonstrating models of alternative ways to live, they also point out that people who feel ostracized or who hold “peculiar beliefs” are more inclined to separate themselves from the mainstream. This includes “dozens of utopian models ranging from cultic collectivities like the Texas Branch Davidians to the tolerant Amana People, to modern day Doukhobors and Hutterites” (*ibid.*).

Friesen and Friesen’s sociological definition of a utopian community describes “a group of people who are attempting to establish a new social pattern based upon a vision of the ideal society, and who have withdrawn themselves from society at large in order to give a face to that vision in experimental form” (2004, p. 14). This ‘vision of the ideal society’ is not the same as Kanter’s or Sargisson’s ‘vision of the good life’, and perhaps it is the emphasis on aspiring to create an ideal society that underlies the aversion many long-established communards have towards being described as utopian. Certainly most would agree that they aspire to achieve a good life (although as Jenkin points out, who does not?), but many would be more hesitant about the idea that they aspire to create an ideal society. This may well reflect the maturity of long-established communities. While the founders may have been originally motivated by visions of striving to create an ideal society, over the decades these may have been adjusted to more achievable goals of ‘a good life’. In 2010, Sargent concludes in *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* that there is a great danger in taking utopianism too seriously, reminding us that, “one needs to be able to believe passionately and also to be able to see the absurdity of one’s own beliefs and laugh at them” (p. 127).

Dystopia

Krishan Kumar (2000) describes utopia and dystopia as “two sides of the same literary genre. ... One paints the future in glowing tones; the other colours it black” (p. 253). He refers to texts such as Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Those writers, along with H. G. Wells, whose books followed a pattern in which “a natural or man-made catastrophe destroys the old-order on earth, allowing those who remain painfully to put together the structures of a lasting new world order” (Kumar, 2000, p. 255), expressed an dystopian view of humanity. Kumar views them as a

response to 19th and early 20th century literature that “renewed the literary utopia and kept alive the hope of a socialist future” (p. 252). The notion of catastrophe leading to a new world order is particularly relevant to the survivalist motivation on the part of many people to establish rural communities in New Zealand during the 1970s, as Jenkin’s reference to the Moonsilver group illustrates. It also provides a possible insight into the motivation behind many resident foreign nationals in New Zealand to immigrate to this country. Amongst the people who founded or joined communities during the 1970s, many expressed a sense of foreboding and fear of imminent global catastrophe and a belief that the best option for survival was to withdraw from mainstream society, and become self-sufficient.¹¹ For many, this stemmed from concern about the threat of nuclear war or accident associated with the escalation of the Cold War during the 1970s, which generated fear of apocalyptic scenarios and a desire to retreat to rural communes. Others believed that a capitalist consumption-orientated society was unsustainable and could only implode, at which time society would collapse and descend into chaos, resulting in a Hobbesian war of all against all. The best chances for survival in these scenarios were to live in rural enclaves and cultivate a self-sufficient lifestyle. New Zealand’s geographical position in the world made it an attractive destination for European and North Americans with such an outlook. In the present, many communards continue to express a sense of foreboding about the effects of over consumption on both society and the planet. However, concern about climate change, ‘peak oil’, unsustainable practices and environmental despoliation have surpassed nuclear threat in motivating many to cultivate a cooperative rural lifestyle with like-minded others. The titles on the shelves of many community libraries of the 1970s in New Zealand reflected a range of both utopian and dystopian literature. The texts by Orwell, Wells and Huxley (cited above) were widely circulated amongst the communards I was associated with, alongside other iconic texts such as *Siddhartha* (Hesse, 1951), and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Pirsig, 1974), which represented the widespread quest for personal and spiritual improvement.¹²

¹¹ This assertion is based on my own recollections, and others’ of the widely expressed concerns about a perceived imminent collapse of society, and associated belief that the only viable option was to create independent self-sufficient alternatives. Some took it to the extreme, retreating into rural corners, arming themselves, refusing to have bank accounts, and keeping a very low profile.

Post-utopianism

Henry Near observes in Israeli kibbutzim, that as time passes, and circumstances and people change in community, utopian elements wane. He applies the descriptor ‘post-utopianism’ to refer to the increasing privatisation that many kibbutzim have experienced in recent years:

In some cases the equation kibbutz = utopia seemed to hold good for several years: in others the dream began to change or dissolve after a few months. And at this point, the kibbutz stops being utopia, and becomes a post-utopian society (2010).¹³

Near identifies four major ways in which the utopian reality in kibbutzim becomes, “less perfect than in the first flush of its realisation” (*ibid.*). These include an inability on the part of kibbutz members to put their pre-conceived ideals into practice, changes in the kibbutz as a result of wider societal change, tension between the utopian model and conflicting influences such as “between economic progress and the original naive conceptions of complete equality and job rotation” (*ibid.*), and differences of approach and clashes in personality between members. These tensions suggest that while utopian aspirations to create a better society often provide the impetus for establishing communities in the first instance, these ideals are most evident in the early years, and over time tend to decline and become less relevant as people relinquish their initial aspirations and settle into more private and less communal enterprises. This links to Pitzer’s notion of developmental communalism.

Sargent concedes that some degree of post-utopianism is evident in most intentional communities, but believes that the concept of utopia continues to be “periodically revived” (personal communication, 23 July, 2010). I argue that this is illustrated in this research in two respects; frequently, younger and newer members of communities express strongly utopian aspirations, in some instances expressing a desire to revive the original ideals they believe the community was founded on.

¹² Ursula Le Guin, Jack Kerouac, Carlos Castaneda, and Hunter Thompson are other examples of popular authors whose literature was widely circulated amongst communards.

¹³ Near has since published this work (2011): *Where Community Happens: The Kibbutz and the Philosophy of Communalism*, Oxford: Peter Lang. The quotes here are from an unpublished chapter of that book that he sent to me prior to publication.

This is evident at Wilderland, for example: the small group of recently established residents (all under the age of 40) expressed utopian sentiments as they explained their intention to rebuild the community on the basis of the original purposes stated in the trust document. One said “I see Wilderland as being a kind of guiding light” (JP, personal communication, 4 November, 2009). Another said:

I personally believe it is a better future for this world [to have] people living together off the land ... We aspire to achieve something that most people just talk about. We are trying to ... set an example and interest others to live the same. And if we can achieve that ... it's a better future for humanity (Avner, personal communication, 4 November, 2009).

The distinction between aspirations of early members and later ones is reflected in the observations of Yaacov Oved who, in *200 Years of American Communes* (1988), argues that there are significant differences between the first generation that make an ideological choice to found communes, and later generations who are more influenced by family relations, affinity with home and inertia, and, who after “making a first voluntary step into communal living, carried on with their daily routine” (pp. 369 – 370). This is evident in the case of Renaissance, where the second wave of people who arrived after the community was established were a different generation – not only in terms of age, but also in experience, motivation, and expectations. Founding and early members of Tui have also observed this distinction between subsequent generations of people in the later comers to that community.

The New Zealand context

Bill Metcalf points out that “while there are many similarities between stories of communal living in Australia and New Zealand, there are also significant differences” (2003, p. 705). He identifies one of the most obvious ones as deriving from the historical differences between the two countries; Australia’s early European settlement was “based on it being a dumping ground for convicts; hence utopian communalism was precluded” (*ibid.*), whereas New Zealand was influenced by settlement schemes “which had a moderately utopian ring to them”

(*ibid.*).¹⁴ Lyman Sargent is more enthusiastic about the degree to which utopian ideals underpinned 19th century settlement schemes in this country, arguing that “utopianism is central to the New Zealand experience and has helped create the nation that exists today” (2001, p. 1). He cites five sources as evidence: New Zealand’s colonisation projects, the aspirations of individual settlers, utopian literature written by New Zealanders, the plans of intentional communities, and “various social, economic and political movements which put forward explicit designs for an improved New Zealand” (2001, pp. 2–3). Sargent believes that only North America shares such a history of utopian aspirations in its colonisation schemes, to the extent that they are also “central to the national experience” (2001, p. 10). He believes that the visionary schemes that underpinned the colonisation of New Zealand were based on a desire to “creat[e] a better society that that in the old country. [Thus] the history of intentional communities in New Zealand is virtually identical with the history of New Zealand” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 6). He points out that 19th century colonisation of New Zealand by Britain promoted New Zealand as “the farthest promised land,” the “happy colony”, “the land of promise” (*ibid.*). While this could be seen as a branding exercise or marketing ploy to encourage British emigration, it also reflected an aspiration on the part of colonial promoters, such as Edward Gibbon Wakefield, to create a “Brighter Britain” (Sargent, 2001, p. 2) in the new colony, one “without the very rich or the very poor” (2001, p. 3). However, despite these utopian aspirations on the part of colonisers, Colin James (1986), writes that:

The colonists did not so much strike out boldly for New Zealand as flee from the social disaster of nineteenth-century England. It was not to seek their fortune they came; rather to escape the fact or fear of starvation, unemployment and homelessness. Once here they naturally turned to each other and the state for mutual sustenance (1986, pp. 11–12).

By the 1950s, James asserts, an entrenched sense of security had been established by the state through the provision of free education, medical care, social security, compulsory unionism and a highly regulated economy, which included guaranteed minimum prices for some agricultural produce, import protections, and state-fixed

¹⁴ Metcalf identifies Wakefield, Angas, Lang and McLeod, 19th century New Zealand colonisers, as particularly influential in this respect.

minimum wages (James, 1986, pp. 12–13). He describes New Zealand culture at that time as:

... an inferiority-complex expression of the virtues of hard, physical, outdoor activity ... shored up by a levelling process that denied excellence in others; cultural expression was similarly timid, unimaginative, dull and unproductive, elevating the mediocrity of secured individuals to a virtue. The affluence of the 1950s and 1960s set that in a concrete of smugness (1986, pp. 19 – 20).

Toby Boraman describes the 1950s in New Zealand as “a period of suffocating cultural conformity” (2007, p. 2). He refers to the 1951 waterfront lockout, when “the radical wing of the union movement was eventually shattered in a draconian manner by the combined forces of the state, capitalist class and mainstream union bureaucrats” (2007, p. 3) as a key event that marked “a crucial turning point in radical politics” (*ibid.*) in this country, and that from then until the late 1960s “a quiet discontent simmered away in society ... to eventually explode in the late 1960s, when open class conflict emerged once more” (2007, p. 4). Boraman points to the expression coined by Austin Mitchell, that refers to New Zealand as ‘The Half-Gallon Quarter-Acre Pavlova Paradise’ as representative of “the myth that Aotearoa was a classless, ethnically harmonious society” (2007, p. 4).

Russell Johnson, a member of *The Socialist Action League* referred to “the radical change of political climate” (in Fyson, 1973, p. 5) that New Zealand experienced during the 1960s. He identifies the generation who grew up in the 1950s as being “in sharp contrast to the previous “‘silent generation’ ... of passive if unenthusiastic acceptance of the status quo” (*ibid.*). Discontent gained momentum as the generation that grew to adulthood in the 1960s and early 1970s “developed in an atmosphere of mounting challenge to the injustice and inequalities of modern society” (*ibid.*). This was manifest in such things as protests against New Zealand’s involvement in the Vietnam War, sporting contact with South Africa, and “the despoliation of our environment” (*ibid.*). George Fyson identified the “destruction of the environment by profit-hungry business interests, epitomised by the plan of Comalco, and the National Government to drown Lake Manapouri”¹⁵

¹⁵ A long-lasting environmental campaign that began in the 1960s was waged in protest against the proposed raising of lake levels of Manapouri and Te Anau (two remote lakes in the Fiordland

(1973, p. 9) as providing further fuel to the growing radical activity and environmental protests by young New Zealanders.

Another significant event that fuelled protest by young New Zealanders was the French testing of nuclear bombs in the Pacific, and Greenpeace's response to take a flotilla to Mururoa to protest in 1972. That same year, the Labour Party victory, lead by Norman Kirk, "marked a general shift to the left in this country and the desire on the part of the mass of the population for effective measures to be taken against the injustices they face[d]" (Fyson, 1973, p. 8). The Kirk government actively participated in the protests against French nuclear testing, sending two Navy frigates to Mururoa to join the flotilla lead by Greenpeace. Twelve years later, in 1984, another Labour Government, lead by David Lange, introduced legislation that made New Zealand the first country in the world to declare itself nuclear-free. New Zealand's nuclear free policy contributed to its attractiveness to foreign nationals, and coincided with the increasing disquiet felt by many young Germans who identified with the alternative movement and chose to immigrate to New Zealand:

The [German] state was trying to marginalise 'progressive' movements and even to declare their leaders criminal. As these developments continued, many Germans felt they had to decide as individuals whether they could go on fighting for 'good' – indeed, whether they could go on tolerating Germany at all – or whether personal happiness and life in a better environment were not more important for them. The personal Utopia of life in a clean, unpolluted environment led them to go looking for earthly paradise. ... New Zealand seemed to qualify for various reasons. Its isolated situation seemed to guarantee security; the sparse population promised enough space for one's own ecological needs; the climate was said to be pleasant; and a total ban on all forms of nuclear energy from the mid-1980s gave New Zealand the aura of a small exemplary and courageous country at the end of the world (Bönisch-Brednich, 2002, p. 108).

Another development in New Zealand that had an impact on the alternative communities of the 1970s, especially the open land ones, was the closure, beginning in the early 1970s, of most of the psychiatric institutions in New Zealand. John Newton refers to a "period of dramatic change that saw the

National Park) to guarantee a supply of electricity for Comalco's aluminium smelter established at Tiwai Point in the South Island.

emptying out and closure of virtually all New Zealand's major psychiatric facilities within the course of a couple of decades" (2009, p. 72). Newton refers to this in the context of the commune James K. Baxter founded at Jerusalem in 1969 absorbing a number of mentally ill people. Open-door communes were not only places where the mentally ill could find refuge, but police and social workers actively encouraged people with psychiatric illnesses to stay in communes, sometimes discharging them to such places when they had nowhere else to go. This was the experience of Tahuna Farm and Renaissance communities. Communes, as experimental environments, tolerated eccentric and bizarre behaviour by people. Unfortunately the widespread availability of drugs, particularly marijuana in those places, meant that for those with "fragile mental or emotional states [such environments were] likely to be unhelpful" (Newton, 2009, p. 74).

Prior to the early 1970s, notable existing intentional communities that influenced the later establishment of alternative lifestyle communities in New Zealand include Riverside Community, Beeville, Wilderland and several short-lived mainly urban communes with which James K. Baxter was affiliated.¹⁶ Beeville was founded in 1933 by members of the Hansen family who were conscientious objectors.¹⁷ Dan Hansen left Beeville with his family to establish Wilderland Community in the Coromandel in 1964. Tim Jones, who lived both at Beeville and Wilderland, published *A Hard Won Freedom: Alternative Communities in New Zealand* (1975), with photographer Ian Baker. It takes the form of a travelogue, describing an 18-month journey Jones took visiting mostly relatively young communes and alternative schools throughout New Zealand in the early 1970s, including stays in both those communities. His text captures the spirit of the times with its language and commentary, and demonstrates the naiveté and youth of many of the participants.

Riverside is the oldest community in New Zealand, having been in existence for 70 years. A history of the first 50 years of that community is documented in

¹⁶ Most notably the Jerusalem commune.

¹⁷ The history of that community is documented by Rosemary Fyfe in her master's thesis: *The Beeville Community, c1933 – 1973: Rural Radicals?* (2004)

Community: The Story of Riverside (1991), written by Lynn Rain who was a member at the time of writing. Bill Metcalf has included a biographical account of Riverside by Chris Palmer in his book *Shared Visions, Shared Lives* (1996). There are also numerous papers and unpublished memoirs associated with Riverside, held in the National Library of New Zealand, and this research has drawn on both Rain's and the National Library material.

A controversial community that attracted considerable outside and media attention was Centrepoin Community, in Albany. Len Oakes' book *Inside Centrepoin: The Story of a New Zealand Community* (1986) is another insider account. It documents the first nine years of the community that existed from 1977 until 2000 when it was shut down after its leader, Bert Potter, and other senior members of the community were convicted of sexual and drug offences. Oakes described the community as "a communal psychotherapy cult" (1986, p. 10). At its peak there were over 200 residents. This community became the focus for many articles, mostly generated by media, and mostly concerned with sensational aspects of that community and the legal battles that precipitated its end.

Lyman Sargent has written extensively on the subject of intentional communities in New Zealand. He produced a comprehensive Research Guide (1997), and has written numerous academic articles and papers, most notably (1997a, 1999, 2001, 2004) about communal living in this country. Lucy Sargisson has also published papers on New Zealand communities (2003, 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2010). I draw extensively on both these scholars' works throughout this thesis.

In her master's thesis on intentional communities in the Coromandel (*Living Together? Change and Continuity of a New Zealand Intentional Community*), Larisa Webb (1999) draws on her experience of living communally in the study of Arohanui, a fictional community she created through a composite of four of the most established communities in the Coromandel. She took this approach to protect the identity and privacy of the participants, particularly as she discussed explicit examples of conflict between particular participants.

An alternative magazine, *Mushroom: A Magazine on Alternative Living in New Zealand* was published from 1974 – 1985. Describing itself as, “subsistence publishing” (Olds) it aimed to cover:

Communes and Communities; The Ohu Scheme; Homesteading; Rural Technology; Alternative Schooling; Natural Foods; Organic gardening and farming; Crafts; Survival in Cities; Personal Awareness. ... [It was a] self-published, non-profit, non-professional activity of like-minded people; a major distribution network for – and surviving now as a document of – the counterculture and alternative movements in New Zealand in this period. ... [It produced] printed articles, news, letters, notices and opinion (*ibid.*).

There were also three *New Zealand Whole Earth Catalogues* (the first in 1972) published by Alistair Taylor. The first edition explains that its “starting point has been the *Last American Whole Earth Catalogue*” (Wilkes et al., 1972) which circulated throughout New Zealand in 1971 and sold many copies here. The New Zealand version “differ[ed] in emphasis” (*ibid.*) from the American version, cataloguing “techniques” rather than “tools and books” (*ibid.*). Both *Mushroom Magazine* and the *Whole Earth Catalogue* were present in virtually every commune’s library in the 1970s. They offered practical techniques for do-it-yourself subsistence living, and *Mushroom* particularly, provided a forum for people to connect with others involved with similar projects throughout New Zealand.¹⁸ More locally, a number of newsletters were published, such as *Waterwheel* (Coromandel), and *Gumboot Express* (Hokianga), which provided a forum for exchanging information, ideas and debate amongst communards in those areas.

The Ohu Scheme

Toby Boraman speculates that a reason why the commune movement in New Zealand was “relatively larger than most of its overseas counterparts” (2007, p. 83) was in part because of the relative cheapness and availability of land here compared to other countries, but also because it “was given great impetus after the

¹⁸ Renaissance raised funds to buy their land partly through asking for donations via the *Mushroom Magazine*. The magazines provide invaluable historical records as they document comprehensive details about land prices, areas being settled, as well as insights into the aspirations of participants, largely presented in the vernacular of the period.

Labour Government (1972 – 1975) established the Ohu Scheme in 1973” (*ibid.*).¹⁹ The Ohu Scheme was a government land settlement initiative that was designed to enable tracts of Crown land to be made available for groups of people who wanted to establish alternative communities in rural areas. Ohu members leased the land from the Department of Lands and Survey “at a peppercorn rental (4.4% of unimproved current market value per year) and was perpetually renewable at ten year intervals after an initial one year temporary lease” (*Ohu: Utopias in a Paradise Lost?*).²⁰ The extent to which the Ohu Scheme influenced the commune movement in this country is not clear, however. It was short-lived, and few groups actually succeeded in establishing communities under the scheme. It seems more likely that the high interest in communal living in this country influenced the instigation of the Ohu Scheme rather than the other way around.²¹ The early editions of *Mushroom Magazine* would suggest that by 1974 the movement was already well established in this country and numerous groups of young people were independently buying or looking for tracts of rural land for the purpose of living communally. Nevertheless, clearly the third New Zealand Labour Government that came into power in 1972 lead by Norman Kirk, was sympathetic towards many of the sentiments being expressed by the youth in New Zealand at that time. The Labour Party’s strong social conscience was evident in their opposition to French nuclear testing in the Pacific and support for a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone, their termination of national conscription and New Zealand’s involvement in the Vietnam War, and the cancellation of visas for a South African rugby team (in 1974) in objection to their country’s apartheid system.

¹⁹ ‘Ohu’ is a Māori word that “refers to either a communal or volunteer work group, or to work together as a communal group” (Ohu Advisory Committee, 1975, p. 1). Sargent writes that it was in August 1973 when “the first indication that the Government was considering a scheme of this nature” (2004, p. 41) and that the first meetings occurred in 1974. In 1975 the first groups were settling Ohu land.

²⁰ This article that was retrieved from the internet had no author or date. I have been unable to trace them.

²¹ This is reinforced by the author of *Ohu: Utopias in Paradise Lost?* article who writes that “[i]n the 1972 election, the newly formed Values Party running on a platform of environmental sustainability (although the word was not yet coined) and political integrity, garnered a respectable percentage of the vote. ... It can be inferred that ... Ohu were at least partly conceived as a counter to the Values Party manifesto.” Colin James (1986) further reinforces this view in his reference to the influence of the “radical-liberal” Values Party that was established in 1972, and its broad appeal to the New Zealand populace, especially the young, in relation to “the idealism of its message (limits to economic growth, particularly energy, concern for the environment, decentralisation of power and liberal moral values) (1986, p. 34).

In *Ohu: Utopians in Paradise Lost?*, the author speculates that the Ohu Scheme may also have been driven by a desire on the part of the then Labour Government to provide “an outlet for those who might otherwise engage in dissident political action” (*ibid.*). This is indirectly borne out by a reference in a Lands and Survey brochure explaining the Ohu Scheme:

Mr Kirk also made it clear that the people he was talking about, the people who were feeling left out, were not those standing on street corners demonstrating. There were, he said, a lot of others besides those, who would welcome this opportunity for social development (Ohu Advisory Committee, 1975, p. 1).

Boraman argues that by the late 1960s and early 1970s New Zealand was experiencing a period of “political, social and cultural ferment” (2007, p. 27), illustrated by the fact that by the early 1970s the first women’s liberation, gay and lesbian groups, as well as ecological groups such as the Native Forest Action Council were active (*ibid.*). Protest groups such as the Progressive Youth Movement (PYM), the anti-apartheid group Halt All Racial Tours (HART) were also gaining popularity at this time. This social ferment amongst young New Zealanders is evident in Prime Minister Norman Kirk’s stated reasons for establishing the Ohu Scheme when he said:

In the last few years a lot of young people had been saying that the Establishment had gone soft, that it had lost its ideas and its drive. ... Those who were disillusioned with the way things were going were to be given the opportunity to see if they could do what they said should be done (1975, p. 3).

Sargent points to the Ohu Scheme as providing further evidence of New Zealand’s inherent utopianism. However, while the ideals expressed by Kirk and Rata were clearly rooted in utopianism, their motivation could equally be seen as a response to the widespread unrest being expressed by young people, as outlined above. For both Kirk and the Hon. Matiu Rata, then Minister of Lands, the emphasis of Ohu was “mainly spiritual” (1975, p. 3). Rata described the scheme as providing “the opportunity to experience the earth, the country, and each other in a new fraternal unity” (1975, p.4). For Rata (who was Māori), “the need to set up alternative communities in New Zealand [was] just as logical as supporting Māori communities” (Ohu Advisory Committee, 1975, p. 4). He said:

For me, having two cultural frames of reference ... it is an easy matter to understand and appreciate the different aspirations of other groups. It is

easy to support others who want to develop their own life-style, their own inter-personal relations, especially when such life-styles have a deep spiritual and group strength. ... The over-emphasis on the gross national product, perpetual greed, speculation, profiteering, unethical practices and the cult of individualism can only result in the further alienation of those who seek a return to community and group feelings (Ohu Advisory Committee, 1975, p. 4).

The Ohu Scheme was short-lived for a number of reasons. Sargisson and Sargent describe it as “a classic case of an idea coming from the top levels of government and being almost immediately undermined by the bureaucracy” (2004, p. 42). The Lands and Survey Department was uncooperative. District Land Offices did not produce lists identifying available land, and stalled any attempts by groups to access possible tracts: “The bureaucracy went through the motions of supporting policy while making sure that the communities failed” (*ibid.*). Sargisson and Sargent describes the Ohu Scheme as a story of “enthusiasm and high hopes followed by a rapid disillusionment, a story of idealism against bureaucracy, naiveté against political realities, weakness against power” (2004, p. 41). Many groups disbanded before they could find land to settle. Frustrated by delays some either bought land themselves, or went off to pursue other interests. Others, who did manage to secure a lease, had the challenges of remoteness and accessibility to contend with, as well as difficult terrain and poor quality land. As well as this, many groups were poorly organised, unskilled in practical areas, and unprepared for the realities involved in settling land from scratch, as is evident in one participant’s recollections:

We found this land way up the Wairoa Gorge. We were granted the land but we never actually did it. It was all native bush. ... The road was just rocks and the land was on the other side of the river. We camped out and put a totem pole on it and lots of people would go out there from town for their country hit, but we really did nothing much up there at all. We were all fantasy people. We had all this Lord of the Ringsy stuff going on in the back of our minds. ... Some South African people who’d heard about this government Ohu Scheme, they came along, same with this Canadian couple (Sandi, personal communication, 28 April, 2006).

A few groups that did manage to settle land under the Ohu Scheme lasted for several years. The most noted examples are Earth Extract, in Waipu, and the Ahu Ahu Ohu up the Wanganui River that was occupied for almost 25 years.

Influence of Māori communalism

Sargisson and Sargent suggest that along with the European and North American experience, another factor that influenced the communal living movement in New Zealand was a “growing recognition” of Māori communalism (2004, p. 41). While they included the Ohu Scheme as evidence of this, the extent to which Māori communalism influenced the communal movement in this country is difficult to gauge. Colin James points out that, “The fragmentation of Māori society through urbanisation in the 1950s and 1960s weakened Māori collective tradition and left younger Māori floundering and alienated in an individualistic society” (1986, p. 14). He also states that “[b]y the late 1960s Māori language, arts and crafts were atrophying” (1986, p. 20). Rata’s reference to supporting Māori in his justification for creating the Ohu Scheme reflects a desire to address this. However, the people that established communities (including Ohu) during the 1970s were not only almost exclusively non-Māori (and this remains the case in the present), but I suggest that most displayed neither knowledge of, nor a particular interest in, tikanga Māori.²² From my own experience of the communal movement during the 1970s and 1980s, it seemed that for the majority of participants, knowledge of, and interest in, Māori communalism was minimal. Romantic associations were articulated in connection with Parihaka, and the pacifist Māori prophets Tohu and Te Whiti,²³ but I suggest that for the majority of people who chose to live in rural communities these aspects were insignificant alongside the other influences discussed above. Although Hohaia, O’Brien and Strongman (2001) point out that “the continuity of [Parihaka’s] political legacy can be seen in land rights protest movements such as the historic 1975 Māori Lands March, the events at Bastion Point and at the Raglan Golf Course” (p. 12), I argue that in general, the people who chose to live an alternative lifestyle were not influenced by Māori communalism.²⁴ Rather (paralleling Miller’s assertions about participants in the

²² Tikanga – custom, obligations & conditions, provisions, criterion (Ryan, 1994).

²³ Parihaka was a Māori community in Taranaki lead by two Rangatira – Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi, who advocated non-violent resistance in response to military oppression and land confiscation during the 1880s, “advocating always peace rather than violence on philosophical and moral grounds a generation before Gandhi’s parallel response to British imperialism” (Hohaia, O’Brien, Strongman, 2001, p. 10).

²⁴ This assertion is based on personal observation. It is also borne out by Colin James’ reference to the “dominant strand” (1986, p. 14) of European New Zealand society in the 1970s, being “the individualist strand” (*ibid.*). As well as this, “New Zealand – or at least its European component –

communal movement in North America), I assert that they were apolitical, and that American Indian culture and Eastern spiritualism were just as influential as the concept of Māori communalism.²⁵ This is not to play down the “remarkable renaissance in Māori culture, society and protest” (Boraman, 2007, p. 105) that began in the mid-1970s, particularly in relation to Māori land rights. Rather, I question the degree to which it influenced the alternative lifestyle movement at the time. A growing awareness of tikanga has steadily increased in this country in more recent times, particularly since the late 1990s, reflecting both a strengthening interest amongst young Māori in their history and culture, as well as a greater recognition and promotion of biculturalism in New Zealand. In recent years a number of Pākehā communards have actively pursued involvement in Māoritanga, learning te reo Māori²⁶ and incorporating some practices into their own communities.²⁷ Despite the fact that by the mid-1970s “a new generation of university-educated Māori liberals reawakened interest in Māori culture and tradition” (James, 1986, p. 20), Colin James asserts that in 1979, New Zealand still did not have a strong national identity that linked it to Pacific and Polynesian traditions (*ibid.*) rather than British or American. While a few informants in this research referred to communes as providing “a kind of Pākehā marae”²⁸ (Piet, personal communication, 20 January, 2009), there is no evidence that they incorporated Māori protocol or practices, or that there was a strong presence of Māori participants. I consider the fact that land was communally owned to be a tenuous link with Māori communalism.

An exception was the Jerusalem commune up the Wanganui River. John Newton’s (2009) book *The Double Rainbow* is a scholarly examination of this commune, which was established by James K. Baxter in 1969 “under the aegis and on the terms of a Māori [community]” (2009, p. 12), although it was peopled mainly with

[was] slow to create a distinctive independent culture. Until well into the mid 1970s its cultural expression was highly derivative, transplantations of the British and the American” (*ibid.*).

²⁵ Sandi’s description above of erecting a totem pole on the ohu land the group she was part of reflects this. Her reference to them being ‘fantasy people,’ further illustrates the apolitical and non-activist tendency of most participants. The fantasy element associated with the influence of texts such as Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) was popular within the alternative scene in the early 1970s and was evident in names adopted by people and places. Nelson’s ‘coffee shop/hangout’ in the early 1970s was called *Middle Earth*, for example.

²⁶ Maori language.

²⁷ For example, the concept of hui (an extended meeting or discussion).

²⁸ Marae refers to a meeting place. Pākehā is a Māori word for (white) non-Māori.

“disaffected and damaged young [Pākehā]” (back cover). In 1969 James K. Baxter wrote that Pākehā had “lived alongside a psychologically rich and varied minority culture for a hundred years and ... taken nothing from it but a few place-names and a great deal of plunder” (Baxter, in Newton, 2009, p. 11). In referring to the disaffection of urban youth in New Zealand during the 1960s, Newton wrote that:

For Baxter, their wholesale disaffection was a realistic verdict on the society they had inherited. ... In the Māori world, by contrast, and particularly Māori communalism, he believed he could see an alternative to this atomised majority culture – a system of values that answered to the longings and frustrations that he recognised, both in himself and in the young people around him. To establish an alternative Pākehā community that could ‘learn from the Māori side of the fence’ was to help restore, symbolically, the mana of the tangata whenua²⁹ and to begin to resuscitate a Pākehā culture that was choking to death on its own materialism (2009, p. 12).

Newton asserts that the Jerusalem commune “appears to be unique” (2009, p. 12) in the history of the contemporary communal movement in New Zealand, for this close association with Maori. The commune lasted for a few years after Baxter’s death in 1972, but declined rapidly and finally closed towards the end of 1975.

Foreign nationals

Sargent’s assertion that both the colonisation of New Zealand and the establishment of intentional communities in New Zealand were strongly influenced by utopian ideals might reflect the considerable number of foreign nationals who live in alternative communities in this country. Sargisson and Sargent believe that foreign nationals interested in living an alternative lifestyle are attracted to New Zealand because they see it as “a place to realise their dreams and aspirations” (2004, p.11). Klaus Bosselmann, a founder of the Green Party in New Zealand wrote:

Internationally, New Zealand has the reputation of being a country with particularly advanced environmental policies. Aotearoa/New Zealand is, of course, privileged for a number of reasons. Isolated from the centres of industry and population, it has been spared many environmental problems. Low density population, a lower degree of industrialisation, and a mild maritime climate with lush vegetation make it easy to reflect on the politics of the future (Bosselmann 1995, p. 129 in Bönisch-Brednich, 2002, p. 108 – 109).

²⁹ Tangata whenua – local people, aborigine, native (Ryan, 1994).

German immigrants make up a large ethnic sub-group in the communities in this study. Tui community particularly stands out in this respect. However, in *Keeping a Low Profile: An Oral History of German Immigration to New Zealand* (2002), Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich suggests that many young German immigrants “from the alternative scene” (p. 120) who chose to come to New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s, did so more as a consequence of unease about the direction German politics were taking during the late 1970s, and a sense that there was no future for them in Germany, than because they saw New Zealand as a place with the potential to realise their dreams and aspirations.³⁰ Indeed, many of Bönisch-Brednich’s informants expressed spontaneity in their decision to first visit, and then to decide to stay in, New Zealand. The decision to immigrate was often taken after initially coming as tourists and travelling around the country, during which time many visited alternative communities. Such places were a very attractive option for German travellers seeking an ecological lifestyle. They offered “self-discovery courses, lessons in meditation techniques, therapies, and much more, and trying them out was considered an important part of a full life” (Bönisch-Brednich, 2002, p. 125).

Bönisch-Brednich’s findings are borne out by my own interviews with foreign nationals in association with Renaissance, Tui and Wilderland communities. Many European informants expressed a deep sense of unease and dissatisfaction with Europe. Reasons given for leaving Europe include a desire to escape what were considered to be restrictive systems, including educational options for children, bureaucratic hurdles to building a career as an artisan, the impossibility of ever owning land in Europe because of scarcity and price, anxiety about pollution, nuclear power plants, militarisation, and a perception of a deteriorating quality of life. Tina, a Tui member, expressed a sense of suffocation in response to what she saw as a highly prescribed German society:

I was just at a point where I had that absolute question – was I going to settle in the condition of living where everything is secure? I was a physicist but I couldn’t find anything in the industry [that satisfied me] so

³⁰ This aligns with Colin James’ assertion that British settlers were motivated to come to New Zealand more from a desire to ‘flee’ the problems of Britain than because they were attracted to New Zealand as a utopian destination.

I went for a teaching job, and the teachers become state employees and there's a whole cushion that's built around them of how they can live – how to get the right insurance for their eyeglasses; they gave us a lecture on that! I *ran* out of that lecture and from that day I left everything (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Klaus, who settled at Renaissance community before moving to Riverside, left Germany because he felt that:

Germany was too densely populated and too over-regulated, and controlling of how somebody's life might be. It wasn't necessarily a particular country or something that I thought would be good [to go to], but I wasn't terribly interested in being in Germany. ... There were star fighters - very low level, very noisy aircraft. You'd be out with your pram somewhere and all of a sudden you had a star fighter above you breaking the sound barrier. It was madness! ... Then we had the army which was reasonably present wherever you were in the countryside, doing their exercises, walking past your front door. And we had nuclear plants just about everywhere (personal communication, 22 April, 2006).

JP, who came to New Zealand from South Africa, and lived for a time at Wilderland, believes “there are two kinds of foreign nationals – people who run away from what they're stuck in and want something new, and other people who are running *to* [something]” (personal communication, November 3, 2009).³¹ He placed himself in the latter category, saying he chose to come to New Zealand because he was impressed by New Zealand's nuclear-free policy and “because you could go snowboarding and surfing in the same day” (*ibid.*). Using this framework of ‘running from’ or ‘running to’, Klaus's decision to leave Germany and come to New Zealand could be seen as ‘running from’ the aspects of Germany he found untenable rather than ‘running to’ attractive options in New Zealand. Similarly, for another Wilderland resident, an Israeli, coming to New Zealand enabled him to escape “the habits [of] consumption, being employed and having rent” (Avner, personal communication, 3 November 2009). For him:

One of the best ways to break [old habits] is to fly away to another place. ... When you are born in New Zealand and live in New Zealand it's much harder to cut loose these cables that force you to an ordinary Western life (*ibid.*).

³¹ This notion of ‘running from’ and ‘running to’ is parallel to observations made by Bill Metcalf in his own doctoral research (1986). In relation to the motivations of participants in Australian intentional communities Metcalf refers to them choosing to live communally ‘in order to’ or ‘because of’ in the same context.

Two of the four communities in this study – Wilderland and Tui – have consistently had a high percentage of foreign nationals as residents and members. To a lesser extent Renaissance and Riverside have also had Europeans as long-term residents, and have hosted significant numbers of European travellers who visited or stayed for various lengths of time.

New Zealand and the national character

In this chapter I have dwelled at length on utopianism in relation to intentional communities in New Zealand. I referred to Sargent's and Metcalf's assertions that early colonisation schemes created a distinct utopian climate in New Zealand, and that this has been reflected in the history of intentional communities in this country. The geographic position of New Zealand as a small island nation in the South Pacific, removed from Europe has contributed to the image of New Zealand as a utopia, its distinctive national character, as well as to its attractiveness to alternatively-minded foreign nationals. However, in identifying the national character that epitomises New Zealanders, Colin James challenges the view that New Zealand has historically been portrayed as, that is:

...a society of self-reliant achievers descended from forebears who came to a new frontier with a pioneer spirit that still survives in our love of the outdoors, our inventiveness, and our do-it-yourself qualities (1986, p. 11).

He points to a tension between this view and another, which considers New Zealand to be a security-seeking nation, in which "government policy and economic behaviour has been geared to the secure life" (1986, p. 12). James writes that this quest for security has been "less a communal search for a secure society than the sum of individual searches for individual security" (1986, p. 15), and that "life for each individual has been centred on oneself and what can be got out of the society" (*ibid.*). I suggest that both these aspects that James identified as being present in New Zealand society up to the mid-1980s are relevant to the attitudes that informed New Zealanders who have chosen to live an alternative lifestyle. James believes that the rejection of the British class structure, a focus on 'the ordinary bloke', an emphasis on getting 'a fair go,' and the image of New Zealanders being active in clubs and voluntary organisations have all contributed to a tension between the individualist and the collectivist strands that made up

New Zealand society in the mid-1980s. He describes suburban houses as “private fortresses, ... each on an eighth-acre section, separated from those around with a *cordon sanitaire* of lawn and fence” (1986, p. 16), in contrast to other countries which have a history of much closer living arrangements, as well as closer social outlets. I argue that this history and mindset is also evident in the character of New Zealanders who choose to live in intentional community. On one hand the desire to foster a collective community security exists. On the other, as a group, New Zealanders tend to be “a collection, rather than a collectivity of individuals” (James, 1986, p. 16).

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

*Tis strange – but true; for truth is always strange;
Stranger than fiction: if it could be told,
How much would novels gain by the exchange!
How differently the world would men behold!*

Lord Byron, 1823 (from the poem Don Juan).

In each commune I located common areas of problematic, and the best way to face the challenge of finding a communal phenomenology was through the method of comparative history in its broadest perspective. As soon as I adopted this method, significant characteristics began to emerge, adding up to a generalised profile.

Yaacov Oved, Two Hundred Years of American Communes (preface, 1988).

The Research

A comparative approach to studying social phenomena is central to sociological and anthropological analysis of societies, cultures, and institutions (Durkheim, 1938; Marsh, 1967; Merton, 1967; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Radcliffe-Brown writes that:

It is only by the use of the comparative method that we can arrive at general explanations. The alternative is to confine ourselves to particularistic explanations. ... The two kinds of explanation are both legitimate and do not conflict; but both are need for an understanding of societies and their institutions (1952, pp. 113-114).

A comparative framework enables a comparison of variations that exist in a range of contexts: within one society, in similar societies which differ in some respects, and in dissimilar societies which share some common elements (Durkheim, 1938, pp. 136-140). The communities represented here share common elements and are also quite dissimilar. Although they were established in different decades of the 20th century, they have all been influenced by the alternative lifestyle movement of the 1970s. While different philosophical principles underlie their governance, a comparative analysis enables both generalisations to be made and particularistic

aspects to be identified that are relevant to New Zealand and international contexts.

Influences

The seeds for this research were sown in the 1970s, when I was part of a group who bought a farm and called it public land. Over the ensuing decades I have continued to observe the consequences of an ideological belief system that enabled a community to become established without structure or authority, with a land ownership structure making it extremely difficult to dismantle. The events that have transpired at Renaissance over the decades have been inspirational, horrifying, hilarious, and (in my opinion), deeply illustrative of the human condition. During the 16 years I was a participant I realised I was witnessing a social experiment from its conception to maturity (if you could call it that) and decided that one day I would write about the Renaissance Community. My motivation was twofold; I wanted to write about the movement and the consequences of different approaches to communal organisation, but I also wanted to capture the rich personal stories and oral histories that illustrated the experience of communal living.

In 2006 I was given the opportunity to act on my interest in collecting people's stories to record key aspects of the communal living movement, and more specifically, the story of Renaissance Community. I spent a year as a Teacher Fellow with the New Zealand Science, Mathematics and Technology Teacher Fellowship Scheme (NZSMTTFS).³² During that year I conducted an oral history project, which involved interviewing around 25 people who had been associated with the Renaissance Community over a 25 year period, with the intention of representing the story of the life of the community from the multiple points of views of its participants. As I recorded and then transcribed the stories people told me, I became increasingly aware of the multi-layered nature of their narratives; they exposed the cultural and class backgrounds of the participants, the entrenched

³² The Teacher Fellowship Scheme is administered by the Royal Society of New Zealand. My research project was independent and did not constitute official academic study. I was hosted by the History Department of the University of Waikato.

gender roles of the lifestyle, the conflicting aspirations and values of the participants, and contradictory attitudes and motivations for living communally. At the same time, these stories exposed some of the underlying issues, problems, and challenges of living in community, and the influences of different values and organisational structures on the way a community evolves. In almost all the interviews, for example, stories emerged concerning a particular person – I will call him Bill - who created mayhem within the Renaissance Community with his extreme alcohol-fuelled behaviour over a two year period. His continued presence generated considerable conflict and debate in the community. While on the surface the stories centred on Bill, indirectly, they exposed fundamental community issues, including ways of collectively dealing with conflict, decision-making processes, and the consequences of a foundation structure that emphasised individual freedom and personal responsibility for actions.

My awareness of the complex and many-layered aspects of those narratives generated my interest in further research, hence, this doctoral study. I drew on the material from some of those oral history interviews for the chapter on Renaissance, and revisited some participants to re-interview them with more focused questions directly relevant to this research. This study incorporates a multi-method qualitative approach to collecting data, with narrative analysis being central to the research methodology. It includes oral history, biographical discourse, unstructured and semi-structured interviews and participant observation, and draws on my own knowledge and experience. It also draws on primary source material held by the National Library of New Zealand and the archives of the communities themselves. These approaches are explained in detail later in this chapter.

Traditions informing qualitative approaches

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) believe the extent to which “the qualitative revolution” has overtaken the social sciences and related professional fields over the last 30 years, “is nothing short of amazing” (p. ix). They identify seven stages, or ‘moments,’ that they consider to encapsulate the main approaches that qualitative research has evolved through, during the last century:

The traditional (1900 – 1950); the modernist or golden age (1950 – 1970); blurred genres (1970 – 1986); the crisis of representation (1986 – 1990); the postmodern, a period of experimental and new ethnographies (1990 – 1995); the postexperimental inquiry (1995 – 2000); and the future, which is now (2000 -) (2003, p. 3).

Denzin and Lincoln describe the present - the ‘seventh moment’ - as a period in which all these previous approaches overlap and simultaneously operate. They believe the social sciences are becoming “sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalisation, freedom and community” (2003, p. 3), and that “many have learned to write differently, including how to locate themselves in the text” (2003, p. 4). By acknowledging my long relationship with communal living and many of the participants, I not only locate myself in the text, but acknowledge that this relationship influences my interpretation of my informants’ narratives, my personal knowledge and understanding of the movement, and thus the shape and emphasis of my analysis.

Given my former relationship with Renaissance Community, I am aware that my discussion and observations about this community set it apart from the communities examined here. This is exacerbated by the conflict-ridden nature of the community’s history, which is associated with its anarchistic philosophy. I have written elsewhere about the problematic aspects of being both insider and researcher in the process of collecting and analysing data (Jones, 2006). However, I consider it important to acknowledge the fact that any interview is what Fontana and Frey describe as a “negotiated accomplishment” (2003, p. 91). That is, the interview itself involves a social encounter between respondent and interviewer regardless of whether they have an existing relationship or prior knowledge of each other or not. Because it is socially situated, the interviewer “becomes an equal participant in the interaction” (*ibid.*). This is discussed further in the section about narrative analysis below.

Bill Metcalf suggests that whether they take an ethnographic or a survey approach, most accounts of intentional communities present “the story of communal living from the objective, analytical perspective of the author, generally a real or pseudo-scientist” (1996, p. 7). Metcalf, himself a social scientist, chose to keep his

“sociological analysis out of [the] personal, biographical accounts” (*ibid.*) of 15 long-term communards, that form the basis of the book *Shared Visions, Shared Lives* (1996). However, in explaining his use of “biographical discourse” (1996, p. 187) as a method, Metcalf also points out that this approach,

... implies that the editor/discussant (myself) has some clear ideas about the key issues involved in communal living, and that from within that paradigm and understanding, prompts, cajoles and ‘harasses’ the subjects into discussing whatever aspects have been pre-ordained to be important, while other aspects of the story may, inadvertently and unfortunately, be played down or even ignored (*ibid.*).

Metcalf’s comments highlight the problems discussed in Chapter 2, concerning the challenges associated with a scholarly analysis of communities. This is further evident in the reservations Andrew Rigby expresses about social scientists’ approaches to the study of communities. In the preface to his study *Communes in Britain* (1974b), he writes:

What I have sought to do ... is to portray the commune scene in Britain as it is seen and interpreted by those who are involved in it. I have been concerned to portray *their* reality and not some artificial reality constructed by the allegedly scientific observer, which is then presented as the ‘real’ reality, when in fact it is nothing more than the scientists’ own personal version of that reality (p. vii).

In emphasising the importance of the insider voice, Metcalf and Rigby reinforce the idea that “prolonged exposure to a given commune has often been more helpful than sociological sophistication” (Zablocki, 1980, p. 3). However, they do not add that the ‘real’ reality’ of the insider is just as much a construction as that of the social scientist, and presents nothing more than the insider’s own personal version of that reality. As Sargisson and Sargent remind us, insider accounts also risk being flawed by the insider’s bias, due to a desire to show the community in its best light (2004, p. 2). And/or, I would add, to emphasise what they consider the researcher wants to know.

Many sociologists who studied communes during the 1970s and 1980s made reference to the problematic nature of conducting research about them (for example: Rigby, 1974; Abrams and McCulloch, 1976; Kephart, 1976; Gardner, 1978a; Metcalf, 1986, Shenker, 1986). In 1986 Metcalf wrote:

People who hold radically altered world views, and who do not believe in the process of scientific study or in 'objective facts' have little motivation to co-operate with an eager social scientist, particularly when knowledge, as defined by the social scientist, is seen as useless or misleading by the subjects. ... Gardner (1978a:18) points out that 'within many of the rural communes ... sociologists ... were considered second only to the police as bearers of the plague (p. 29).³³

Abrams and McCulloch's experience reinforces this. They believe that at the heart of the problem, is the use of,

... terms of reference which, seen from within the world of communes, grossly distort one of the most important things that communes are about. This gives both them and us serious problems of communication – problems which are perhaps caught by those members of communes who found our questions about the sorts of personal qualities needed to make a commune a success 'bloody silly', or who answered by saying ... 'a commune is its members' (1976, p. 9).

Several informants in my own interviews also told me that they considered a community to be its members. Similarly, in discussing the underlying causes of change in their communities, informants pointed out the complex and multi-faceted nature of change, reminding me that frequently no distinct cause can be identified. Abrams and McCulloch believe that "the fundamental belief which we found to be very common in communes is that there are ways of knowing which are at once entirely real for the individual and entirely beyond the grasp of science" (1976, p. 10). This nebulous area returns us to the problematic nature of attempting to adequately define communes in the first instance; there are those that defy all definitions but still consider themselves to be communities, and those that do *not* consider themselves to be communities when outsiders do.

These views reinforce my belief that the methods employed here are appropriate approaches to collecting information from participants about their communities. Through the narratives of participants relevant issues emerge from their stories which can be analysed. Inherent in the recognition that there are ways of knowing that are real for the individual but beyond the grasp of science, is the recognition

³³ Metcalf provides a thorough critique about the merits of various approaches to the subject of researching alternative communities (see his thesis *Dropping Out and Staying In*, 1986), and concludes that using a mix of methods 'seeks to optimise both the quality and quantity of data at the least social cost to the researcher and the research subjects' (p. 29).

that interpretation and analysis in social research includes yet another aspect of storytelling. This is discussed further under the sections on narrative and discourse analysis below.

There are also several important points to bear in mind in relation to the arguments of Gardner, Abrams and McCulloch, Rigby *et al.*, who wrote about the commune movement at a time when many communities were newly founded and their adherents were young, reactive, and anti-establishment. Three decades later, many long-term communards who originally expressed such views have mellowed and matured; they are more secure in what they are doing and do not have such an urgent need to reject the 'straight' world that they once were determined to distance themselves from. Many have also become more conservative and mainstream in their views over time. Thus the distance between researcher and participant is reduced. However, I was aware when I approached people in the communities included here that their attitudes towards outsiders interested in writing about their communities are still frequently tinged with mistrust and/or a reluctance to participate in research, although for possibly different reasons than those expressed in their youth. Over time it becomes wearying for communards to repeatedly try to explain or justify their way of life, frequently to outsiders who have no idea of what it really entails. The potential for misrepresentation and unwanted exposure of the personal lives and affairs of the community is always present, and for those communities that struggle to remain strong and united, a sense of loyalty to their community, along with a fear of being quoted out of context, can underlie a reluctance to engage about some core issues.

A related issue is the need for the researcher to distinguish him or herself from the general public, or curious outsiders. One participant mentioned that on a daily basis 'sightseers' wandered through the community he lived in, and despite living in a relatively isolated corner of the property, plenty of passers-by (such as myself), wanted to stop and talk to him about community living, which interrupted his day. It wasn't until we had talked for awhile that he acquiesced to being interviewed, and even then it was while he was involved in a manual task. My own credentials of having lived for a long time in community as well as having shared knowledge of some of the older communities in New Zealand helped to

distinguish me from other curious outsiders. At Renaissance ‘sightseers’ were referred to by one resident as ‘tourists.’ He told me that he had witnessed people driving into the community and taking photos without even getting out of their cars, let alone making any sort of contact with residents.

Resistance on the part of communards to sociological study referred to by Metcalf *et al.*, also draws attention to some of the core differences between sociological and anthropological approaches to research. Traditionally, anthropologists have focused on ‘other’ cultures, rather than their own, and employed fieldwork involving ethnography and participant observation as a primary methodological approach to understanding the culture. Through living as a member of the society under study for an extended period, the aim is to understand it from the point of view of the lived experience of its members. This method of immersion makes it more likely that the researcher will establish relationships of trust with their subjects. When sociological approaches involve visiting rather than immersion in the culture under study, and the use of interviews, surveys and written questionnaires, a different relationship and pattern of interaction is created. In this respect the researcher, as an outsider, has a more challenging task to build trust and to overcome the resistance on the part of their target group to full participation.

This leads to a third important point. Although I have not lived in three of the four communities in this study, I do not approach the subject entirely from the point of view of an outsider. I have the advantage of being able to draw on insights from personal experience to inform some of the aspects of this research. This includes an awareness of the problematic nature, for the insider, of participating in research about one’s own community. During the years I lived communally I was interviewed by journalists and researchers on several occasions, and soon became sensitive to the risk of being misrepresented as well as the difficulties of navigating through an interview in which the researcher’s limited comprehension of the concepts of communal living emerge with their questions. Particular questions not only reflect the ignorance of the interviewer, but they also oblige the respondent to talk about their communities in ways that might not seem relevant to their lived experience.

I gained further insight into the tension that underlies the exchange between researcher and informant in 2010 when I was interviewed at length for the film documentary *Dirty Bloody Hippies* (Salmon, 2010). As informant rather than researcher, I was acutely conscious of the difficulty of talking freely while the interviewer/director exposed little of himself in the interview. This reinforced my belief that any interview involves an exchange, and that to get rich data, the interviewer must be involved in that exchange. The subsequently heavily edited documentary further illustrates the (necessary) selective process the researcher employs; while their selection of material to include exposes the areas of interest they consider important, it can seemingly miss the main points the informant believed they were making. Barry Shenker makes reference to this in relation to the years he spent living on a kibbutz. As his own interest in scholarly writing about communal living grew, so did his disquiet. He wrote, “I did not have the feeling that they were talking about me or anyone I knew. ... There were many nuances of daily life in communities which outsiders often failed to notice, or misinterpreted entirely” (Shenker, 1986, p.6). For him, “outsiders, for all their ‘objectivity,’ were often more concerned to impose their own abstract models and private values on their material than to understand those of their subjects” (*ibid.*). In considering how he might approach his own research into communal living, Shenker wrote, “it seemed to me that, without an understanding of the insider’s perceptions and motivation, no analysis could be complete” (Shenker, 1986, p. 7). Consequently his approach to research was eclectic, in that “no particular sociological or psychological model [was] drawn upon [and] a variety of theoretical influences [were] present and freely used as appropriate” (Shenker, 1986, p. 6). My own approach to conducting this research has been shaped in a similar way.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is an interpretive approach to qualitative research that “takes as its object of investigation the story itself” (Reissman, 1993, p. 1). This approach recognises that informants’ stories are “constructed, authored, rhetorical, and replete with assumptions” (Reissman, 1993, p. 5). I was particularly aware of this

in my analysis of the interviews with people associated with Renaissance Community as I recognised stories people told me about events that I had witnessed myself. Frequently these stories did not match my own recollections. Indeed, in some instances, I did not recall the person telling the story being present at the time it happened, yet it was recounted as a first person narrative. In the process of telling, those stories can expose more about the narrator than the events being described. Such accounts illustrate the way “narrators inscribe into their tales their ideologies and interests” (Langellier, 1989, cited in Riessman, 1993, p. 22). The departure from events as I recalled them enabled the narrator to remodel their version of the story and to position themselves in it to make a particular point. This provides insights into the narrator’s own attitudes, their view of the community and their relationship with it.

A number of typologies exist for narrative analysis, but the approach that is relevant to this research primarily concerns oral narratives of personal experiences. One aspect of this is ‘thematic analysis,’ where “emphasis is on the content of a text, ‘what’ is said more than ‘how’ it is said, the ‘told’ rather than the ‘telling’” (Reissman, 2005, p. 2). Reissman gives an example of research conducted by Carole Cain in 1991 into identity acquisition amongst an Alcoholics Anonymous group. Through observation and interviews she uncovers “common propositions about drinking in the classic AA story [,] identifies a general cultural story, and analyses how it shapes the “personal” stories of group members” (Reissman, 2005, p. 3). In a similar way, an analysis of the personal narratives of informants from each of the four communities in this research reveals cultural stories, both about the movement as a whole, as well as ones peculiar to each community, and the individuals within them. This is evident in the narratives of Tui residents in their recounting of a ‘communal empty nest syndrome’ to which several members referred. It seemed clear that the impact of this experience on the culture of the community had been collectively recognised and talked about by the group; the personal stories and explanations of informants closely mirrored one another’s accounts.

The construction of cultural stories was also evident in the stories of Wilderland residents when they recounted historical events that had happened before their

time, such as the crisis that precipitated the introduction of a no drugs rule. Further, just as Dan Hansen (Wilderland's founder) was referred to erroneously as a "lifestyle guru" (Hauraki Herald, 29 October, 2010), so too was he idealised into a figure that was synonymous with the identity of Wilderland as an "iconic" (*ibid.*) New Zealand community. These views were possibly influenced by his paraplegia, his boundless energy and optimism, and accounts of his extraordinary ability to convert old machines and vehicles to run on alternative fuels and to aid his mobility.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis differs from narrative analysis in its emphasis, although overlaps exist between the two approaches. Discourse analysis emerged from postmodern theorising and focuses more on language and communication, including public discourses, such as the mass media, whereas narrative analysis "focuses specifically on the storied element of texts" (May, 2010). Yates (2004) distinguishes between:

... two different but related conceptions of a 'discourse.' In the first, a discourse consists of 'real' things such as words spoken in a conversation or letters exchanged between people. ... On the other hand there is a conception of a 'discourse' as a set of ideas, concepts and rules about how one thinks and talks about a topic as well as the knowledge a group, institution, society or culture has about that topic. In other words, a discourse can be seen as a socially or culturally defined system of knowledge (p. 233).

In Chapter 2 I discussed Abrams and McCulloch's assertion that it was not possible to analyse communes. I referred to their example of an interview between a researcher and communards where the two parties were at such odds that the interview was inconclusive. This demonstrates this second concept of discourse as relating to a set of ideas or how one thinks and talks about a topic. In that interview, in response to direct questions about how the commune arranged such things as their economic affairs or intimate relationships, and how they collectively dealt with emotional issues, the informants repeatedly said that they did not have a theoretical approach to things, and that no generalisations were possible (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 9). Had the researchers used a different approach to interviewing, and encouraged those informants to tell stories about

their community and their lives within it, discourse and narrative analysis might have enabled the researchers to find answers to the questions they were exploring.

In a chapter entitled *Telling a Story about Research and Research as Storytelling*, Robin Usher (1997) refers to a postmodernist assumption that knowledge is relative to discourses, and thus “is always partial and perspectival” (p. 31). Usher writes that “we are so used to thinking of research as providing a special kind of methodology validating knowledge about society [that] it’s not easy to accept the notion of research as story telling” (Usher, 1997, p. 27). He illustrates his point by referring to the novel *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco (1980) – “a story which on the face of it is not about research” (Usher, 1997, p. 40), while at the same time being a metaphorical story about research. In the same sense, the stories that centred on Bill in the Renaissance interviews were, on the face of it, not about the community and its ideological underpinnings, or its ability to manage adversity, yet people’s responses to the disturbing events that characterised his presence in the community closely informed and illustrated some of the core issues in this research. In this respect, people’s stories provide the raw data, and the analysis of those narratives informs the process of creating meaning and understanding the communities.

A further element of discourse analysis involves the words and language that is used. Kanter wrote of the 1960s-era communes “the language of the counterculture signals ... impermanence: terms like ‘into,’ ‘trip,’ and ‘scene’ convey an episodic quality, a temporary contact that one dips ‘into’ then quickly and easily moves ‘out of’ (1972, p. 167). Similarly, the concept of ‘security’ is used by members of different communities in different contexts. At Wilderland, for example, the word emerged repeatedly, generally in reference to a fundamental sense of *insecurity* of tenure felt by most people who spent any length of time there. Dan himself referred to security as illusory, repeating the philosophical rhetoric of Krishnamurti. This is more in line with the meaning given to it by a Tui member who referred to security in terms of the impermanence of life, and impossibility of being able to fully control one’s external environment. These different ways of talking about security and insecurity revealed much about the structural and philosophical differences of each community, including the different relationship

people have with a community if they have a sense of ownership of their homes or formally recognised status on the land and control over some of the things that happen on it. Further, at Wilderland, residents often referred to ‘Dan’s dream’ without there being any tangible evidence of what Dan’s dream might have been, and regardless of whether or not they had ever met him. The word ‘dream’ could be interpreted in a variety of contexts; aspirational, utopian, or what the 1960s-era hippies would have called his ‘trip’.

Oral history

For the 2006 oral history project I employed a slightly different approach to the one I used for this research, although there are considerable overlaps between that method and others drawn upon here. In writing about ‘community oral history methods’ (generally, not specifically intentional communities), Linda Shopes describes two axes of difference. On one of them:

At one end, there are interviewing projects developed by grass-roots groups to document their own experience; at the other, interviews conducted by scholars to inform their own research or to create a permanent archival collection for future scholarly work. ... The second axis is defined by voice, that is, the extent to which the narrator’s voice or the historian/interpreter’s voice dominates the final product of the interviews (Shopes, 2006, pp. 262 - 263).

In the 2006 oral history project, my intention was to encourage participants to talk about their experience of living communally, including any background experiences that lead them to that lifestyle. This involved encouraging them to shape their own narratives as opposed to responding to a series of questions. If we use Shopes’ concept of axes, on the first, I straddled both ends, with an emphasis on documenting my own (ex) community’s experience, as well as creating an archive to capture the experiences of those times. On the second axis, the narrator’s voice was more dominant. Applying the same concept to this doctoral research, the emphasis has changed. I was the outsider in three of the four communities and in the fourth (Renaissance) I was a long departed ex-resident. The interviews were conducted to inform my own research rather than to collect the stories of participants’ lives, thus the questions were more focused and the narratives were directed. However, the material contained in the oral history

narratives still provided a comprehensive source of information relevant to this project, thus I have drawn on those narratives here. While the narratives provided primary data, my voice, as the interpreter is dominant in this work.

Another key difference between the 2006 oral history project, and this doctoral research, is one of scope. In the oral history project the focus was on encouraging the informants to tell their own stories about communal living. My informants dictated the topics they talked about to a greater extent than they did in the interviews conducted for this project, where questions were more specific and my purpose was defined.

Participant observation and ethnography

Participant observation, a research method where “the investigator hangs out or works or lives with a group, organisation or community and perhaps takes a direct part in their activities” (Giddens, 2006, p. 85), is employed in this research in two ways. During the process of collecting data I spent time in the communities, staying with residents, eating with them, participating in some of the activities, chatting and hanging out. Participant observation in this research is also retrospective. I consider that my 30 year involvement with the communal living movement, and with the communities in this study, included participant observation and ethnography. Although it could be argued that the years that I lived communally involved more participation than observation because the intention to be involved as a researcher was not present at the time, the insights and understandings that I have as a result of this extended involvement have retrospectively informed this research.

In relation to the three communities in this study with which I did not have close previous involvement, participant observation plays a lesser role than interviewing and archival research. I spent less time in those communities, and did not participate in many communal activities. However, I had some prior knowledge of these communities. For example, Renaissance is only 20 kilometres from Riverside Community, and during the years I lived at Renaissance, Riverside hosted many community events including concerts, community gatherings, and

sports exchanges. People from other communities, including Tui, also attended these gatherings. Individuals from Tui and Riverside continue to collaborate on projects. Renaissance and Riverside were also linked more formally - in its earlier years Renaissance sought professional assistance from Riverside for mediation to attempt to resolve conflict that divided the community, and Riverside members have been trustees of the Renaissance Trust at various times.

Selection of communities

Two main factors influenced my choice of the four specific communities included in this project: accessibility and the contrasting emphases of their foundation structures. Accessibility directly relates to the challenges of approaching an unknown community as an unknown researcher, as already outlined. Consequently I chose to include communities that I already have a degree of connection with and/or knowledge about. Like Miller (1999), who justified his selection of communes for *The 60s Communes* project by saying; “I chose not to expend a great deal of energy plowing difficult ground when so much material on other communes was available for the asking” (Miller, 1999, p. xxi), my prior knowledge of these communities informed my choice to include them. This was advantageous when initially approaching the communities, and is particularly relevant to Renaissance. I suspect it would have been very difficult to include this community in the research if I had been an outsider. Lucy Sargisson discovered this when she attempted to make contact with Renaissance for her fieldwork for *Living in Utopia* in 2001. She wrote “eliciting a response to letters proved impossible, and my visit was hosted by one household rather than the whole community” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 101).³⁴

A second factor that informed the choice of these four communities was the diverse emphases of their foundation structures and community cultures. They range from a shared economy to an emphasis on financial independence, from open door to extended membership processes, from minimal organisational

³⁴ Similarly, my own initial emails to people in some other communities (particularly in the Coromandel) asking them if they would be prepared to participate in this research elicited no response, so I chose not to pursue them.

structures to highly prescriptive agreements and processes, from an emphasis on personal growth to a collective aversion to it. I consider these aspects not only to be representative of the diversity of intentional communities but through their inclusion, I assert that it is possible to explore the links between different emphases and foundation structures and the culture of each community. However, while they provide a sample of communities that have been significantly influenced by the alternative lifestyle movement in New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s, I do not claim them to be representative of *all* alternative lifestyle communities in this country. I also argue that they demonstrate many of the challenges that are common to most contemporary communal groups, as well as ones that are peculiar to each community as a consequence of their own structures, processes and the personalities and capabilities of key members. I also consider that these four communities are both diverse enough, and share enough common elements, to make useful comparisons and generalisations.

I chose to limit myself to four communities because I think this number is large enough to demonstrate diversity and to make comparisons, while being small enough to enable a concentrated and detailed account of the specific changes peculiar to each community. Approaches that involve the surveying of large numbers of communities exclude detailed accounts of individual communities. As this research is concerned with changes over an extended period of time, my decision to focus on in-depth interviews with key people associated with four communities rather than an overview of many seemed to be most appropriate.

The research commenced in 2008. In early 2009 I began fieldwork with visits to all four communities where I conducted interviews with informants. These were transcribed and further interviews were conducted later in 2009. In 2010 I made two further visits to Wilderland community to monitor and document the rapid change that was occurring there, especially in relation to changes of key participants. The process of analysis and writing up of data was undertaken in 2010 and 2011.

Data Collection

With the exception of Renaissance my approach involved in the first instance, a written letter sent to each community explaining my research and asking for their permission to be included. Correspondence with representatives from each community proceeded from that point via email and/or telephone. In all subsequent interviews with residents of each community informed consent was received.³⁵

I conducted a total of 46 recorded interviews with people associated with the four communities in this study.³⁶ I consider the interviewees represent the variety of people associated with these communities. 21 participants were women and 25 were men. With the exception of Wilderland, which involved interviews with eight men and four women, the rest were fairly evenly gender balanced. Interviewees ranged in age from early 20s to 80s, although the majority were in the 50 – 60 plus age bracket, which reflects the age of long-established populations in the communities. Eight were under 35 years old. Fifteen were former residents (most notably in the case of Renaissance and Wilderland). Fifteen were foreign nationals. Some interviews were in-depth and extensive, and this is reflected in the emphasis on quotations from some individuals in particular. Others were short and might only have covered one particular aspect of their community or involvement. Those interviews often reflected the transitory nature of the participant's relationship with the community. I interviewed some people more than once. Many have not been quoted here, but their views have informed and/or reinforced some of the ideas that have emerged from the interviews with others.

³⁵ Appendix F provides a sample of a consent form.

³⁶ See Appendix E for a list of informants and the communities they are associated with.

The interviews

Interviews were semi-structured and unstructured. I had prepared a number of questions to ask interviewees, and in some cases referred directly to an interview schedule during the interview.³⁷ This proved useful early in the research process and in situations where a participant was not particularly forthcoming, or tended to be vague or rambling in their responses. For the most part, however, interviews took the form of a conversation; to begin with I introduced the research in general terms, and invited the informant to describe their experience of living in community. Typically an interview lasted one to two hours. I explained that I was interested to identify what key changes each community had experienced, and how much the participant believed the community had sustained or departed from its original foundational aims and objectives. Interviews often began with general questions about the person's background and their relationship with their community – how long they had lived there, what it was like when they first arrived. Some participants were very analytical, and needed little prompting to discuss changes they considered their community had experienced over the long term and the reasons for those changes, as well as their perceptions about the movement more generally. These interviews were generally unstructured - conversation was often directed by the participant. Committed long-term members of alternative communities often need little prompting to talk about their aspirations, their own community's strengths and weaknesses, and where they perceive its challenges and failures to lie.

Interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder, and later fully transcribed. Hard and electronic copies of transcripts and the original recordings are held by me in a personal archive. Copies of interview transcripts were sent to those who requested them. Consent forms were produced prior to each interview, and the rights of the participant were clarified with each interviewee. This included an explanation that the informant could request the omission of any aspect of the interview at the end of the interview, or to remain anonymous. In some instances people requested that particular disclosures remain private. In such instances, if I thought it was necessary to make some reference to it, I did so in such a way to

³⁷ See Appendix G for a sample of questions.

disguise its origin. One participant chose to remain anonymous so I gave that person a pseudonym. Another gave his name as Hippie Tim and so I have referred to him as that.

Spontaneous interviews were conducted in situations where participants were either reluctant to arrange a later time for an interview (reflecting, perhaps, the mistrustfulness discussed above) or were engaged in some task but agreed to be interviewed while they did so. Consequently interviews were conducted in a variety of situations, many of them outdoors. Other information was gleaned from conversations that took the form of participant observation, and transpired through the process of wandering around a community, or hanging out in the community house. In all cases I explained what my research was about and asked for verbal consent to include anything a person might have said that I thought I might later refer to.

This research is also informed by conversations I have had with people who either live in or are associated with other intentional communities in New Zealand, as well as interviews with people who live in *Christiania*, an urban intentional community in Copenhagen, Denmark,³⁸ and people I met at the 2010 conference of the International Communal Studies Association in Israel.

Riverside

At Riverside I interviewed four long-term members (two men and two women) whom I considered had a comprehensive and far-ranging knowledge of the community.³⁹ I also interviewed a couple who were members of Riverside and had previously lived at Renaissance. They were able to speak at length about both communities and make some interesting comparisons between them. I also interviewed a probationary member, who, during the course of the research

³⁸ When I began this research, I initially intended to include *Christiania* in the study to provide an international comparison. However, it became clear to me after visiting that place that it was not going to be a useful or suitable comparative community. Nevertheless, the interviews I conducted with residents there provided insight into some of the social issues that New Zealand communities face.

³⁹ Appendix E lists names of interviewees associated with each community.

withdrew her membership and then left the community.⁴⁰ A young woman who had grown up in the community but did not live there as an adult, arrived towards the end of an interview I was conducting with her father and joined in. I also interviewed a former member who had lived at Riverside from the late 1940s until 1970 and still maintained ties with some of the people there. She preferred not to be recorded, so I took notes during the interview. I conducted an interview with Chris Palmer, another elderly resident who was living at Riverside as a tenant and had lived in a range of communities in the US and New Zealand for most of his adult life.⁴¹ I have not quoted him in this thesis but his interview informed some of the issues I discuss in Chapter 7. The informants represent the age range, the perspectives of both members and tenants, former members who could recall the period of extreme change that occurred in the 1970s, adult children, and those who had arrived relatively recently.

Tui

I found Tui the most difficult community from which to recruit participants. Many people were either absent, unavailable, did not respond to emails, or were too busy doing other things when I visited. Perhaps this unavailability reflected Sargisson's comment that the community "operates a somewhat reluctant 'showcase' for alternative lifestyle" (Sargisson, 2007, p. 11). Tui has many visitors and a busy public face. My own interest in the community as an outsider reinforces an earlier point about the difficulty for the social scientist to differentiate themselves from other interested outsiders. Permission to include that community in the research was granted via the chairperson of the Tui Trust who provided me with accommodation while I stayed in that community. He made available archival material for my perusal and consented to be interviewed. The seeming unavailability of participants might also reflect the highly organised and time-protective attitude of many members. It is evident in the spontaneous nature of some interviews and the situations where interviews were carried out. In some instances I was obliged to conduct an interview on the spot when encountering a person because of their reluctance to commit themselves to a later time. One

⁴⁰ Probationary membership, full membership and the status of tenancy are explained in Chapter 7.

⁴¹ Chris Palmer's biographical discourse is included in Metcalf's *Shared Visions, Shared Lives* (1996).

interview was carried out during an informant's lunch hour (from his work at Beebalme). Another was on a beach when an informant was having a break between sessions teaching a Permaculture course. Another was while an informant plucked a dead possum to collect its fur. I interviewed eight members of that community, including one young man who had spent most of his life at Tui, a recent arrival who was keen to apply for membership, and six long established members. A further member responded to questions via email.

Wilderland

In the case of Wilderland, the community was in the midst of extreme change at the time of this research. Dan Hansen's death in 2006 had deeply affected the community. His widow Edith was in her 90s and in poor health and was unengaged with the community. The resident population had dwindled to such a small number that it was not a matter of choosing *who* I might interview when I visited the community. I interviewed three key people at length who were managing the place at the times that I visited. On one of my later visits I conducted a group interview with the newly committed resident group of four. I was also interested to hear the impressions of the visiting population (mainly WOOFers),⁴² as they have been a significant and important aspect of the community as a workforce. I interviewed three former residents of Wilderland who lived there during the 1970s and 1980s, and had been involved in one of the major legal challenges to the Wilderland Trust described in that chapter. I also considered it important to interview the daughter of Dan and Edith Hansen, the founding couple. Despite her status as neighbour as opposed to resident, she is the only person that has an overview of the entire lifespan of Wilderland and her parents' relationship with it. There were difficulties surrounding her inclusion as the relationship between her and the residents of Wilderland at the time I was interviewing was tense and she expressed vehement views about the community and a desire to see it dismantled. She seemed cautious in her responses while being recorded. When

⁴² WOOF – an acronym for Workers on Organic Farms (or WWOOF – Willing or Weekend Workers On Organic Farms). The website describes the organisation thus: “WWOOF New Zealand is part of a worldwide community that promotes awareness of ecological farming practices by providing volunteers with the opportunity to live and learn on organic properties. WWOOF is an enjoyable, educational and safe way to explore and get to know the people in the country” (<http://www.woof.co.nz>). WOOFers most commonly tend to be young international travelers.

the recorder was not running she was clearly more candid and willing to speak freely. In those instances I jotted notes afterwards. Her apparent reluctance to speak candidly while being recorded may have been exacerbated by her knowledge that I was also speaking with residents of the community. At the time I was conducting interviews, she was acting on behalf of her mother (who was a lifelong trustee of Wilderland Trust) in relation to a legal challenge to the community, and there were court proceedings in process. This situation was resolved early in 2011 when her mother was removed from the trust and the Hansen family withdrew their challenge. Because of these circumstances, the discussions when I was not recording or note-taking were our most candid and informative interactions.

Renaissance

Renaissance Community is in an exceptional position in this research for two main reasons: my close long term association with this community, and the previous study I undertook in 2006. In relation to the first point some key people associated with the community in its early years declined to be involved in this research as a direct consequence of our past conflicted relationships as fellow communards, and/or their very negative feelings about the community and their past experiences there.⁴³ In her study of a Coromandel community (1999), Larisa Webb refers to the problematic nature of her own “relative insider/outsider status” (p. 18) as a former resident of a community she studied. Webb acknowledged that this relationship enabled an ease of access, but that it also made the research more difficult as she was “concerned that the personal nature of [her] relationship with informants might cause [her] to be unduly mindful of how [she] represent[ed] them” (1999, p. 20). Further, she was concerned about offending her informants by “placing them in an anthropological framework” (*ibid.*), which in her opinion, created a conflicting situation between her role as both “‘self’ and ‘other’” (*ibid.*) as she was simultaneously insider and social researcher. This tension exists in my own relationship with Renaissance Community. I also acknowledge a bias in my own

⁴³ The emergence of two separate factions in that community, and the antagonism that existed between some members of each faction is discussed in Chapter 4. I was aligned with one faction. Some of the key participants who were aligned with the other refused to be involved in this research. However, other people who were aligned with that faction did agree to participate, so their views are represented in the research.

selection of participants as a consequence of this former relationship. However, I consider the conflicting perspectives and points of view have been represented in the narratives of participants who contributed to this study.

A further aspect that set the Renaissance interviews apart from the ones I conducted with participants from the other communities was that people with whom I had previously shared a close connection, such as fellow founding and early members, assumed (rightfully or wrongly) shared or conflicting understandings, perspectives, attitudes and knowledge as a result of our previous shared experience. While I am advantaged insofar as I have kept informed of some of the events and changes Renaissance has gone through (I have visited the community regularly in the years since 1992 when I left and maintain connections with people who either live there currently, or who used to, but still reside in the local area), I am also disadvantaged because informants did not always give me as full and detailed explanations in response to my questions as members of other communities did.

I also possess an extensive personal archive of primary material from Renaissance Community (the originals are held by the National Library of New Zealand, in Wellington), and have recordings and transcriptions of in-depth interviews with more than 25 people associated with that community from the 2006 oral history project. This research drew on information from 19 of those earlier interviews.⁴⁴ For this current research, I re-interviewed five key informants from Renaissance that I had previously interviewed for the oral history project, to ask further questions directly relevant to this project. I interviewed a further three people who were resident during the period this research was being conducted. At that time I also engaged in a number of informal conversations with transient and short-term residents. I have exercised discretion in my use of quotations, references to particular events, and observations. Some informants have mental health and/or drug and alcohol dependency issues, and while I would have liked to have referred to particular disclosures to illustrate a point at times, I decided not to in deference to individuals' rights to privacy.

⁴⁴ As referred to earlier in this chapter, in relation to the multi-layered nature of the narratives, those oral history interviews informed the research questions central to this study.

Primary source material

This research has also been informed by an examination of archival documents held by each community and/or the National Library of New Zealand. Minute books, agreements, policies, letters, diaries and trust documents have all been useful. The National Library in Wellington holds an archive of original material from a number of intentional communities in New Zealand, including Renaissance and Riverside, as well as material relating to the broader subject of communal living in this country. I visited that archive twice in 2009. I have also accessed television documentaries and radio broadcasts made about Wilderland and Riverside. Dan Hansen left diaries that spanned 45 years of his life, as well as a memoir of his pre-Wilderland years. These were loaned to me by Heather Hansen, who holds the originals.

Three of the four communities have websites, and I have accessed information from these sources. I also corresponded via email and telephone with various informants. Some follow-up email correspondence clarified particular points which seemed unclear after I had transcribed an interview. Other times it was to keep myself informed of the numerous changes a community, or individuals within them, were going through during the research period. This was particularly relevant in relation to Wilderland, which as this thesis is being written continues to experience significant change.

Ethics of identifying participants

When I began this research, my intention was to give each community and its members pseudonyms, in deference to individuals' rights to privacy in the first instance, but also (like Webb) out of concern about exposing both the communities and their members to unwanted or negative publicity. I indicated that I would do this in my application for ethical approval to the University of Waikato Ethics Committee.⁴⁵ However, several factors influenced my decision to identify people

⁴⁵ I discussed this change with the Chair of the FASS Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato and was granted formal approval to make that change.

and places. Firstly, most informants were positive about the research, willing to be named and many expressed an interest in having their voices, and the stories of their communities, included. Indeed, a number of participants lamented the dearth of material about the movement in this country generally, as well as its long-lived communities, and were keen to see this addressed. Secondly, given the smallness of New Zealand's population and the interconnectedness of alternative lifestyle communities in rural areas, I realised it would take little imagination for the people involved to identify each community and the people within them, despite the use of pseudonyms. Residents of the wider rural districts that the communities are located in would also be able to recognise them. The only advantage of disguising them would be to protect their identity in the greater public arena. However, the geographical location of each community cannot be omitted, as this has a bearing on the character of each place and informs the challenges that each community has faced. Thirdly, the public airing of Wilderland's internal politics and struggle for survival after the death of Dan Hansen as well as the dispute between the Hansen family and the community was reported in the media. This convinced me that I did not need to hide the identity of the communities and their people out of deference to their rights to privacy over such issues. Finally, I concluded that a study such as this could have the potential to contribute to the slim body of literature about alternative lifestyle communities in this country and that therefore I should not make these communities anonymous. Having considered all these factors, I decided to identify people and communities unless requested, and thus stipulated otherwise. I have, however, only referred to most informants by their first names in the text. Appendix E contains a list of informants' full names.

Chapter Four: Renaissance Community - Motueka Valley

(Established 1979)

I wanted to do what I wanted to do. Same with the others; they didn't want to take orders from anybody. They wanted to do what they wanted to do, not what somebody else said they should (John, former Renaissance resident, personal communication, 30 April, 2006).

The only thing I could think of was to go to art school, but even that seemed too formulated for me. Nothing seemed appealing. Everything up to that point meant that I would leave school and potentially walk back into the same soul destroying system that had given me nothing (Sally, former Renaissance resident, personal communication, April 30, 2006).

I think it's an exercise in futility, this whole place (Kenny the Grub, Renaissance resident, personal communication, 25 August, 2006).

This chapter is in three parts. It begins by introducing Renaissance Community as unusual amongst New Zealand's long-lived alternative communities because of its anarchic philosophy. This is followed by an overview of the events that preceded the creation of the Renaissance Trust and the purchase and settlement of the Renaissance Community, including a description of Tahuna Farm, where the founders of Renaissance began communal life together, and developed the philosophy that underpinned the Renaissance Community.

The second part identifies significant changes that have shaped the evolution of Renaissance Community over a thirty year period, including the departure of key founding people, the emergence of factions, the effects of decentralisation as houses were built, the consequences of welfare, a second wave of departures and the second generation of adult children who have settled on the property.

Finally, I discuss the impact of the Renaissance Trust, and its core doctrine, the effects of unresolved conflict on the evolution of the community, and the long-term implications of an open and unregulated structure, including the

consequences of an owning body that does not exercise its authority in the administration of the community. I also question whether Renaissance can still be considered to be an alternative community.

Part One: Introduction

Yaacov Oved wrote of the young middle-class people who established communes during the 1960s and 1970s in North America, “they had a naive approach to human nature; they believed that if people were taken out of traditional American society and culture and placed in an alternative humanistic system, they would change and adapt to a new type of social life” (2000, p. 274). Oved may have been referring to the youth of North America, but this is equally applicable to the New Zealand context, and the evolution of Renaissance Community demonstrates the long-term consequences of such naiveté.

In 2009, Renaissance Community passed its 30th anniversary. This community differs from most other long-lived communities in New Zealand, in that its founders deliberately set out establish a community that would be as unregulated as possible and accepting of anyone who wanted to live there, and has remained so ever since, despite attempts by numerous people over the years to introduce some controls. The land is held by a charitable trust “for the people of New Zealand” (Renaissance, 1977). The community has always had a minimal and informal organisational structure. It has no acknowledged leaders or people in positions of authority, and demands very little in the way of financial or labour contributions, or commitment from residents. It remains unusual amongst intentional communities, not only because of its open door policy and anarchistic structure, but because it has continued to exist for 30 years in spite of the challenges this openness and lack of organisation presents. After visiting the community in 2001, for the *Living in Utopia* project, Sargisson reported that Renaissance,

...breaks all the rules of conventional wisdom regarding intentional communities. It has no core values, doctrine or belief system; currently no management structure, meetings or processes; and no rules for membership (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p.101).

Sargisson and Sargent further assert that Renaissance is “anarchic not only in its internal arrangements but also in its ownership” (2004, p.100). I argue that while the residents of Renaissance community might appear to lack these things in the present, the Renaissance Trust, which holds the land *does* have core values and a belief system, but because they do not take the form of written statements of policy, or a list of aims and objectives, these values are difficult to identify and not obvious to a visitor or outsider. (It could also be argued that they are not obvious to many of the community residents either). This is discussed in the section later in this chapter about the Renaissance Trust.

Renaissance evokes strong reactions in many of the people who know it, both in its defence and condemnation. For much of its history, problems associated with alcohol and drug abuse, violence, and illegal activities have drawn negative attention from police and social welfare institutions. The question of whether it can still be described as an alternative community continues to be vehemently argued both for and against by the people associated with it.

The key people who were responsible for the creation of the Renaissance Community Trust in 1977, wanted to free land from the possibility of it being owned or controlled by any individuals, thereby securing land in perpetuity. Its stated purpose is to,

... hold land as public land, where the people of New Zealand will be free to visit, live and commune with each other and the land in order to foster the spiritual, intellectual and physical advancement of the people of this country, and to develop through cooperative effort, environmentally sound methods of farming and for such charitable works in connection therewith as the trustees may from time to time determine (Renaissance, 1977).

Benjamin Zablocki’s definition of anarchism closely describes the underlying ideology of the people who established the trust. That is,

... the belief that the individual is capable of regulating himself in the absence of any external authority, and the belief that there is no such thing as good authority, that authority by definition is subversive (1980, p. 167-168).

The Renaissance Community has been profoundly shaped by this anarchistic ideology, and the inability of the resident group to address the social problems that

have assailed the community over the years are a direct consequence of its absence of an authoritative structure and screening processes for newcomers.

Historical overview: Tahuna Farm

The founders of Renaissance began community life in 1974 in an open-door commune known as Tahuna Farm. This four hectare property was situated in the industrial belt of Tahunanui, a suburb of Nelson, and leased from Dominion Breweries for seven years for a monthly renewable lease of sixteen dollars. It was surrounded by urban development; to the west by factories and undeveloped land, to the south a new housing subdivision, and to the east and north an established residential area. The property comprised of an old farmhouse and outbuildings shrouded by trees, and about half of it were open pasture. It was independent of city utilities including electricity and sewerage, and provided an environment where people interested in subsistence farming could experiment with 19th century farming methods, using draft horses rather than tractors, and traditional tools and implements. The decision to remain separate from the city's electricity and sewerage systems reinforced the fiercely independent and cynical attitude of the founding group towards 'the Establishment.' Tahuna Farm also served as a crash-pad for travellers and runaways, and, frequently, a half-way house for Nelson's Ngawhatu psychiatric hospital. People with mental health issues were frequently discharged to Tahuna Farm after treatment, others were admitted to Ngawhatu in a psychotic state after smoking marijuana and/or ceasing to take prescribed medication while living at Tahuna Farm.

The core group that became established at Tahuna Farm shared a prevalent ideology of the alternative movement at that time, that is, that 'the Establishment' was corrupt, that society was over-regulated, and that capitalism was responsible for an unequal and money-obsessed world. They wanted to create an alternative society, and to live in a different way. In reference to the anti-establishment sentiment in North American open-land communes, Miller wrote: "At the heart of

it was a rejection of greed, of material desire, and ultimately of individualism.⁴⁶ ... The grand and impossible goal was nothing less than the rebuilding of society from the ground up” (1999, p. 151). The culture that the core group at Tahuna Farm fostered set the tone and ideological underpinnings for the Renaissance Community. Topy, who initially secured the lease of Tahuna Farm with Dominion Breweries, was a dominant and influential early figure. He expressed a predominant attitude of the group when he said:

I’ve always been anti the status quo. I’ve always looked for adventure in my life, and I’ve always figured that the best adventure is revolution. ... I didn’t [just] *think* society was corrupt, I *knew* it. ... I think I just don’t handle bullshit very well, that’s what it comes down to. ... I liked the idea [of] buying a piece of land that wasn’t going to be capitalised on. ... Two things got me interested [in forming a charitable trust to purchase land]; earning money and not paying tax on it, and the fact that the land couldn’t be sold (personal communication, 28 August, 2006).

John, architect of the Renaissance Trust document, and another dominant personality at Tahuna Farm and later, Renaissance Community, said:

We were fired up with a notion that we could actually alter society ... by living a different way, and that slowly everybody would come around to living on a small plot even if it were a quarter acre with a garden, feeding themselves. We were after a roof over our heads; we were after food out of the fields. Lots of people had the feeling that society was going to collapse. ... The classic was those people who were collecting guns and sacks of rice, looking for caves up in the hills to go and hide in when the crunch came (personal communication, 30 April, 2006).

Robert Houriet, in reference to the North American communes, said:

The first phase of the movement was *implosive*, that is, an escape from the all-pervasive influences of a plastic, fragmented mass society and a return to the primal centre of being and man. In the classical utopian tradition, the commune was an island, a free space, a cultural vacuum. It was the ideal situation for a spiritual revolution – for regaining the vision of a simpler unified life and the pristine consciousness of uncomplicated tribal man. But unlike the desert island, the communes were not naturally surrounded by an ocean to keep the “outside” society at bay (Houriet, 1971, p. 210).

⁴⁶ This notion that communes involved a rejection of individualism is paradoxical – on one level people wanted to reject it in favour of the ‘collective consciousness’ but the open communes were characterised by the individualistic and uncompromising attitudes of many individuals who refused to capitulate to the group as well as the wider society. It reiterates James’ (1986) view of New Zealanders being a collection rather than a collectivity of individuals.

Tahuna Farm certainly demonstrated this analogy of the commune as an island; it was literally surrounded on four sides by a conventional urban and industrial environment. With its use of horse and cart for transport, and dogged determination to remain independent of city utilities and services, its rejection of mainstream culture reinforced the identity of the community as a distinct and separate entity from the wider community it was surrounded by, from the perspectives of both its inhabitants and the people outside its boundaries. It was relatively easy to maintain this independence on a small piece of land with minimal overheads surrounded by a town which provided rich pickings in terms of its waste and recyclable materials.

Miller believes that in their critique of contemporary society communes,

... focused a great deal of their scorn on technology [which] was frequently seen as the villain, and in many cases the new communards ... attempted to step backwards from modernity into a primitive past (1999, p. 157).

The subsistence approach to agriculture and living at Tahuna Farm both reflected a romantic idealising of an Arcadian past, and a reaction to the prevalent approach to farming in the 1970s in New Zealand, which was heavily subsidised by the government; farmers liberally apply large quantities of phosphates, herbicides and pesticides to farm land, regenerating native bush in gullies and on marginal hill country was often referred to as 'rubbish' and annually burnt, and concepts of organic farming were viewed with suspicion and derision by many farmers.

Creation of the Renaissance Community Trust

The core group at Tahuna Farm created the Renaissance Community Trust for the single purpose of creating a legal entity for securing land, rather than to serve as an authoritative or guiding structure to underpin a community. Their primary desire was to move to a rural location to practice farming on a larger scale, but to do so they needed a mechanism to secure land. A significant motivator was the growing threat of eviction from Tahuna Farm as industrial development of the area escalated in the latter part of the 1970s and it became apparent that Dominion Breweries intended to sell the property. As well as this, conflict with the local

council intensified as their demands that the commune comply with council regulations, including placing a cap on numbers, demolishing illegal huts and shelters, and connecting to the city sewerage system (along with the cessation of composting their own waste), made it obvious that the commune's days were numbered. The decision to form a charitable trust rather than some other form of legal entity came about almost accidentally:

We were just going to have an incorporated society or some other thing. ... The reason we went for charitable status was that when we said we wanted to make the people of New Zealand beneficiaries, the man in the companies' office suggested it. He said 'oh, what you're talking about is a charitable trust. You should go for charitable trust status.' So we did (John, personal communication, 27 October, 2006).

Purchase of land

The group at Tahuna Farm, lead by Topy, worked as a house removal and demolition gang to raise money for a deposit. An invitation for people to donate money towards the purchase was also made in *Mushroom Magazine* (No.10, 1978, p. 47), along with an open invitation to settle the land once it was bought. A 23 hectare (60 acre) farm up the Motueka Valley, south-west of Nelson, was found and half the purchase price of \$53,000 was raised through demolition jobs and donations. The rest was obtained through two mortgages, one guaranteed by Dan Hansen of Wilderland, and the other by John's parents. The Renaissance Community Trust purchased a farm called Graham Downs on the first of May 1979.⁴⁷

Early years

At the time of purchase Graham Downs was bare land that had been heavily grazed for 15 years. It was zoned Rural A, which was considered quality farm land. It comprised of the top half of an elevated terrace above the Motueka River bordering the foothills of the Kahurangi National Park. The only buildings were a

⁴⁷ Tahuna Farm continued to exist for a further two years after Graham Downs was purchased before the lease was terminated and the land sold to developers. The area is now covered with industrial complexes and roads.

run-down farmhouse (ca. 1910) and a disintegrating barn. As soon as the land was purchased, around 30 people moved onto the property. They came from all over New Zealand, Europe, and North America, not just Tahuna Farm. They slept in caravans, housetrucks, vans, huts and tents. Partly as a response to the invitation in *Mushroom Magazine*, and partly through word of mouth, Renaissance Community was quickly inundated with people.

Despite the challenges associated with establishing a community with such a large and disparate group, no rules and limited facilities, for the first decade or more Renaissance thrived. The community fluctuated between 40 and 60 people at any one time with a core group of around 25 adults and ten children. Money was collected informally; bills and necessary purchases were displayed on a notice board in the community house and people contributed to a “farm fund” when and if they were able, or inclined. A team of draft horses cultivated the land and extensive field crops were grown. The focus on farming produced an abundance of food: grain, fruit, vegetables, dairy products, eggs, honey, and meat. Several parents established an alternative primary school, which later purchased its own property adjacent to Renaissance, and drew pupils from the wider ‘alternative’ populace, many of whom bought properties and moved into the area in increasing numbers throughout the early 1980s.⁴⁸

Zablocki described the early stages of open land communes as being an ephemeral but brief golden age which was inspiring to experience (1980, p.169). This was certainly the case at Renaissance. People contributed freely and generously, and the atmosphere that existed generated a powerful sense of community spirit. Heather, who first visited Renaissance in 1980, recalled that “the energy was fantastic, it really was vibrant. There were so many enthusiastic young people just trying to change the world” (personal communication, 29 April, 2006). Within a few years of Renaissance’s settlement, several other alternative lifestyle groups and individuals bought land nearby, with the intention to live communally:

⁴⁸ The Mountain Valley School was parent-run, based on A.S Neill’s philosophy of education. It gained registration with the Education Review Office (ERO), and operated for 25 years. The land is still held (by a charitable trust) for educational purposes.

It all happened at a time when the tobacco farming was coming to an end in the valley, and a lot of farmers made ends meet by selling off lifestyle blocks. The whole alternative thing started expanding and people started buying blocks of land. Renaissance was the centre of the local alternative community. ... All the big parties happened up there (Heather, personal communication, 29 April, 2006).

From the outset, an inadequate physical infrastructure and limited resources were severely stretched to cope with the influx of people, including, on average, 12 – 15 young children. Overcrowding and health and sanitation issues did not endear the communards to the long-established and conservative farming community and contributed to the stereotype of ‘dirty hippies’ that grew with local unease about their presence in the valley.⁴⁹ When the community initially applied for building permission to erect ‘workers’ accommodation,’ the Waimea County Council requested a development plan. Not only was the community unable to agree on a unified plan, or vision, but the council did not have a policy for accommodating communal groups either.⁵⁰ Renaissance was the first of many alternative communities that were established in the area to challenge the District Scheme that allowed for only one dwelling per title, by applying for permission to build multiple dwellings on a single property. The process of gaining building consent took several years, and the delay not only added to the pressures of insufficient housing and facilities for the community, but fuelled the first ideological divisions between community residents about how they should respond to the demands of external authoritative bodies.⁵¹ It also brought the community unwanted media attention, with the exchanges between the community and the council being widely reported in the print media. Resentments on the part of the local farming community (who were also not permitted to build more than one dwelling on their properties), along with unease about the unconventional appearance and behaviour of many participants, generated anxiety about the presence of the Renaissance Community in the conservative farming community.

⁴⁹ Hepatitis A spread through many communes, including Renaissance in the early 1980s. It was commonly assumed that it originated from the second Nambassa music festival (1980), after which many young people visited communes throughout New Zealand.

⁵⁰ This involved applying for a Specified Departure from the District Scheme. This procedure required the advertising of the application, giving neighbours the opportunity to lodge objections to the application. Fifteen objections, supported by a petition signed by fifty local residents asking the council to ‘stop communes before it’s too late’ added to tensions between Renaissance and the wider community and helped prolong the process of gaining building permission.

⁵¹ Two residents went ahead and built their houses despite not being granted permits to build.

The types of people drawn to the anarchistic philosophy of Renaissance in the first instance were generally highly individualistic, contemptuous of regulatory systems, and reluctant to comply with any system that might curtail their own freedom. Several core residents did not believe they should have to apply to the council for permission to build, or to comply with building regulations. This attitude was not uncommon amongst people attracted to open-land communes. As William Kephart pointed out in relation to American communes in 1976, “it stands to reason ... that the conformist/ conservative/ type of person would seldom be found in the commune, whereas the radical type would be quite common” (p. 286). Further, the majority of people attracted to Renaissance came from an urban background and lacked practical skills in farming, building, and self-sufficiency. Many belonged to a generation that were on a voyage of self-discovery, rejecting their middle-class roots, experimenting with drugs, spirituality, sexuality and relationships. This also reflects the North American experience in open-land communes (Rigby 1974; Gardner, 1978). Along with survivalists, and people seriously interested in subsistence farming and self-reliance, the Renaissance group represented a wide range of interests and motivations. Unsurprisingly, within a very short time, disparate purposes, principles and ideological beliefs resulted in clashes between individuals and sub-groups, and a high turnover of people:

It starts with this burst of enthusiasm [and then] it slowly got known that [Renaissance] was a cheap and easy place to visit and hang out. And then you get the tension that happens around who’s actually doing the work and who isn’t, and can we organise this better so that if you live here you have to do something. That perhaps we need to make a few rules. And then you’ve got the philosophical base about not having rules and then all of the arguing starts happening around do we want rules or don’t we want rules, and how do we make a decision, and who makes the decision, and how do you police the decision, and so the actual issue of how do things get done kind of gets overshadowed with the arguments about who makes decisions about that and how. And people need to get on with their lives, and maybe they just get to a point where oh, maybe I don’t want to do this for the rest of my life, and I’ll move on (Heather, personal communication, 29 April, 2006).

Unable to agree on how to make binding decisions, let alone deal with the social problems they were assailed with, the core group became fragmented. Some

people simply left, and those who stayed divided into factions who shared similar attitudes. Eventually all but one of those original residents departed – several of them after 15 or 20 years or more.

Part Two: Key changes

Departure of core founding people

When Renaissance was initially bought and settled, Topy and Paul, two founding members who not only were strong leaders and personalities, but also had extensive practical skills, secured a contract to build a woolshed three hours drive from Renaissance to help pay off the mortgage on the land. It was expected that the labour pool would come from the community. The organisation of the project was casual, the labour pool unskilled and uncommitted, and communication haphazard (the community had one telephone, in a phone booth behind the community house, and the building crew were camped in a remote forested valley without a phone). The job took several months during the critical early period of establishing the community. A breakdown in communication, poor organisation, and subsequent resentment and disillusionment due to a lack of interest in the project by many at the community lead to the permanent departure of Topy and Paul. A number of other important founding people also left in the first two years. Their departure, combined with an influx of newcomers during the same period, created significant instability, a lack of cohesion, confusion about the identity and purpose of the community, and a disintegration of the original sense of unity that had been shared by the Tahuna group who had organised the purchase of the land. Muni, who came from Germany with his partner during this period said:

The first big change came when [my partner] and I went back to Europe and came back again and Topy and Paul and Chris and another guy ... had gone... I don't know if the spirit had gone with them [but] I think to a degree the spirit ... had been beaten by that (personal communication, 26 March, 2006).

Klaus, who came from Germany with Verena and their two young children and settled at Renaissance a few years after its purchase said:

I understand that in the first few years people had already left who were quite strong and ... instrumental in the setup of the community ... And

they were people who had a vision. ... They were very strong personalities (personal communication, 22 April, 2006).

Reasons for the departure of other founding residents were varied – from forming romantic attachments with people elsewhere, to finding the open and unregulated structure too challenging and personality clashes and conflicting philosophies too overwhelming. Many people with young children found it difficult to stay, not only because of the lack of structure, but also because of the archaic and labour intensive facilities, overcrowding, a large contingent of single men, and a culture of marijuana use. Heather recalled:

We stayed at Renaissance for a few weeks in our truck after we'd come back from the States, but I felt it was too unhealthy for me and my children. ... I loved the atmosphere, and I loved the people ... but I just felt there was something too unhealthy about the culture – all that meat and dope - so we went off and started our own [vegan] community with two other couples further up the valley. We got extremely healthy there, we lasted six months! [laughs]. It got all self-righteous and ... judgemental [and then] we all decided to sell out. ... Meanwhile there was this sort of hippie stoned abandon thriving down the road [at Renaissance] (personal communication, 29 April, 2006).

Split into Factions

A change that had a significant impact on the culture of Renaissance involved a split between the core individuals into two groups. A combination of the departure of several foundation members and the arrival of a second wave of people created unsettled and confused social dynamics. The founding group had lived and worked together at Tahuna Farm where the project had been small scale, and they had forged strong friendships. The newcomers did not have that experience; they came to Renaissance because they wanted to live in a community, and the openness of Renaissance's structure enabled them to establish themselves on the land without financial requirements or negotiation. Jill, who lived at Renaissance for 22 years, recalled arriving unannounced with her partner and their new baby in the first year of the community's life:

I guess we just got the message that we were welcome to be there. We were obviously going to set ourselves up well. ... We wandered around the farm and decided we'd like to live there on that spot, on that hill. I was happy with that. I didn't really want to live in the middle of everybody anyway (personal communication, 21 April, 2006).

Differences of opinion in relation to how to respond to the council's request for a management plan and a leader, or at the very least, a spokesperson, to liaise with them, polarised the group and exposed differences in attitudes towards social organisation and the lack of a collective vision. Weekly meetings were implemented to discuss the increasing number of contentious issues, as well as core issues such as decision-making processes, expectations in regard to financial and work contributions, regulation and screening of newcomers. But the ideological differences between the foundation members and the second wave were exacerbated by personality clashes between a few dominant (male) residents, and these tended to stymie the progress of meetings. John, who, with his partner Betsy, had engineered the trust document, was considered by many to be a charismatic and influential figure in the community.⁵² The second wave of people who arrived in the first two years included Ray, who was energetic, determined, highly organised and very capable. He was soon joined by Ian, who was interested in the intellectual and political aspects of the community. Over a period of several years, Ray and Ian initiated many community meetings to discuss the structure of the trust, the distribution of power, and to try to implement a system of accountability, compulsory contributions, and processes for decision and policy making, including a system of vetting newcomers. This was met with resistance from members of the original group who felt that the later arrivals did not understand or appreciate the purpose of the venture or the ideological basis of the trust. This resistance was supported by newer and peripheral people who recognised the personal advantage of supporting an unstructured environment. Personality clashes and ill-feeling developed, and the core community split into two main factions. The geographical layout of the farm further emphasised this split; the group who wanted to implement a degree of structure built their houses on the other side of the property, some distance from the community house, gardens and main farm centre.

⁵² Most informants talked at length about John and the influence he had on the shape and direction of the community, mainly through his continued defense of an anarchic framework and resistance to imposing any sort of structure.

Over an extended period spanning several years, Ray and Ian continued to challenge the Trust and the community and to push for the introduction of a structure which would include an entry criteria, compulsory contributions to work and finances, an agreed policy for decision-making, and more direction and involvement by the trust. The lack of progress in these discussions culminated in them eventually publicly opposing a second application by the community to the district council for permission to build more housing. John remained adamant in his rejection of any proposals for introducing a structure, and had plenty of support. Reflecting on this impasse 30 years later, John included himself when he candidly declared “we had headstrong males that were stuffing it up” (personal communication, 27 October, 2006). Klaus:

It seems to me now that it was a bit of a battleground for strong personalities of the early people who were basically battling out their position there. ... John was using the label of anarchism to bring as many as possible people onto one side, which was reasonably easy to do with that sort of label. To talk about how we are all into freedom and that we are doing this and that (personal communication, 22 April, 2006).

Jill:

I never supported the open door policy. That was one of the things that our little – splinter group was trying to get a change on right from the beginning. ... I felt there should have been more controls on who got to stay (personal communication, 21 April, 2006).

Amelie:

I was definitely on one side. Because once we started having all those problems, like what do we do with the money, what do we do with the work and things like that, and how can we spread it over everybody a bit more equally and how can we stop having people abusing the place, or abusing other peoples effort ... in the end we felt there was no hope really. We couldn't change a thing. And the trust had been set up in such a way that we were all guests of the trust. We had no say, you know, we couldn't do anything (personal communication, 26 March, 2006).

Muni:

Quite a difficult aspect was the personality differences, and - I think that was really ... exacerbated by the way Renaissance operated as well. When the big crunch came, suddenly there were two camps. And it was difficult to reconcile ideas, and it became personal. ... The big crunch was when ... [at] a farm meeting for deciding what to do with the gardens, no-one turned up... Ray, Ian, me ... decided to ... abandon the community gardens and start our own garden. ... And it just happened to

be geographically over the other side of the farm. ... And then later I think John's Folly became another 'other side' (personal communication, 26 March 2006).

Amelie's statement that 'we couldn't do anything' exposes the paradoxical nature of the concept of freedom that underlies the ideology of the Renaissance Trust. Her sense of powerlessness reflects the paralysis that developed when conflicting approaches to realising the freedom to do anything made cooperative action and the ability to adapt as a community extremely difficult. As Muni pointed out, more than two factions developed at Renaissance, but it was the unresolved division over principles between the most capable and committed members that dominated the political and social atmosphere of the community, made progress difficult, and enabled further factions to develop for the first decade. Renaissance never resolved even the most fundamental of issues – how to make a decision and then to enforce it. The lack of resolution meant that the group remained unable to collectively make agreements that would be honoured in order to move forward effectively as a cohesive community, and to deal with the increasingly destructive social issues associated with freeloaders and people with mental health and/or addiction issues.⁵³

'The Folly'

An article in the New Zealand *Listener* (Jan 15, 2011, p. 26) noted that in 1982 there were large numbers of disenfranchised and unemployed young people in this country, and the Department of Labour listed one job vacancy for every 30 people on the dole. This state of affairs in the larger public arena profoundly affected the social fabric of Renaissance. During the early to mid 1980s the nature of the visitors began to change. Many were younger than the founding residents; their teen years were the late 1970s and early 1980s rather than 1960s and early 1970s. They were predominantly male, less educated than the main body of visitors and residents, and came from poorer backgrounds. A number of them came from a low-socio-economic region of South Auckland. Klaus recalled that "there were a

⁵³ The community has made agreements and rules over the years, and has at times successfully evicted people for not abiding by them, but enforcement has been inconsistent and ineffective.

lot of Jason's around ... there were drug related problems, and dead cars everywhere" (personal communication, 22 April, 2006). Pete:

Brian and Chris introduced keg parties. [Brian] was one of the first from South Auckland. They knew each other from up there and they must have been telephoning 'come down! Come down! This fantastic place, everyone smokes dope! Do anything you want to! And they came down in their droves. One time there were six of them living in the honey house – four of them inside and two underneath (personal communication, 24 April, 2006).

With one or two exceptions, this group for the most part remained uninvolved in community affairs. They had neither interest nor involvement in the politics of the community or its farming and horticultural aspects. They also stood apart in a cultural sense, contrasting in both appearance and attitude from the others who were described by outsiders as hippies. Hippies wore colourful clothes, believed in healthy living, organic food production, environmental concerns and world peace. The new group dressed in black, drank heavily and often became aggressive when drunk. They listened to heavy metal or punk music rather than rocknroll, and were, for the most part, uninterested in the ideology of self sufficiency or creating community. These people were essentially freeloaders, attracted by the unregulated environment and the company of like-minded others. They included one of the personality types Kephart identified as prevalent in open land communes - "borderliners ... the alcoholic, the drug addict, the psychopathic personality. ... In the view of the borderliners themselves [communes] often provide a haven, a retreat from a difficult world" (1976, p. 290). They evolved into another faction and settled in an area called John's Folly.⁵⁴ The Folly, as it came to be known, was close to the entrance to the community, in a field that had been designated for mobile homes, and a centre for transient visitors. The closure of a property further down the valley known as Rocky River Ranch increased the influx of borderliners into Renaissance. That property comprised of an assortment of baches and sheds which were rented out as cheap accommodation for several years. When 'the Ranch' was sold and its tenants evicted, Renaissance inherited both its residents and their culture of binge-drinking and anti-social behaviour.

⁵⁴ John's Folly was named after Little John, an early resident who initiated the planting of several acres of vegetables, most notably beans, which he ended up tending on his own. The field that he grew his beans in was named John's Folly, and later shorted to The Folly when it became the designated campground.

The unresolved ill-feeling that existed between the two main factions at Renaissance undermined the solidarity of the community. New people sensed the ill-feeling when entering the community, and consequently many who were interested in the concepts of community espoused by the trust document did not stay long. The haven provided by the Folly became widely known amongst people without permanent homes or income. One observer noted that “someone comes [to stay], then their six mates come home from the pub, and then the original person leaves and we’re left with the six mates” (Chrissy, personal communication, 23 February, 2009).

Decentralisation

The transition from a dependence on community facilities to separate households had a profound impact on the community which depended on daily interaction between people to keep everyone informed of important matters. In the early years, the shared meals and reliance on the facilities at the community house served this purpose. Over time, however, as houses were built and babies were born, people stopped eating together daily, preferring to spend more time in and around their own households. This fragmented communication channels. John:

The very first year we were there, there was very little food on the place, and very little money. It was about survival and that was the strongest community ever. ... It was simply that if you weren’t there at the right time and communicating with people, you didn’t get to eat. And you could argue that ... the community has slowly but surely evaporated ever since then because as people got houses set up and as children came along ... slowly the community meal at night became less and less well attended until finally there were houses all over the place ... and people cooking for their children on their own (personal communication, 27 October, 2006).

Chrissy:

[To begin with], we were young and single or recently coupled, and we were happy to live in a concentrated communal environment. Then as children arrived there was more need to build individual shelter, and then as time went on you’re way more likely to have your evening meal in your individual shelter and read a story to your kids rather than gee, let’s race back to the central house (personal communication, 23 February, 2009).

Building a house was a considerable undertaking, particularly because they were independently financed and built, mostly by novices who learned on the job. Builders invariably had very little money for materials, and consequently a building project generally took years to complete, with one person doing most of the work. The effort this involved meant builders withdrew from community activities, often for extended periods. As the family focus shifted to individual households, attending the daily community meals became less practical. Verena:

When we first got there, we didn't have a kitchen in our little hut, so we would go over to the house for all the meals - breakfast, lunch and dinner. And after awhile we got a little stove so we at least had breakfast at home but we still always had dinner over there. I remember carting dishes across because we had no sink or anything. Later Klaus constructed a little sink outside. ... After a year or more of using the kitchen [in the main house] I'd had enough. ... In the beginning there were more people helping, or being around to help. But after awhile there were less and less people wanting to do that, and it was becoming more of a chore. It wasn't so much fun anymore. We tried rosters and this and that and ... then at some point we just had less meals, and people cooked more in their own spaces because it was just too hard (personal communication, 22 April, 2006).

Despite living on the other side of the farm (initially in a caravan) with a baby, Jill and Ray still came over to the community house for dinner every night. Jill recalled "I'd rumble across the farm, through the bloody ford, up the hill in the dark, with my huge old pram" (personal communication, 21 April, 2006). The experiences of Verena and Jill not only illustrates the gender division of labour discussed in Chapter 1, but also the demanding physical nature of having young children in an environment where facilities were minimal.

Impact of Social Welfare

The gradual introduction of social welfare into Renaissance community had a major impact on the direction and culture of the community. There were benefits in that the community became more affluent, but the negative aspects tended to overshadow the good that this brought. The founding group from Tahuna Farm who established the Renaissance Trust initially rejected the option of collecting welfare. It was an intrinsic part of the ethos of self-reliance and independence from the state that underpinned their philosophical stance. For the first years after

Renaissance was established, this unofficial agreement was honoured - nobody collected an unemployment benefit, although a few single parents were on the DPB.⁵⁵

Muni:

Initially to say nobody is on the dole, I think that was really good. The change started when Ray and George went on the dole. But with those guys, the money they got from the dole, they invested in the farm, but I think after that a lot of people left the money at the pub. And there was no way of saying hey, you know, you're not fit to be here, or, you haven't got the spirit that we want, because anything went - it was an open house (personal communication, 26 March, 2006).

John:

The dole [is] the most destructive thing that's happened to that place, I reckon. ... In the early years the farm had a strong anti-dole ethic, which resulted on one or two occasions in near fisticuffs with people saying they were going to be on the dole –Topsy particularly had a really strong anti-dole ethic. And I kind of shared that with him, in principle. I thought it was totally right that we shouldn't be on the dole, although at the end of the day ... I'd think, this is ridiculous, I couldn't put another board on my house because I didn't have enough money to buy a box of nails, and there were people over there pissing their dole on the wall. I was looking after Betsy, who was pretty ill, as well as two children and we had no money, so you know, eventually I succumbed (personal communication, 27 October, 2006).

Amelie:

What started changing things was when people started relying on the social welfare. [It meant that] some people [who were] not really interested in the farm ... could just have a good time, staying there, have no input and no desire to build up something (personal communication, 26 March, 2006).

The unemployment benefit was easy to access at that time. There were high rates unemployment throughout New Zealand and in the Motueka district while seasonal labour was available in the summer months, for the rest of the year there was no local work, and signing up for the dole was straight forward process. The unemployment benefit had some positive aspects; it enabled people to stay on the

⁵⁵ Income came from variety of sources: some worked locally as seasonal labourers in the tobacco and apple industries, which helped to forge more positive relations with the wider community. Others generated income through cottage crafts and small business ventures, such as weaving, leatherwork, woodwork, and an apiary business.

farm, helped to finance the building of houses, paid for tools and equipment for the community and contributed to paying off the mortgage. But it also gave people the option of buying instead of growing food. For people looking for a cheap place to live, it was possible to exist in relative comfort on social welfare benefits without the expense of paying rent or utility costs. The focus on large scale farming and gardening gradually diminished and over time as less people committed themselves to being involved. The number of unskilled, welfare-dependent people, and single mothers with little external support increased as those who were interested in self-sufficiency became disillusioned and chose to move elsewhere – either to other communities where they could pursue their interests with like-minded people, or to buy land of their own. Klaus:

At the time there still was possibly a balance where the majority of the people were more in a position to say well this is not what the majority of people want. And that slowly ... changed into where the balance got more and more to be people who were basically refugees of society ... rather than people who were looking for an alternative lifestyle with the intention of living communally. People ended up living there because they just didn't have anywhere else to go (personal communication, 22 April, 2009).

Rob Francis, a former resident of Riverside and trustee of Renaissance Community in its early years, now lives and works in Motueka facilitating community programmes including the reduction of family violence. Referring to Renaissance in 2009, he said:

The only experience I've had in recent years is talking to people who come into town. Coming across things around family violence and seeing some of the damaged people either living there or coming out of there. People who have gone there as refugees almost, but caused trouble in the community through drugs or abuse of various sorts. I've felt really bad about that [because] I felt Renaissance was - and still is - a beautiful dream (personal communication, 28 January, 2009).

The refugee theme surfaces frequently when people speak about the residents of Renaissance in the present. Pete, the only original member still resident, said:

I always thought a place like this closely attracts the larger society. And it's what the larger society is all about. We now have people coming here who are second generation unemployed, unemployable. ...Lost souls, they end up here. Sometimes they end up being sent here by some social agency, or the police say where are we going to bail you to, and they've heard of Renaissance, so its "oh well, bail them to Renaissance." ... If you could think of one thing that epitomised this place it was this sort of

notion that we had to be charitable, therefore we had to take in anybody which is pretty much what charity's about, isn't it? We put up with lots of people who couldn't possibly understand what it was about because they were paranoid schizophrenics. We thought that was what we had to do – to give succour to these people. To say no would be uncharitable. ... Why do we put solo mothers who have got no interest whatsoever in farming, into houses which were supposedly built to house farm workers? But we have, you know, until recently five of the eight or nine legal houses have been occupied by solo mothers (personal communication, 24 April, 2006).

Departure of key long term residents

In the late 1990s and early 2000s there was a second exodus of core people, when several key people who had lived at Renaissance for more than 20 years left the community. John left in 1995, a few years after his partner Betsy died. He now lives on another collectively owned property on the other side of the Motueka River:

I was quite torn about leaving, actually [but] without Betsy standing beside me ... I felt quite exposed, and totally inadequate ... I got a definite feeling of being back up against the wall and people kept on coming [to me] and saying ... how do you do this, what's that, how do you do that. ... I realised that a lot of being able to be out there surrounded by the sort of darkness in John's Folly as it were, I was enabled by having Betsy beside me. ... Even now when I go over there, I just see the potential. It would be great if somebody could magically clean the slate and have a new group going in there. ... It's a very beautiful spot and going over there is like stepping back into a dream that I've had (John, personal communication, 30 April, 2006).

In 2003, Klaus and Verena left Renaissance after 23 years. They moved to Riverside Community because they felt it embodied their philosophy of communal living more than Renaissance did. This couple, along with others who left throughout the 1990s took with them valuable skills in land management, the maintenance and repair of farm equipment, tools and water systems. They had also hosted WOOFers for a number of years - an important group who had become an essential labour force to maintain the extensive community orchards, woodlots and gardens through the 1990s.

Klaus:

I found it very hard to leave the place, emotionally ... having built [a house], and I had a vision, you know, of being out there and slowly

working towards being sustainable and self-employed, and just before we left I had more customers [for] woodwork and I drove my tractor to other people's places and did their mowing, and I was quite well-known in the area as being a reasonable man who did work for people ... and that's not happening anymore (personal communication, 22 April, 2006).

Jill left after 22 years at Renaissance:

Maybe it was time for me to go – maybe that was the way that the community should be, it's become a community for people with the sort of values where they don't care about growing food, using the land for growing trees and using the produce in a sensible way. ... Most of the people didn't actually have gardens, and couldn't have given a stuff about them. ... My feeling ... then was that it was ugly, ugly. And I couldn't feel any pride in it. I felt very distressed about that side of things. I felt embarrassed to tell people that I was living there. I felt a total lack of pride in the place. I'd lost that, whereas before I'd had it (personal communication, 21 April, 2006).

While Verena considered that Renaissance “was a rebel culture, and it still is” (personal communication, 28 February, 2009) and that anyone “who attempted to develop a different culture and kind of bring in structures ... would be shot down every time” (*ibid.*), Pete believes that the departure of the last of the long-established residents heralded the end of the entrenched divisions and conflict-ridden environment that had previously existed at Renaissance. While this may be the case, I dispute the inference that the remaining group have a united and unconflicted relationship. Pete claims that strong bonds exist amongst several of the remaining resident group, that they care for the land, share a community garden, and keep the community operating. In reality, the relationships between the remaining resident group remains tenuous, with little cooperative action, and inconsistent management of farm and community affairs. The physical appearance of the property bears this out. The buildings are rundown and there is an overall air of neglect. The departure of the last of the second wave of long-established productive residents changed the dynamics and emphasis of the remaining group, some of whom began to express the same concerns of the departed ones. Marie has lived at Renaissance since the early 1990s:

We've been so nice over the years. Take for instance, R. He's got two children; he's living in a bus. Their mother's up north in rehab now. They both have drug problems. ... Being the kind hearted people we are, and they being in a desperate situation with kids and all that, we let them in and, you know, imposed conditions, which they didn't fulfil. ... His

whole attitude is that he can do anything he likes here and we can't do anything about it. It's quite funny as you get older and settle down into the farm, you start thinking how the ones that you thought were the hierarchy, you start thinking like them. You start recognising their concerns I think. I just want people to come up here and be into the lifestyle. To make the place work, to look after and care for the land, and not be here just because it's a cheap house (Marie, personal communication, 25 August, 2006).

Part Three: Discussion

Renaissance Community Trust

Sargisson and Sargent suggested that Renaissance Community “is anarchic not only in its internal arrangements but also in its ownership” (2004, p. 100). They also stated that it has “no core values, doctrine or belief system” (*ibid.*). In terms of this second assertion, a distinction needs to be made between the Renaissance Trust and the Renaissance Community. The core values and belief system of the Renaissance Trust are evident in the trust's essential mission statement (see Appendix A). They can be interpreted as broadly including the ideas that: publicly owned land enables individuals to practice a fundamental right for the people of New Zealand to live and create homes on the land, without discrimination and regardless of their economic situation; individuals are capable of regulating themselves and do not need external restrictions imposed on them; the elimination of a capitalistic framework enables the potential for the advancement of people, and by providing access to land, and the opportunity to work together on that land, people's lives will be enhanced. These core values are reflected in the freedom of the residents of Renaissance to live their lives as they see fit.

These principles are not very different from the rationale that Kirk and Rata gave for establishing the Ohu scheme. Rata believed Ohu had the potential to “lead the way to a more concerned society and recapture anew the deep links between people and land. ... It is meant to give an opportunity to New Zealanders to experience the earth, the country, and each other in a new fraternal unity” (Ohu Advisory Committee, 1975, p. 2). By establishing a charitable trust as an entity to hold land as public land, the intention of the founders of the Renaissance Community was to secure an environment for people to learn self governance and

self-reliance without the risk of any individuals assuming control or personal profit from the venture. John, the document's chief author, admits the goal was to produce a document that would be as minimal and unrestrictive as possible. The inclusion of the word 'free' in the mission statement has generated considerable debate amongst residents over the years. Some interpret it to mean without obligation or responsibility, misinterpreting 'free to commune with each other and the land' to mean free to do as one pleases without responsibility. However, this statement is qualified by the second part: 'to foster the spiritual, intellectual and physical advancement of the people of New Zealand.' One of the reasons that conflict over the purpose of the Renaissance Trust has never been resolved is because of the vague and open-ended nature of the statement. It is difficult to measure spiritual, intellectual and physical advancement.⁵⁶ While some have been adamant that the resident body at Renaissance has not lived up to the trust statement, others argue that it has and does.

An underlying assumption of the Trust's philosophy illustrates Rigby's observation that "founders of secular communities typically believed in the immanent goodness of all men which only required the correct social and economic environment for it to be made manifest" (1974, p. 282). In hindsight, John believes that an unstructured environment is too difficult for most to manage:

One of the things is this thing of anarchy. Basically, the underlying thing is that we don't need government; we're capable of governing ourselves. But you see the point is we're not ready for anarchy, and that's why [Renaissance] is where it's at (personal communication, 30 April, 2006).

The fact that Renaissance still exists is remarkable in this sense. It could be argued that the community has changed to the extent that the community it is in the present is not the same community as it was in its early years. This raises questions not only about whether Renaissance can still be considered to be an alternative community, but also, whether simply continuing to exist insofar as the land is owned by the Renaissance Trust in perpetuity and people live in its dwellings means that it can be considered to be an intentional community at all. John has always argued that the community needs to be given time, that a few

⁵⁶ Just as I would argue it is difficult to measure whether a community is 'successful' or not.

generations need to pass before it can be judged to have achieved its aims or not. This reflects Pitzer's notion of developmental communalism, which includes the idea that community living is a phase of a much longer developmental process that may depart from its original aims in order to serve the needs of its participants. A further question this raises is, if a community fails to sustain its ideology and core principles over time, can it still be considered to be the same community that it began as? Because the trust has so few requirements, and a disparate group of trustees, some of whom are long-term residents of Renaissance Community, it seems unlikely the community will ever be dismantled. I assert that this is a primary reason why it has managed to continue as an open-door community with minimal structure for 30 years. Attempts to change this have been unsuccessful. The implications of trusts for the survival and longevity of communities are discussed in the final chapter.

Unlike the trust boards of the other communities in this study, all of whom are made up of members who take an active role in the management and governance of the communities they oversee, Renaissance Community Trust was, from the outset, formed solely for the purpose of being a legal entity to hold title to land, not to govern or guide the community. Theoretically, it could potentially hold title to any number of properties, not just Graham Downs. There was never any requirement that trustees must either be resident upon, or involved with, Renaissance Community personally. Chrissy believes the relationship between the trustees and the community is "a tricky one" (personal communication, 23 February, 2009) because:

There are matters of accountability, of keeping a legal entity together. ... Nonetheless you are representing an anarchist anomaly and therefore your responsibility is to try and model that behaviour within the situation so that [the community residents] have got a model of the trust acting in that way. ... So you're not [telling people what to do], you've got to give them the freedom to evolve (*ibid.*).

In spite of this hands-off philosophy, the trustees have, over the years, felt obliged to exercise their authority on a number of occasions "when internal management becomes difficult, and fraught, and more than [the community] can cope with" (*ibid.*). Their involvement has included the issuing of eviction notices to people "on the basis that their violent behaviour was becoming more regular and more

serious” (*ibid.*), and mediating between community residents in situations when they were unable to find agreement, particularly in relation to who should take over a house when it becomes vacant. While Chrissy points out that the trustees do not see their role as that of community managers, the trustees have in recent years taken responsibility for managing the houses, as they are fixtures of the land and therefore trust property. Residents now pay a minimal rental to the trust to live in the houses. The rent accumulates in a trust-held fund to finance the maintenance and upkeep of the buildings, though it remains the responsibility of individual householders to initiate and/or undertake any repairs or renovations.

Despite the evidence of small pockets of well-maintained areas of the land, the neglected facilities and buildings, the rundown appearance of the place, and the continued presence of a culture of drug and alcohol abuse, suggests that the body of residents at Renaissance in the present do not actively pursue the aims and objectives of the Renaissance Trust. Chrissy:

I think the original aim of the [trust] document demanded an interest in the land, and in land management skills. And I think that has been one of the hardest things to uphold over the years. People have come in because it’s a cheap place to live, because it’s a place of refuge (personal communication, 23 February, 2009).

Conflict

Rigby (1974) wrote that “the major causes of failure [in communes] have traditionally been factional divisions and personal quarrels between members” (p. 282). In her paper *Surviving Conflict* (2003) Lucy Sargisson discusses processes for managing conflict in the long-lived New Zealand communities she surveyed for the *Living in Utopia* project. She wrote that “intragroup conflict is an unintended outcome of community life. It can threaten the future of a community and was identified by 98% of interview subjects as the source of personal pain and anguish” (2003, p. 233). Sargisson writes about conflict in two senses: it can be dangerous, or it can be useful. Dangerous conflict is destructive and destabilising, and can destroy a community if it is not resolved. Useful conflict, on the other hand, can be “valuable, functional or socially useful” (Sargisson, 2003, p. 230). It can also “permit the clarification of a group’s ideas. It can allow for changes in the

balance of power and is a dynamic force” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 143). Conflict in this sense is a creative process. Sargisson makes further distinctions between three kinds of conflict: conflict over principle, domestic issues, and relationships. She adds that “conflict over principles are the most difficult to resolve” (2003, p. 237), and that “when a community founded on and for shared values experiences serious conflict about those values, the future of the group comes into question” (2003, p. 246). In relation to Renaissance I assert that unresolved conflict in all these three areas had a profound effect on the committed community that existed over the first 15 to 20 years, but conflict over principles resulted in the events outlined above. This is evident in the fact that the core group were never able to agree on how to make, and then honour, a binding decision, or, that when agreements were made, there was no authoritative structure or system to enforce their application.

The conflicting principles of the founding group who defended the anarchistic principles of individual freedom and self-regulation vs. those who would implement restrictions and structures became insurmountable and undermined the solidarity of the group, as outlined in this chapter. While Renaissance continues to exist, it is with a very different emphasis and core resident population than it had during the first period of its existence, and with a low-level of group interaction and activity.

Tim Jones referred to the inability of members of Beeville community to effectively address conflict between members, remarking on the frequency with which people stormed out of meeting and refused to attempt to address differences. Unresolved conflict contributed to the eventual disintegration of the Beeville community. At Renaissance, disintegration occurred in terms of the unity and cohesion of the group, with unresolved conflict resulting in the eventual departure of most of the core members, but a fundamental element that has contributed to the continuation of Renaissance is the fact that land has remained secure.

Sargisson and Sargent point out that a critical aspect of making conflict useful as opposed to dangerous lies in the methods employed by community groups to respond to it. Generally, if a community is unable to implement an effective means

of addressing conflict within the group, resentments fester until eventually either one party leaves, or the entire community collapses. As events at Renaissance illustrate, a point is reached where “trust breaks down and people can no longer work together” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 154). Further, without an agreed upon system of discussion and decision-making, conflict is not likely to be socially useful. Although Renaissance attempted to introduce mediators on a few occasions, resistance to the concept of ‘personal development’ on the part of several key participants, combined with the ideological gulf between the different factions, meant that resolution was not achieved.

Can Renaissance be considered to have survived?

Given the issues outlined here, can Renaissance still be described as an intentional community, and if not, at what point did it cease to be one? Renaissance Community, at the time of this research is home to, on average, 40 people. While a few residents have independent sources of income, most residents rely on welfare - some do seasonal work for part of the year and collect welfare for the rest. Others are sickness or invalid beneficiaries or collect the DPB. Increasingly, residents are qualifying for the old age pension. The majority have been resident for more than ten years so it is fair to say the core group is established and settled. A further transient group have lived there on and off on a casual basis over a twenty year period. As I have stated above, the resident population, on the whole, could not be described as fostering ‘the spiritual, intellectual and physical advancement of the people in this country.’ Nor is there much evidence of the development of environmentally sound methods of farming through co-operative effort (the second part of the trusts objectives), despite the resurrection of a community garden and a small herd of cattle. Physically the place exudes an air of neglect, with a derelict community house, poorly maintained buildings and minimal evidence of farming activities. There is a small contingent of productive residents who maintain a minimum level of maintenance and management. Periodically there are meetings and group initiatives, but they are not consistent or sustained. A number of long-term residents have drug and alcohol issues. Renaissance provides a refuge rather than an environment which encourages self-reliance and the opportunity to work collectively for the greater good.

The complexities surrounding definitions of what constitutes an intentional, or alternative, community have already been identified. I assert that Renaissance is a community because the Renaissance Trust was created to enable the land called Graham Downs to be inhabited by a group of people for the purpose of ‘communing with each other’. In this respect, as long as people reside on that land, and the Renaissance Trust owns it, the resident group can be described as a community. However, whether it can be called either alternative or intentional is another question. Further, whether the community in the present is the same as the community in the past, or that it can be considered to be one single community is a subject for further discussion that is returned to later in this thesis.

If we assume the minimal definition of intentional community includes “groups of people who have chosen to live (and sometimes work) together for some common purpose” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 6), or to “carry out a shared lifestyle with a common purpose” (Metcalf, 2003, p. 670), then Renaissance in the present fits this criteria. Residents socialise and meet occasionally. They contribute financially to a common fund (‘Farm Fund’) to cover overheads, and to the trust for the maintenance of the buildings. Some share communal gardens, and the produce from collective endeavour – vegetables, meat, sometimes dairy products. A common purpose could include living on public land on a minimal income. From the trust’s perspective, the provision of low-cost housing to long-term beneficiaries, people with mental health issues, and single parents could be included as “charitable works in connection” (Renaissance Trust document, 1977) with the objectives of the trust (although this is not identified in the trust document or associated documents). However, if we add the further assertion that to be a community, members must actively strive to forge a shared identity (Andelson, 2002; Miller, 1999; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004), and that they can be defined by “their vision, values and practices” (Metcalf, 2003, p. 670) the subject becomes less clear. But if we were to argue that an intentional community must uphold the aims of its foundation objectives in order to be considered as such, where does this leave other long-lived communities that have also changed their emphasis and purpose considerably over time, have members who do not participate in communal affairs or are absent for extended periods, or communities that

experience prolonged periods where there is no collective activity and the aims and objectives are not being practiced? Is it possible to say that a community can move in and out of being an alternative community? This aligns with Henry Near's (2010) assertion that long-lived kibbutzim have become post-utopian, that inevitably they move away from their original *raison d'être* to the extent that they no longer can be described as utopian.

There is also the question of whether working together or sharing a stated common purpose is necessarily a key identifying element of alternative communities. There are numerous examples of groups who share collective ownership of land but operate completely independently of each other, sharing little other than the roadways to their houses, dividing up the land into lots, owning their own vehicles, houses, and resources, allowing members to sell or sublet their houses at rates they set themselves, and in many instances paying outsiders (or relying on WOOFers) to provide labour for community work. Such communities consider themselves to share a group identity and ethos (generally through their environmental principles), but it can be difficult to distinguish them as alternative when there is little to differentiate them from a rural subdivision. Some prefer to describe themselves as a village rather than a community.

It could be argued that Renaissance has evolved over time from being an intentional community, to a circumstantial community. However, this is not entirely accurate either, as a number of the long-term residents have forged strong bonds and actively support one another. I consider that a number of residents do demonstrate they share a sense of shared identity. While there is a culture of drug and alcohol abuse, there are residents who do not have addiction issues, and who actively try to reduce the negative influence of this. In this sense, it is difficult to talk about the resident body of Renaissance as a single community. As one resident pointed out, there are people at Renaissance that he considers to be part of his community and others who are not. Thus, it is possible that several sub-communities can exist within a single community.

Lucy Kamau believes that "intentional communities are nearly always liminal, and their members in a state of 'outsider-hood'" (2002, p. 20); that in communities

“life is lived outside normal society and on the margins” (2002, p. 19). ‘Outsider-hood’ in the context that Victor Turner uses it, involves a state of liminality, where members are “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). This could describe the resident group at Renaissance. But liminality is a transitory phase, and generally marks the passage through a life-stage. The core population of Renaissance are not in a state of liminality, or if they are, it is not very transitory. However, the founders of Renaissance certainly occupied a deliberate stance of outsider-hood. They clearly defined their way of life in terms of a rejection of mainstream values and practices. In the present however, Renaissance serves as a refuge for a different kind of outsider – people who do not cope well in mainstream society and opportunists who find the undemanding environment convenient for their needs. Their outsider-hood would seem to be a result of dysfunction, disadvantage or a perceived lack of choices rather than a deliberate ideological stance. While the majority of the current residents of Renaissance might not actively uphold the aims of the trust, I suggest some still demonstrate varying degrees of cooperation and community. I have demonstrated here that the community experiences cycles of cooperative activity, and that it remains unpredictable in terms of its potential for future cooperative action.

The land Renaissance exists upon (Graham Downs) is owned by the Renaissance Trust in perpetuity. As long as it remains so, and houses are available to live in, people will live there. This does not necessarily mean it can accurately be described as an intentional or alternative community in present times. I suggest at the time of this research that it would be more appropriate to call it a circumstantial community. The resident group in the present do not appear to share a common purpose, shared goals, or interest in the aims of the trust, but the potential for new people to become established and resurrect a strong community focus remains. The emphasis and the population might change over time, but the land ownership remains secure, giving it the luxury of time to evolve in new directions. This subject is returned to in Chapter 8.

Chapter Five: Wilderland Community - Coromandel Peninsula

Established 1964

Quote from Krishnaji at Rishi Valley: “Don’t think of yourselves as a community” he said, “there is something aggressive about a community, something sectarian and self-endorsed.” Instead, he wanted us to be a compassionate and intelligent group of people who had their doors always open (final entry in Dan Hansen’s diary, 2003).⁵⁷

For some people, living at Wilderland was good because it was cheap. For some it would be a philosophical thing – to avoid working for The Man. For myself, I started appreciating what community could be. Not being a Māori I didn’t have a marae to go to, and I realised that in a way Wilderland was a Pākehā marae (Piet, former Wilderland resident, personal communication, 20 January, 2009).

Everyone who comes here, the first thing they see is potential (Avner, Wilderland resident, personal communication, 4 November, 2009).

This chapter is in three parts. Part one begins with an orientation concerning the state of Wilderland’s affairs at the time of this research. This is followed by an overview of its history and development since the property was purchased by Dan and Edith Hansen in 1964. Part two identifies significant changes that the community has experienced throughout its lifetime, and the impact of those changes on the community’s evolution. This is followed by a discussion of the Wilderland Trust. In Part three, I discuss the implications of Dan Hansen’s influence over the development of Wilderland and the transference of ownership from the Hansens to the Wilderland Trust, the cycle of commitment followed by disillusionment and departure by successive groups of residents, and the situation at Wilderland at the end of 2010.

⁵⁷ This quote was written by Dan Hansen after visiting a school founded by Krishnamurti (Krishnaji is a name Krishnamurti is sometimes called) in the United States. Hansen was strongly influenced by Krishnamurti in his own principles and beliefs.

Part One: Introduction

Orientation

During the period that this research was conducted, Wilderland was in the midst of a crisis, with a number of major events seriously threatening its continued existence. Between the beginning of 2009 and the end of 2010, this included a complete change of the resident population, a legal challenge to the Wilderland Trust that owns the land on the part of the daughter of the original founders, and a court order by the Thames Coromandel District Council demanding the demolition of all its thirteen illegally built dwellings, which were considered a health and safety risk. In January 2009, when I first visited the community, the population had dwindled to three residents and a number of casual visitors and WOOFers. By the end of 2009 those three core residents had been replaced by five different ones, three of whom were foreign nationals with insecure residency status.⁵⁸ This new group were considering how they would respond to the threat of a legal challenge to the status of the trust by Dan and Edith Hansen's daughter, Heather, and her family. By October 2010, this dispute had been settled out of court. Edith Hansen had been removed from the trust, two of the three foreign nationals had secured residency status, a new group of trustees had been elected, and a resident group of four committed members and several "trial residents"⁵⁹ were working towards developing a new management policy, and negotiating with the council to upgrade rather than demolish the illegal dwellings.

Dan Hansen, the founder and original owner of the property, died in 2006, and although the Wilderland Trust was established in 1989, and ownership of the land transferred to it in 1992, there have been several disputes and issues associated with this. Initially, these concerned Dan's retention of authority as landowner, and later, challenges to the legal status of the group living at Wilderland as beneficiaries of the trust, and to the power invested in the trustees to manage community affairs. Dan's widow Edith remained a lifelong trustee of the

⁵⁸ By 'core' I refer to people who are committed to living at Wilderland and take responsibility for managing the property. Wilderland consistently hosts a large number of visitors, some of whom stay relatively long-term but on a casual basis.

⁵⁹ A category of resident outlined in the Wilderland Resident Policy document, 12 July, 2010.

Wilderland Trust after Dan's death. However, in 2009 she was elderly, in poor health and did not take a role in the affairs of the trust. Her daughter Heather, who lives next to the community, had assumed the role of advocate for her mother. At the time I first interviewed her Heather expressed uncertainty about what she thought should happen next, but felt the community should be "closed down" (personal communication, 4 February, 2009) because she believed it was not upholding the aims of the trust. In 2010 Edith was removed from the trust due to her infirmity, Heather and her family withdrew their challenge, and no longer have any connection with Wilderland.

Overview

Wilderland comprises of 73 hectares (183 acres) of hilly bush covered land on the Whitianga Harbour. It is a certified organic farm,⁶⁰ and includes extensive orchards, horticultural gardens and an apiary. There is little flat land; the orchards and gardens are spread across the north facing slopes, comprising about 20% of the property, with the rest regenerating native bush. Dirt roadways provide access to small, modestly constructed huts and dwellings and the rambling network of gardens and orchards. When *Country Life* radio interviewer Jerome Cvitanovich visited Wilderland he described it as a "verdant and luscious cornucopia" (Murray, 2001). The Coromandel Peninsula has a sub-tropical climate where vegetation thrives, including a vast variety of fruit and avocado trees as well as number of invasive weed species. This, combined with the terrain, and an organic approach to horticulture makes the management of such a property a very labour intensive practice.

While the tenuousness of Wilderland's political situation in recent years has left it in a vulnerable position, the challenges associated with both serious conflict, and a fluctuating and impermanent core group of residents, is by no means a recent phenomenon. The community's 46 year history has been characterised by a high turnover of residents, and a high degree of disharmony. There have been extended periods when the resident population has dwindled to two or three, aside from Dan

⁶⁰ Certified with *Organic Farms New Zealand*

and Edith. This is evident from numerous entries in Dan's personal diaries as well as the interviews with former residents of the community. A letter to Mushroom Magazine in 1981 invites new people to join the community to help it revitalise:

We are only 7 – 8 people ... the lowest population in several years. ... The people who are here now are not unified in their views of what we can do to bring life into a place that feels to all of us dismal and disparate (Elwell-Sutton, p. 47).

There have also been several protracted disputes, some of which have involved legal challenges, that have had a profound impact on the community. Some of these issues are discussed in this chapter. The recent crisis described above has been developing for some years. When Sargisson visited in 2001, she wrote that:

Wilderland was undergoing changes and [Dan] Hansen did not describe them as a community. But he has since deeded the land to a trust and there are still a small number of permanent residents, so it is correct to say that Wilderland remains an intentional community (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 125).

The changing population at Wilderland has presented obstacles to finding clarity and continuity for this research, particularly in regard to the history of the community and the causes of conflict. Resident informants often referred to events that happened long before their time there, and gave inaccurate information about them, based on hearsay. Consequently, a number of key events have become mythologised⁶¹ and accounts were given of some events that had sometimes been heard about second or third hand. This mythologising is not uncommon in oral accounts of the past. The Popular Memory Group (in Perks, 2006) refers to the social production of memory that is produced in the course of everyday life. Through the exchange of personal comparisons and narratives memory becomes “encapsulated in anecdotes that acquire the force and generality of myths” (in Perks, 2006, p. 45). Similarly, in her thesis about other Coromandel communities, Larisa Webb refers to the role of gossip in small communities, suggesting that rapid circulation of stories through close social networks contribute to a process of turning past events into firmly established stories in the history of a community

⁶¹ Two examples of this are the various versions presented to me about two major events in particular - the events that led to the banning of all drugs and alcohol from the property in the 1970s, and a dispute during the 1990s when five members challenged the Trust over a financial issue (this is returned to later in this chapter).

(1999, p. 103). This is also evident in references to Dan and his intentions that were explained to me by people who had never met him. Apart from being referred to as a “lifestyle guru” (Hauraki Herald, 10 October 2010) or “charismatic” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004), many referred to his ‘dream’ or ‘vision.’ Yet there is no real evidence that Dan himself was motivated by any vision or dream beyond growing organic food. His intentions certainly did not include establishing an alternative community. To the contrary, he said in a 2001 *Country Life* radio interview that he never set out to create a community, either practically or ideologically (Murray, 2001).

Sargisson and Sargent remarked that “communities that focus on a charismatic leader can face difficulties when this person dies” (2004, p.127), but they believed that Wilderland would survive Dan’s death because of the establishment of the Wilderland Trust. However, Dan Hansen’s death, five years after Sargisson’s visit, had unforeseen repercussions. As Russel, a resident and spokesperson for Wilderland in 2010, pointed out in relation to the legal challenge that Dan’s daughter had instigated, the transference of ownership to the trust did not take into account the possibility of a situation arising in which “a daughter who is taking care of her mother’s whole affairs [is] absolutely against Wilderland” (personal communication, 3 November, 2009). Nor did it consider implementing a process to deal with the possibility of a complete change of the resident population.

I visited Wilderland twice in 2009. None of the residents had been there longer than seven years. The first visit was in January, at the height of the harvest season. The orchards were laden with ripe tangelos, plums, pears, and avocados. The vegetable gardens were producing enough vegetables to supply the Wilderland shop, and to feed the community.⁶² The proceeds from produce sold in the shop paid a wage to Thomas and his partner Sigi, who were the chief organisers and managers of the community, and a small allowance (\$50 a week) for long-term residents. The income from the sale of produce also paid for bulk food and the costs associated with running the property.

⁶² The Wilderland shop is discussed on page 133.

When I arrived at Wilderland the first time, Thomas (the chief organiser) was returning to the community hall for lunch with a work crew of about six people, comprised mainly of WOOFers. They had spent four hours picking tangelos to stock the Wilderland shop. A hot meal was ready, prepared by one person who was rostered on to that role. I had arranged via telephone with Thomas to visit Wilderland a week prior to my visit, but when I met him he told me that in the interim period between my call and visit, he and his partner had decided to leave the community because they could no longer cope with the burden of trying to hold the place together virtually on their own. He told me:

It has never been easy for people who live here long term - who actually carry the place - to make it possible for people to come here short term. ... And none of the people who were living here were motivated enough ... to actually go for it. They left it all up to me and then afterwards they blamed me for telling them what to do. And I didn't like that. ... I have carried the heavy end of the stick for far too long and I just can't carry it any more (personal communication, 22 January, 2009).

Thomas also explained that as he and his partner were both trustees, and it was stipulated in the trust document that the majority of trustees had to be resident at Wilderland, their departure and resignation would leave insufficient trustees for a quorum.⁶³ He was unsure of what might happen after they left.

Apart from this couple, there were two others residents, one of whom had been there for several years, and another who had stayed there previously, and had returned as a casual visitor. There were also six WOOFers staying. Despite the small resident group and the transient nature of the population of WOOFers, there was a clearly stated expectation that everyone would turn up at the hall every morning at 9 am, six days a week, and work together for four hours then eat a shared lunch together.⁶⁴ In the afternoons and evenings people were free to do as they wished. Thomas spoke about Wilderland's dependence on WOOFers to provide a labour pool to harvest produce and to tend the extensive crops that Wilderland produced:

⁶³ The Wilderland Trust Deed (1989) states that at all times a majority of the trustees must be resident in Wilderland (at any one time there can be no less than five). Thomas, Sigi and Edith were the three resident trustees at that time.

⁶⁴ This was outlined on a board welcoming guests, as well as stated on the Wilderland website. Further, the WOOF scheme handbook states that the minimum expectation of the scheme is that members work four hours a day with or for their hosts.

We need WOOFers to work. [They] are cheap labour, but they still eat and drink and all the rest of it and they need to be organised. ... Years ago when we had big market gardens, we had up to twenty [at any one time] in the main peak, around December (personal communication, 22 January, 2009).

Gary, an American who lived at Wilderland from 1989 – 2001, like Thomas, became overwhelmed by the workload. He reiterated that those horticultural enterprises at Wilderland could not have been sustained without WOOFers (Torley, 1999). However, WOOFers are unpaid labour and their presence is casual and unreliable. They are also generally unskilled, a high number are foreign nationals and many have minimal English language skills. Their short-term stays means that the residents are constantly teaching new people new skills. While this reflects the objectives of the Wilderland Trust, it is difficult to sustain. When I spoke to Avner, Wilderland's beekeeper in 2010, he remarked that he had taken two WOOFers with him to tend the hives that morning, and that it had taken twice as long as it would have done had he taken someone who was familiar with the process. The inexperience of many WOOFers is illustrated by a young 21 year old architecture student from Ireland, taking a year's break from his studies to travel. He told me "I grew up in a city, so it's pretty different. When I want an apple [here] I just pick one. ... Yesterday was the first time I ever chopped wood" (Rob, personal communication, 22 January, 2009). Gary pointed out that "the strength of places like Wilderland depends on people getting behind it" (Cvitanovich, 1999), but that the demanding nature of the manual labour required to maintain the horticultural enterprises was daunting, particularly for those who took responsibility for managing it.

Historical context

A remarkable aspect of Wilderland's history is the fact that in spite of the difficult physical terrain, its founder, Dan Hansen, maintained a pivotal role for more than 40 years, despite being paraplegic. He was paralysed as the result of a farming accident in 1940, at the age of 21. In 1999, in his 80s, Dan told *Country Calendar* interviewer Jim Hickey that when he first bought the Wilderland property people had said that it would be difficult for an able-bodied person to farm such a

property, and impossible for a crippled person. When he and Edith took possession of the land in 1964 it was a neglected farm, starting to regenerate into native bush. The previous owners had “just walked off it” (Cvitanovich, 1999) eight years previously. At that time the easiest form of access was by boat. The Hansens moved there with their then 14 year old daughter Heather, and a young man who came to assist Dan physically. They lived in a borrowed bus for two years before Dan had a road bulldozed onto the property. Initially another couple with four children had been interested in buying in with them, “but the vandalised and derelict condition of the one small old house existing was considered by them to be inadequate to their needs, so they withdrew” (Hansen, personal writings, 1994). Heather described a Spartan existence in their early years; the family were vegetarian, and lived “on a pretty meagre diet” (personal communication, 04 February, 2009); they had “virtually no money” (*ibid.*) and subsequently divided off two ten acre blocks to pay off their mortgage. Heather attended her studies via correspondence school. In the early years she and her parents began planting orchards and people “just turned up” (*ibid.*).

Dan Hansen

Several informants referred to Dan and Edith’s reluctance to call Wilderland a community, and talked about it being an ‘unintentional’ community. Christine, a resident during the 1990s, said that Edith had called it “a community with a small ‘c.’” (personal communication, 23 February, 2009). Edith did not have much involvement in community affairs. Piet, another former resident, believed that “a part of Dan’s past was community, and some part of him really understood that. Whereas Edith ... she didn’t like it” (personal communication, 20 January, 2009). The Hansen’s reluctance to acknowledge Wilderland as a community seems paradoxical given that during the 1970s it was considered to be “one of Australia and New Zealand’s most prominent ‘communes’” (Wilderland website, Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 33), and that it “influenced the development of many later communities” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 6). Although Dan and Edith owned the property from 1964 until 1992, when they gifted the land to the Wilderland Trust, they always maintained a philosophy of openness towards others living there.

This philosophy had been established earlier when they had lived at another community called Beeville, which Dan's brothers had founded near Morrinsville in the early 1930s (see Fyfe, 2004; Jones & Baker, 1975; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004). Sargisson and Sargent believe that: "Directly Beeville gave rise to Wilderland ... and indirectly Beeville and Wilderland gave rise to the whole New Zealand communal movement of the 1970s" (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 37). This influence is reflected in Tim Jones's observations in 1975:

For many people Wilderland has been a training ground where they learnt to garden, live simply, operate communally and develop their own philosophy of communal living. After this period of learning they have moved on to start projects of their own (Jones & Baker, 1975, p. 80).

Legacy of Beeville

Beeville was described by Sargisson and Sargent as "an anarchist commune that survived for forty years in almost constant conflict with the Government of New Zealand" (2004, p. 33). However, Toby Boraman doubts whether using the descriptor 'anarchist' is appropriate, arguing that Beeville did not have any connections to the anarchist scene in New Zealand of the 1960s and 1970s.

Boraman argues that:

Although Beeville did share similarities with some aspects of anarchism, such as its rejection of leaders, authority ... and private property ... Beeville's philosophy was far more influenced by the Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti. ... Unlike anarchists, Hansen preferred a "people's world government." He also supported Social Credit's version of capitalist economics and distrusted mass movements (2007, p. 2).

The Hansen brothers were conscientious objectors who actively opposed the military efforts of the New Zealand government during the Second World War; they wrote letters to newspapers, and government bodies, took part in public protests, and several of the Hansen brothers were incarcerated during the war in detention camps. Beeville "managed to survive and flourish for many years without a formal governmental structure" (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 34). Like Wilderland, "the Beeville community was originally based on a beekeeping business but as it expanded other activities developed, including a roadside stall that sold farm produce" (Fyfe, 2004, p. 5). Also like Wilderland, income was

pooled and expenses were met from a common purse (Metcalf, 2003, p. 706). The Hansen brothers were influenced by the philosophy of Krishnamurti.⁶⁵ The basis of Krishnamurti teachings involves the avocation of individual responsibility for action, and “individual discovery of truth” (Fyfe, 2004, p. 42). Its adherents believe “individuals can cooperatively produce a better society through voluntary involvement rather than through the imposition of authority” (Fyfe, 2004, p. 5). Dan carried this philosophy to Wilderland, and the community that developed there over time was not planned, deliberate, or structured, and always had an open door. In 1997 Dan wrote:

My part in bringing about the development which has come to be known as Wilderland has lain in an attempt to live in a manner which is not constrained by any limited concept or determined by any particular tradition, ideology, or goal (such as merely “making money,” furthering the belief of a religious concept, following a pattern for living laid down by some idealist or utopian philosopher, or anyone claiming “higher” authority). My underlying concern has been simply to live intelligently; to learn from whatever occurs, to be open to experimentation and exploration and in a way which is not bound by a conclusion. As I see it the social implication or significance of this relates to the consideration of what is the need of mankind and of the world at large. A particular concern of mine has been the needs of children and developing young adults (personal writings, May 1994).

The ‘general manager’ of Wilderland in 2009, Russel, recalled visiting Wilderland and asking Dan for advice years earlier when he was interested in starting a community elsewhere. He said:

The talks I had with Dan – his answers were surprising. He came from a just here and now kind of perspective. His answers weren’t about ideas, or structural concepts. He talked about examples of when he’d supported people on hare-brained schemes knowing they’d fail. He was really open to people learning just from doing and being. He [created] an

⁶⁵ When asked in 1974 by his biographer, Mary Lutyens, to define his teachings Krishnamurti wrote the following: The core of Krishnamurti's teaching is contained in the statement he made in 1929 when he said 'Truth is a pathless land'. Man cannot come to it through any organisation, through any creed, through any dogma, priest or ritual, not through any philosophical knowledge or psychological technique. He has to find it through the mirror of relationship, through the understanding of the contents of his own mind, through observation and not through intellectual analysis or introspective dissection. Man has built in himself images as a fence of security - religious, political, personal. These manifest as symbols, ideas, beliefs. The burden of these images dominates man's thinking, his relationships and his daily life. These images are the causes of our problems for they divide man from man (www.kfa.org).

experimental space where people could work through how they relate to each other and work together without having a blueprint (personal communication, 3 November, 2009).

Dan's own writings reflect his ambivalence towards the notion of alternative lifestyles. In a letter to *Waterwheel* (an alternative newsletter on the Coromandel) he wrote "Alternative this, alternative that. ... What alternative?" (January 1978, no. 8, p. 2), suggesting that "to believe one is the forerunner of a new Aquarian age ... is illusory" (*ibid.*).

In spite of his expressed philosophical beliefs emphasising individual responsibility for action, Dan still exerted his authority over what happened at Wilderland. An early example of this, from the 1970s, involved "a controversy over machines" (Sargisson and Sargent, 2004, p. 126) when a group of residents "wanted to limit the use of machinery to reduce dependence on the outside world. Dan, who was a genius with machines, opposed the change. Those favouring less machine use left Wilderland" (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 126). Dan Hansen generally exerted his authority indirectly. Piet, another former resident said:

Dan was really good at giving people enough rope to hang themselves. I've seen him operate many times at meetings like this. ... He would get his own way almost inevitably because he would just stymie things or slow them down until everyone got sick of them and just went along with them. But no-one really contested his authority. ... Sometimes he just unilaterally did what he wanted to do. Like the thing was no spray ... kikuyu had shown up in the gardens near the shop. And Dan had wanted to spray all the time and we were trying all these other things ... and he said oh well, we won't spray it; we'll just put it on with a watering can (personal communication, 20 January, 2009).

Archie⁶⁶ was a contemporary of Dan's, and also advocated an anarchist philosophy of living. He lived at Wilderland for 12 years from 1986 until 1998 and was the community beekeeper. When he first arrived "there would have been 20 permanents ... there was a good feeling there, because [in the meetings] everyone had a say ... it was really democratic" (personal communication, 23 February, 2009). Archie had intended to make Wilderland a permanent home. He said "my

⁶⁶ Archie founded another community near Kaikoura in the South Island during the 1970s, called Puketa (which also features in Jones & Baker's 1974 book *A Hard-Won Freedom*). Like Dan, he owned the land but allowed it to become an open-door commune.

Will was made out to Wilderland, all my assets – the whole shebang. You couldn't commit yourself any more than that, could you?" (*ibid.*). However, over time he became increasingly cynical about what he perceived to be Dan's continued control over the property after he transferred the ownership of the land to the Wilderland Trust. For Archie, "the place seemed to get bugged up when they formed the trust" (*ibid.*). He believed that Dan was authoritarian, but "it was a hidden authority" (*ibid.*) and "what he was advocating for other people he wasn't advocating for himself" (*ibid.*) because he retained lifelong membership of the trust, with the power to evict others from both the trust and the land.

Tim Jones described Dan and Edith as having "an amazing capacity for letting people come and do their own thing" (Jones & Baker, 1975, p. 85) at Wilderland and believed that they were "pioneers really, of a new type, firstly because they disturbed the ecology as little as possible, and secondly because they were not enclosed in the idea of family territory" (*ibid.*). Jones referred to Wilderland in 1974 as being "open to all who walked in" (1975, p. 75) and that "Dan and Edith [did] not have a policy in regard to Wilderland because that would imply a set of conclusions, which to them is synonymous with mental stagnation" (1975, p.73).

Werner Droescher, "a committed anarchist" (www.thrall.orconhosting.net.nz/spain1.html), lived at Wilderland from 1975 till 1978, where he wrote *Towards an Alternative Society* (Droescher, 1962 - 1978). He considered Wilderland to be similar to communes established in France and Spain in the 1930s, "but thought the major difference was the influence of Eastern religions, which he called the "Eastern Bug" (cited in Boraman, 2007, p. 84). Droescher observed "Commune dwellers easily become elitist and retreat from the world, thus neutralising their effect on the world at large. Wilderland is no exception. ... Intoning mechanically 'Hare Krishna', freeing one's consciousness by hallucinogenic drugs ... often leads to a cosy navel-contemplation" (Droescher, 1978, p 171 – 2, quoted in Boraman 2007, p. 84). Droescher's views align with Dan's. In a paper titled 'Communal Spirit?' he writes:

Continuously comparing their own vision of communal life with what they find will produce disillusionment, frustration, and eventually harping criticism. The cause of disillusionment lies in their selves, not necessarily the spirit of the community. A communal spirit exists by

doing things together ... by living, being, adapting to others ... not by intellectual analysis and criticism based on a particular set of values. To be able to live with others it is necessary to ‘first empty your cup’ (Droescher, 1978).⁶⁷

Emphasis on manual labour

While Dan’s philosophy of being ‘open to experimentation and exploration’ along with an interest in providing an educational environment for young people⁶⁸ attracted people to Wilderland, possibly a very pragmatic reason that he allowed it to evolve into a community, was because Dan was paraplegic and Wilderland is steep country. This seems obvious when considering his preoccupation with producing food on a large scale, which was not something he could have achieved on his own. He needed a work crew, and relied on a transient population to provide free labour. As one former resident commented, “Dan liked hard-working people” (Christine, personal communication, 23 February, 2009). Thomas, an Austrian, who lived at Wilderland with his partner and their two children for three different periods between 1986 and 2009 said:

Dan and Edith were interested in growing organic food. ... I don’t think their main ambition was to have a community. I think it was more like they could probably see the need [for] some people to live there because ... they couldn’t do it on their own. But it wasn’t like they wished for having people there. ... I never experienced Dan and Edith like that, like they were hanging out for some company. That’s not how they were. ... They [wanted] to grow organic food and sell it to the public. End of story (personal communication, 22 January, 2009).

The uneasy interface between Dan’s belief in Krishnamurti’s philosophy and his pragmatic nature which focused around his drive to produce food on a large scale would seem to have created contradictions and ambiguities that contributed to the problems that constantly assailed the community. Thomas observed that Dan’s emphasis in living “didn’t really include a spiritual approach or musical approach or artistic approach. ... All the people who came to Wilderland more or less had to

⁶⁷ Unpaginated in source.

⁶⁸ In his early diaries (1964), Dan expressed a desire to build an alternative school on the Wilderland property. He continued to refer to this from time to time. For example, in relation to some children who were being home schooled at Wilderland in 1995 he wrote “I’m sure the children are learning a lot ... It made me feel that what we came here to do may yet blossom in greater profusion” (12 April).

live Dan's dream"⁶⁹ (personal communication, 22 January, 2009). Thomas's observations align with those Tim Jones made about Beeville more than 30 years previously. He lived at Beeville from 1964 until 1967:

There was always a strong pressure on everyone to work hard, and that meant physical work. Artistic, intellectual and organisational work did not really count. People with these abilities were made to feel uncomfortable and could never really feel at home there, so they would tend to leave after a short while. Thus the community produced abundantly, but it was a very one sided form of production (Jones & Baker, 1975, p. 28).

Dan's work ethic

Dan Hansen's diaries document a seven day a week, long working day approach to life.⁷⁰ His daily entries, though brief, span more than forty years. They reveal a tireless life of rising at 4.30 am and often working late into the night. They record in meticulous details his involvement in the propagation, growing and selling of produce, focusing on varieties, quantities, what they sold for, and daily takings from the Wilderland shop. The diaries also document the seemingly endless repairs and modifications of the various old tractors and farm machinery that he restored and converted, both to accommodate his disability, and to run on alternative sources of energy such as coal. In the early years, before Wilderland produced enough fruit and vegetables to keep its shop fully stocked, Dan travelled throughout the Waikato to buy produce from other growers to sell on. His diary entries almost exclusively focus on the horticultural and practical activities of each day, and give little indication of his thoughts and feelings about the community or its politics. Small glimpses of the difficulties associated with sustaining the emphasis on food production, minimal structure, and the challenges of upholding the 'no drug' rule are evident in some of Dan's diary entries, however:

Annie and Michel have been making a great effort to get the honey in. Michel has been going out to the apiaries, despite being on crutches on account of his injured knee. Fortunately we have had some very willing WOOFers to help – 2 going out with Annie and Michel each time. It has been a critical situation – an “only just” again. 3 Danish WOOFers left

⁶⁹ Thomas refers to Dan's emphasis on food production as his 'dream.' I suggest in this context, his choice of words reflects the language that is used in the alternative scene. In an earlier period, someone might well have referred to 'Dan's trip.'

⁷⁰ The unpublished diaries of Dan Hansen are held by Heather Hansen.

today as they found the work and the “No Smoking” rule too much for them (Diary entry, 1 Jan 1995).

While Dan’s diary entries offer few insights into his inner feelings and thoughts, his memoirs, which he began to write at the age of 87, expose his indomitable spirit. Unfortunately he never got as far as the Wilderland years as he died the same year he began to write them, but insight into his stoic and pragmatic approach to adversity is evident in his explanation of the aftermath of the accident that caused his paralysis when he was 21:

Once home [from hospital], I set about finding things I could do, for I realised that hanging around feeling sorry for myself, would gain no worthwhile end (So, I have never suffered anything more than a few passing moments of depression). I had seen people in wheelchairs in the street but never believed that anything of that sort would happen to me, so big – 6ft 1” in height and 14 stone (196 pounds) and grown strong. But here I was, and there was no alternative but to make the best of it (Hanson, unpublished memoirs, 2006).⁷¹

Wilderland’s development

By 1974, ten years after the Hansens bought the property, there were 30 to 40 people living at Wilderland in “fifteen self-contained dwellings, ranging from the original homestead to a cave-house” (Jones & Baker, 1975, p.73). In 2009 there were 13 small huts and sleepouts dotted around the property, as well as garages, sheds and storerooms, a honey shed and the community hall. With the exception of Dan and Edith’s house, none of the buildings had been granted building permits. Dan and Edith’s house sits on .8 hectares (two acres) of land on a ridge overlooking the community and the Whitianga Harbour, on one of the few flat areas on the property.⁷² Most of the dwellings are modest and inexpensive constructions, made from recycled demolition materials that were “either scavenged from the very productive local refuse tip at Whitianga, or from material already at Wilderland” (Piet, personal communication, 26 February, 2009). Builders “put a little bit of private money in, but very sporadically, and as little as

⁷¹ Dan Hansen’s (hand written) memoirs are also held by Heather Hansen. A typed transcript of these are held by me.

⁷² This piece of land was subdivided from the main property in 2000, and legally transferred into Edith’s name. This created further dissent amongst the people living at Wilderland, who felt that even though the land had been gifted to the trust, the Hansens still appeared to own it.

possible” (Thomas, personal communication, 22 January, 2009). In the early years, people asked Dan’s permission to build shelter. Later it was with the approval of a community meeting. Piet, who lived at Wilderland from 1987 until 1999, built two dwellings during that time. He explained the relatively informal process he went through to get permission to build:

I voiced the idea [at a meeting] and they said okay, how are you going to do it, what are you going to use? ... Generally you didn’t exactly do what you wanted, but in terms of whether it affected anyone else in the community at large, you could just go for it (personal communication, 26 February, 2009).

The community hall was built in 1975, and consists of one large rectangular room that serves as a kitchen, dining and living area and a smaller room that holds a small library and storeroom. In 2010 the hall continues to serve as the community centre, where visitors congregate and everyone eats together daily. It also houses the only community telephone.

Wilderland shop

The Wilderland shop has consistently provided the main source of income for the community, and for most of Wilderland’s history, has been open seven days a week. It is built on Department of Conservation land between Wilderland and the main road, 14 km south of Whitianga. Community members took turns manning the shop each day. In 1975, Jones wrote that produce, including fruit, vegetables and honey, provided ninety percent of the community’s cash income and paid for groceries, fuel, and “anything else needed to keep the place going” (1975, p.75). Any surplus went into a kitty which people were able to “draw on for their own cash needs” (*ibid.*). Until 2010, income from the Wilderland shop provided enough money to support the residents with their immediate needs all year round. At times it has paid a small allowance to the community residents. Between 1995 and 1999 entries in Dan’s diaries during the peak of the produce season consistently recorded between \$1200 and \$1500 in daily takings from the shop. A typical entry describes New Year’s Day in 1998: “In shop. Very quiet until midday but very busy in afternoon – took nearly \$1000 after 12 pm” (1 January, 1998). Community members also sold produce further afield. Two days after the previous entry Dan

wrote “Bryce and WOOFers had a great day at Tairua market ... took \$727, making a total of \$2142 for the day. First time we have exceeded \$2000 in a day” (3 January, 1998). Piet recalled that during the years he lived at Wilderland, “we generally made, from memory, between \$60,000 and \$80,000 a year” (personal communication, 20 January, 2009), although he did not recall anyone receiving any regular allowance in the time he lived there.

Transient population

Wilderland’s history has been characterised by a high turnover of people. According to Tim Jones, in the nine year period to 1974, “several thousand people ha[d] stayed at Wilderland for some period of time” (Jones & Baker, 1975, p. 75). If this is correct, then 25 years later, Dan’s estimate of 4,000 people having visited or lived at Wilderland (Torley, 1999, Sargisson & Sargent, 2004) would seem a little conservative.⁷³ In a community paper entitled “Friends of Wilderland” (11.3.73), signed by Dan and Edith Hansen, it states “The number here varies greatly. Sometimes there are just a few of us, at other times there have been 40 or more.” When Archie Hislop (who lived there for 12 years) first arrived in 1986 “there would have been about 20 permanents ... some of them had been there for years” (personal communication, 23 February, 2009). Archie explained that “Wilderland went through periods where they had clean-outs every so often.” By the end of the 1990s, after a protracted legal dispute between a group of five residents and the Wilderland Trust, the resident population had dwindled considerably and it has not recovered to its former levels since. The small number of permanent residents that Sargisson noted when she visited in 2001, has continued to be the case throughout the 2000s. In 2009 and 2010, the core group numbered between three and five, with a fluctuating visiting population, comprised mostly of WOOFers, of up to ten at any one time. In 2009, the visiting population far outnumbered the resident group. Thomas estimated that on average, they had “probably up to a hundred people visiting each year” (personal

⁷³ Sargisson and Sargent wrote “according to Dan, some 4,000 people had passed through the community by 2001” (2004, p 125). Perhaps Dan had this figure in his head from 1999, when he told Jim Hickey when he was interviewed for the *Country Calendar* documentary.

communication, 22 January, 2009). The majority of them were young foreign travellers, registered with the WOOF scheme.

Wilderland's encouragement of visitors, particularly WOOFers, has been a mutually beneficial arrangement, as the community depends on a constant flow of workers to provide a labour pool for its extensive orcharding, beekeeping and horticultural enterprises, and in return gives people experience and skills in these areas while supporting them without any money changing hands. This fulfils the charitable requirements of the Wilderland Trust. In 2010 the Wilderland website continued to extend an open invitation to people to visit and stay:

Come to Wilderland as a Visitor for a day, a few weeks, or up to three months. Visitors come to stay on the Wilderland property to learn and share in the organic farming and other land based activities. If you visit Wilderland then you become a beneficiary of our main charitable purpose. You will be experiencing a model of moving toward sustainable living. And through this experience you will learn new skills and knowledge, and gain an appreciation for what is possible, and what we can do to improve our lives, society, and culture. Our goals are far beyond our current state, so you will be experiencing a great work in progress (Wilderland.org.nz).

Hippie Tim (a New Zealander) is typical of many who have stayed at Wilderland. He first "turned up" as an 18 year old in 2000 when he was "travelling around New Zealand for the first time" (personal communication, 22 January, 2009). He said "I was only going to stay a while but I ended up staying here for two and a half to three years, and got involved in the place" (*ibid.*). He left because there "just weren't enough people staying all the time. Like WOOFers come and go, but it's good to have a really stable group of friends" (*ibid.*). The impact of a transient and uncommitted population on the responsible resident population has been a perennial theme throughout Wilderland's lifetime. The high turnover of people has produced a culture of impermanence, and contributed to a lack of responsibility on the part of many casual residents.

Foreign Nationals

Wilderland has been home to a large number of foreign nationals over the years. Thomas estimated the percentage of New Zealand and non-New Zealand visitors

and residents at Wilderland averaged about half and half in the time he had been acquainted with the community. It has remained internationally well known, partly through word of mouth – travellers tell other travellers about it - as was the case at Renaissance in its early years - and it is also registered with the WOOFing association, and the Intentional Communities website (www.ic.org). Christine considered Wilderland to be “the gateway to New Zealand” (personal communication, 23 February, 2009) for many foreign nationals looking for a cheap place to stay in New Zealand while they waited for applications for permanent residency to be processed. She pointed out that it has also been included in *The Lonely Planet Guide*. Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich explains some of the challenges for travellers arriving in New Zealand from Germany in the 1980s: “If the job you had learned was not on the Occupational Priority List ... there were a lot of obstacles to be overcome for immigration” (2004, p. 124). She quotes a German immigrant who came to New Zealand in 1982, who said “If you had ... brought no money with you from Germany, it was incredibly difficult to get settled in New Zealand” (*ibid.*). When asked what he did to overcome this, the respondent said “I sneaked out into the country and played hippie. ... New Zealand is fantastic, you can live any way you like” (*ibid.*). Open communities like Wilderland gave foreign nationals the space to orientate and acclimatise to New Zealand culture, to find work and contacts, or start a business while living virtually for free. Living in such places potentially made it “possible to obtain an immigration permit if you already had a fixed workplace and your employer could convince the immigration authorities that this person was needed rather than any other for this position” (*ibid.*).

Work and Responsibility

During periods when there was a reasonably large and stable resident population, work remained manageable, with areas of responsibility distributed among many people. A Monday morning work meeting was routine for many years. Heather explained that “usually somebody was in charge of organising people, especially new people. Once you’d been there for a period of time you were expected to take over some job” (personal communication, 4 February, 2009). However, when the numbers dropped, the burden fell heavily on a few. Thomas:

It's a huge challenge to live like this, to live with people who are lazy and not pulling their weight and that are airy fairy. ... Because of what Wilderland has been ... - growing all that food - we've got all that work that needs doing, and that is a lot. And you've got a lot of people living here who don't really willingly participate enough and that creates a lot of tension between the people who are actually happy to work and the people who'd much rather sit in the sun and find that just as important. ... When we first came to Wilderland there was a much bigger population ... so there was enough people sitting in the sun and playing music and enough people working. ... but as the years went by there [were less] people living at Wilderland, the work got more and more because the place started having higher living standards so we had to make more money. The living costs in general started getting higher (personal communication, 22 January, 2009).

Repetition of themes

Thomas spoke about another couple who had reached the same exhausted and overwhelmed state that he was experiencing when I visited prior to his departure.

Thomas and his family came back to live at Wilderland for a third time in 2000. At that time the other couple were,

... basically running the place in the sense that they were organising lots of things and growing all the food and organising the WOOFers and all that. ... And when we came, it made it possible for them to go because they were really somehow waiting for someone to replace them ... so I just picked up the burden. Willingly, because it was a challenge - I've never grown that much food. And I really loved it! The first two years I was just working day and night. ... I didn't really care that I was working three times as hard as everyone else ... it was a real *rush*, you know, seeing all that stuff being sold in the shop and counting the money. It was just cool! [Laughs] ... But then after a couple of years ... I started to realise that I became very judgemental of people if they wouldn't work properly and if they were lazy and I tried to force them to work more because I couldn't do it on my own ... I became quite isolated. ... Under the conditions we have here ... it's not an easy place to grow lots of food, ... especially with the WOOFers. You can't just show up here at 9 o'clock in the morning and then take two hours to organise everyone. ... so you have to come up here at 7 and have a plan - what you're going to do with 20 people who turn up at 9 o'clock to be told what to do. And none of those people who were living here were motivated enough ... to actually go for it. They left it all up to me and afterwards they blamed me for telling them what to do (*ibid.*).

Thomas's experience not only illustrates the cycle of responsibility and burn-out that has been a theme at Wilderland, but also the "only just" situation that Dan

referred to in his diary entry referring to the bees and harvesting honey. The community appears to have been unable to reach a point where a permanent stable population became established enough to overcome this insecure situation.

Part Two: Key changes

Introduction of no drugs rule.

The most significant change to occur at Wilderland happened in 1984, when Dan and Edith exercised their direct authority for the first time and announced a complete ban on all drugs on the property, including tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs. This had a profound effect, resulting in a mass emptying out of Wilderland virtually overnight, and a change in emphasis as well as in the sorts of people who were attracted to the community. Thomas said that “everyone left and it was only Dan and Edith and [two others] for two or three years” (personal communication, 22 January, 2009). Prior to this, Wilderland’s popularity due to its high profile during the 1970s contributed to it being described as a popular crash pad for many on the “hippie trail,” (<http://www.wilderland.org.nz>, accessed 10 February 2009), including people involved in the cultivation and sale of marijuana during the 1970s and early 1980s. Dan and Edith did not drink, smoke, or eat meat, and did not approve of this behaviour in others, but their principles of individual responsibility for action meant that, while “there were always a few regulations, like no drugs, no alcohol, no tobacco ... it was always spoken by [Dan] and never enforced” (Heather, personal communication, 4 February, 2009). Heather recalled that “we would find huge patches of dope and we would pull them out and put them in the incinerator down where the workshop is now, and burn them [and if the person was found] they would be asked to leave” (*ibid.*). However, the practice of commercial marijuana growing escalated, culminating in a crisis that became a catalyst for Dan to exercise his authority as landowner and declare an outright ban on all drugs at Wilderland. According to Heather:

There were Coroglen dope growers coming in here to rat out Wilderland people. They came here with guns and knives. We had to call in the [police] squad from Hamilton. ... After that it was actively stated there

would be absolutely no drugs (personal communication, 4 February, 2009).

Piet first visited Wilderland during the 1970s, when marijuana growing and use was commonplace. He returned three years after the ban was imposed with his partner and child and decided to stay. He recalled:

We were passing through, essentially, but it felt really good. We were meditating, and practicing yoga ... getting clean and pure. ... Most of the people had left ... everything was falling down, it was overgrown. ... I could just see the potential! It felt really good ... like something was about to happen (personal communication, 20 January, 2009).

The outright ban on all drugs has remained in place since that time, although in 2010 it appears to have been relaxed somewhat. While it remains a requirement that people may not “use or possess “illegal” drugs” (Resident Policy Agreement, 12 July, 2009), tobacco is “allowed in private outside spaces” (*ibid.*). A further clause states that people may not be intoxicated by alcohol, though does not stipulated that they may not consume it.

Transference of land ownership to the Wilderland Trust

During the early 1980s, Dan and Edith registered Wilderland as a cooperative. Heather believes that her parents decided to establish the Wilderland Trust because “they were having trouble with the cooperative society when it came to tax. ... So the tax office in Paeroa said you would probably be eligible for a charitable trust, so they decided to have a charitable trust” (personal communication, 4 February, 2009). While the possibility of avoiding the personal responsibility for having to pay tax on Wilderland’s income may well have been a motivating factor for Dan and Edith to form the trust, former residents of Wilderland expressed a different motivation for wanting to see the Wilderland Trust become the legal owner of the property. They referred to pressure being put on Dan and Edith from people living at Wilderland to relinquish their exclusive ownership of the land in order to give people who wanted to commit themselves to living long-term at Wilderland a sense of security. A lack of security was identified as being the underlying reason for the high turnover of residents, and also the reason why over it’s more than

forty year history, no-one has made it a permanent home, or built substantial dwellings.

The root of residents' insecurity was identified as stemming from Dan's continued position of authority and ownership of the land despite the establishment of the Wilderland Trust. Dan himself stated that people who chose to live at Wilderland had to "be prepared to abandon that demand for security in order to join and get on with it, because if you're looking for personal security it's a divisive factor between you and other people looking for personal security" (Cvitanovich, 1999). However, some residents felt there was hypocrisy underlying Dan's philosophy.

Thomas:

A lot of people came to Wilderland and lived there for awhile and they all ended up saying that we can't really make it our home because we don't own the land. ... Dan owned the land. Nobody else did. And that was the thing that was out of balance. Especially when he kept on saying there is no such thing as security in life. Yet he was the only one who had that security. And he [could say] "oh you guys can fuck off now, we don't want you anymore". Not that he *would* have done that. ... Dan and Edith said a number of times they would love to have some families living here more permanently. But on the other hand the way ... the system was ... it didn't really make it easy for people to actually live permanently here because of the lack of security. ... You could put your money in but you couldn't get it out anymore. ... You could build a house here but you couldn't really call it *your* house. ... A lot of people were saying ... "I haven't really got any security here to really put my roots down" (personal communication, 22 January, 2009).

Piet:

I've come to see some of the problem was the fact people didn't feel secure there. It was at that stage Dan and Edith's farm. You know, they could say bugger off at any time (personal communication, 20 January, 2009).

Archie believed that the community "would have still been going a vibrant way if that ... security feeling [had been there], that you couldn't be kicked out" (personal communication, 23 February, 2009).

A positive aspect of this sense of insecurity and subsequent high turnover of people was the constant flow of new people that not only supplied a workforce, but also brought a freshness and vitality to Wilderland, and fulfilled the stated

objectives (stated below) of providing an environment for people to learn skills of organic horticulture and living collectively. Thomas:

On one hand it ... the place didn't really offer any stability. But because of that ... people kept on leaving and new people kept on coming. Because of all the people leaving there was room for new people to come and make an amazing experience (personal communication, 22 January, 2009).

When Thomas first arrived in 1986, Wilderland was still a cooperative, although "they already had some kind of paperwork" (*ibid.*) for the formation of the trust. The Wilderland Trust was finally registered on the 18th November 1989. However, ownership of the land was not transferred to it until 1992. The original trust document states that "the Trustees [Dan and Edith] are at the date of this Deed owners of the property, but would wish to transfer the said land to such a trust were it formed" (Wilderland, 1989). Thomas believed that "because the land was still in Dan and Edith's hands it was all a bit of a farce in some form ... the cooperative didn't have any real rights because they didn't own the land" (personal communication, 22 January, 2009). Pressure was put on Dan and Edith to sign over ownership of the property. Piet:

I'd heard that Dan and Edith were going to put the land into the trust and I mentioned this from time to time and "oh yes, we're looking into it." There always seemed to be some problem - and this went on literally for years. ... Eventually the land got passed into the Wilderland Trust but essentially it didn't make any difference. ... The way the trust was structured it was still Dan and Edith in charge. It was an oligarchy. They nominated other trustees and it had to be total consensus amongst trustees to elect someone new. So it was really a closed shop (personal communication, 20 January, 2009).

Dan's reluctance to transfer title of the land to the Trust is evident in a letter he wrote in 1991 to one of the residents:

It is now being virtually demanded that we transfer the title of the land to the present BOT [Board of Trustees]. We see this situation as being incongruous, unethical and unacceptable. We hold that the essential elements of intention ... common confidence, mutual respect, a general feeling of friendship and harmony do not exist in a necessary way in the present BOT (personal communication, 3 October, 1991).

Dan eventually conceded however, and title of the land was transferred from the Hansens to the Wilderland Trust in 1992. However, Essentially, Dan and Edith

retained authority by retaining control over who was appointed to the trust board. A clause in the Trust Deed states that Dan and Edith would remain trustees for life, that the trust required a 90% resolution to appoint new trustees, and the appointment of other trustees was to be for a finite term of three years, eligible for reappointment. Appointment was determined by the existing trustees. This paradoxically, added to, rather than eased, the sense of insecurity felt by residents of Wilderland, and increased the degree of ambiguity in relation to who had power to make decisions about Wilderland's affairs. Piet:

The other fly in the ointment was that trustees were put in power by other trustees. That was the Achilles heel of the whole thing. ... The way the trust was structured it was still Dan and Edith in charge. ... They nominated other trustees. And then it got to the point where the trust started to exert its authority. Just like *Animal Farm*. They started putting out edicts about what people should do and shouldn't do. They put out this proclamation essentially that if you didn't obey the orders of the trust you shall have to leave the property. ... Everyone was up in arms! Well, everybody except the trustees (personal communication, 20 January, 2009).

Dan justified his position by saying "it was essential that the trustees all share a common philosophy or intention, and that no-one was appointed merely because they were considered to have a right" (personal communication, 3 October, 1991).

This view was not shared by some residents:

Archie:

Fancy that, this democratic man putting himself in a privileged position! He was retaining his dictatorship really, what he was advocating for other people he wasn't advocating for himself (personal communication, 23 February, 2009).

Heather:

Although there was a trust board, a lot of the residents thought that it should still be open – like it had always been – that everyone still should have their say. I think they thought the trust board was only for ... a piece of paper that was needed. ... They thought [the community's affairs] should be run on a consensus basis (personal communication, 4 February, 2009).

The inability to find agreement and the subsequent ill-feeling that was engendered by this situation must have produced a sense of déjà vue in Dan and Edith. The unfolding of events at Wilderland eerily echoes aspects of their previous

experience at Beeville. Initially the Hansen brothers⁷⁴ owned the Beeville property but after 20 years, transferred ownership into a trust:

In 1958 Beeville became legally incorporated under the Charitable Trusts Act, meaning that all assets were held collectively. The step was taken as members were concerned that the reason most newcomers did not stay long was because the property was owned by the Hansens, which may have caused newcomers to feel like outsiders rather than part of the 'family' (Fyfe, 2004, p.38).

Heather recalled events at Beeville before the family left:

There was a faction of people that came in and wanted to change the place. They wanted to control the place. They ... turned it into a trust - a bit like Wilderland, not long before we left, for much the same reasons – tax reasons. ... [But] they wanted to do things their way, not the Hansen way (personal communication, 4 February, 2009).

The Hansen brothers and their families eventually all left Beeville because of a breakdown in relations between them and other residents of Beeville. Sargisson and Sargent wrote that at Beeville “the assumption is that decisions were consensual, but the frequency of factional in-fighting makes it clear this did not always work” (2004, p. 36). Tim Jones admitted his experience of Beeville was limited to its “final self-destructive phase” (Jones & Baker, 1975, p. 22), when in-fighting between opposing factions eventually resulted in mass departures.

However, reflecting on his experience of Beeville after travelling around New Zealand visiting communities in the early 1970s, he concluded that:

The most important difference between the new communes and Beeville is their ability to discuss differences immediately and openly. They experience the same difficulties as [Beeville] did ... but resentments are not buried where they might fester for months or years. ... I never saw anyone walk out of the room when a touchy subject was raised, as I did at Beeville. This means that there is not the same danger of people forming factions or of the community polarising into two opposing groups (1975, p. 30).

Given their previous experience, it seems surprising that Dan and Edith would consider relinquishing ownership of their land a second time. According to Heather, Edith was completely opposed to transferring title to the land to the

⁷⁴ According to Heather, Dan and his brother Ray owned the Beeville property. Fyfe states that it was founded by Ray and Allan (another of the six Hansen brothers). Nevertheless, “throughout its history the community was dominated by members of the Hansen family” (Fyfe, 2004, p.5).

Wilderland Trust, particularly in light of what had happened at Beeville, and only capitulated after a long period of conflict because Dan was determined to do it (personal communication, 15 October, 2010) and she did not want to curb his idealism. Thomas believed that Dan had “caught himself in a little tight corner there, in a way” (personal communication, 22 January, 2009) through retaining ownership of the land while “preaching about non-security” (*ibid.*). However, the eventual transference of ownership did not appease the residents who felt their status at Wilderland remained insecure, because of the Hansen’s retention of authority as life-long trustees, and thus, control of the trust.

Challenge to the Wilderland Trust

A lengthy dispute and subsequent departure of a group of five people who donated money to the trust dominated much of the decade of the 1990s, and tested the power of trust and its ability to retain control of Wilderland, at great cost to all concerned. It resulted in the eventual eviction of those five residents who were committed and skilled people. The circumstances that lead to this dispute involved the donation of \$75,000 by individuals towards the purchase of a block of land adjacent to the Wilderland property. It provided access to the harbour, was relatively flat, had mature avocado trees on it and riparian rights attached to it. The donation of lump sums of money to the trust by individuals had not happened before. Initially it was a positive experience for the community. Thomas:

Suddenly this piece of land – which is our best piece of land basically – came up for sale again and Wilderland wanted to buy it. There was quite a bit of money in the bank but not enough to buy it. So some people ... donated money from their own personal money, amounts like \$10,000, \$20,000. ... The trust accepted their money; with the reservation of course that said well don’t expect anything for it. Those people gave their money willingly without expecting anything for it [laughs wryly]. ... When the land was added to Wilderland it was really cool. Everybody loved it. It was a great feeling on the place. For a short amount of time there was ... an enhancement of feeling ... a bigger sense of community, because people had freely given something and a wonderful piece was added to Wilderland (personal communication, 22 January, 2009).

The dispute arose after one couple, who had lived at Wilderland for “a couple of years” (*ibid.*) wanted to build a house on the newly purchased block. In contrast to the modest scale of the other dwellings at Wilderland, the proposed building was

going to be substantial, and the builders sought building approval from the local council. Thomas described the couple as being “pretty power hungry in a way [and having] difficulties with some of the residents already” (*ibid.*), while being hard working and in good favour with Dan and Edith. One of them was also a trustee. While they got approval from the trust to fell trees and go ahead with the project, according to Thomas:

There were quite a few people that weren't very keen on them building such a big house, especially the location where they were going to put it. It was a prime location ... a good garden site. ... Anyway, it wasn't so much the location; it was really a personal thing between people. ... The people who gave money to the trust didn't want the couple to build the house anymore. And one of that couple was a trust member. So suddenly it ended up being like there was the trust who supported that couple ... and other people ... who had given all their money to the trust (*ibid.*).

Piet:

It came to a head when one of the trustees ... and her ... partner wanted to build a house right down on the new piece of land we'd bought. ... I was absolutely aghast at this ... there's not much flat land in Wilderland [and] here was a prime piece of alluvial land and they wanted to build a house on it. ... And I'd sourced a lot of building materials for Wilderland, and they wanted to use all these materials on this house (Piet, personal communication, 20 January, 2009).

The dispute culminated in the trustees asking the group who objected, to leave Wilderland. They in turn demanded a refund of the money they had donated. The trustees refused, and a legal battle ensued which was eventually settled by the courts, with the Wilderland Trust being required to return the donations to the group. However, the seven year period that this dispute took to be resolved divided the community, and generated an extended period of ill-feeling as the five remained resident at Wilderland until the dispute was resolved. Their eventual departure left a gap in the skill base, a reduced core population and deeply affected the morale of the group that remained:

It ended up being a tug of war for seven years between the trust and those people. [They] didn't want to leave. This was their home. Some of them had ... lived here for ten years and had given all their money. ..Finally... the court decided that they had to be paid out. ... They were reimbursed, with interest on the money, and then those people had to leave. ... There were a few people who came and stayed [during this period], but not a lot, because of the conflict. But afterwards, when the conflict was resolved there was a very small population again living in Wilderland.

There were only [two] couples [one of whom was] running the bees. ... After maybe three years ... the whole terrible experience started healing a little bit and that's when we came back. ... But then the beekeeping couple left which was very unfortunate because the bees were the backbone of the financial income of the shop. ... The other couple were still here, and we stayed together for two years and then they [left] (Thomas, personal communication, 22 January, 2009).

The proposed house was never built. The dispute motivated the trust to create a Memorandum to the Wilderland Trust Deed. This was registered on the 16th of October 1995 and contains 21 provisions, including a set of conditions that all newcomers to Wilderland are required to accept. It states that “the trust operates an organic horticultural farm” (Provision 2) and people who come to Wilderland do so “with the intention to assist the trust with this work” (Clause 3). Provision 5 states that “the trust board is the only body able to make valid decisions concerning [the] presence on, or eviction from, the Wilderland property” of people living there. Provision 7 defines the categories of “persons present at the Wilderland property”:

- (a) Visitors: new arrivals or people who return for short stays;
- (b) Students: people who have come to study particular subjects and skills;
- (c) Long term participants: people taking on responsibility for certain aspects of the work;
- (d) Trustees: people willing to assist with the administrative work of the trust board, and having been seen as suitable to be appointed by the existing trust board.

The Memorandum also states that people living at Wilderland for more than one month may not “claim any social welfare benefits” (Provision 16). It is interesting to note that the word ‘resident’ or ‘member’ is not used to define any people living at Wilderland. Despite the concern expressed by former residents about a lack of security, or tenure, the most permanent people there are described as ‘long term participants’. This remains in keeping with the emphasis of the trust, which emphasises the place as an educational facility.

Part Three: Discussion

Recent events

When I visited Wilderland in November 2009, Thomas and Sigi had left and none of the five residents had lived at Wilderland for more than a year. Three were foreign nationals who were seeking permanent residency status in New Zealand. At that time Heather Hansen and her family were formally challenging the legality of the trust, and were attempting to appoint themselves as trustees.

I talked over lunch with the new resident group about their commitment to forge a new direction for Wilderland. The role of chief organiser, previously held by Thomas, had been assumed by Russel, who explained his role as one of “general manager, looking at the trust stuff and looking at overall direction... the architect of the management system ... with the approval of everyone” (personal communication, 3 November, 2009). Russel believed Wilderland was at an important point of transition in its life and he was optimistic about its future. He explained that the new resident group were working towards developing a policy to introduce some fundamental changes to the way Wilderland operates in order to foster a stable new community. Their goal was to draw on some of the positive aspects of how Wilderland has been in the past, and introduce some new systems. A year later, at the end of 2010, progress had been made. The dispute with the Hansen family had been resolved, and there was a core group of four committed residents, and a number of other trial residents. There were five new trustees, including Russel and the Israeli couple Avner and Shaki (who had been granted permanent residency a week before my visit), a lawyer and a local kaumātua⁷⁵ (neither of whom live at Wilderland). A Resident Policy Agreement had been written that outlines roles, responsibilities and obligations to participate for all residents. There is also a ‘Notice of Terms for Wilderland Visitors’ which all newcomers are obliged to agree to and sign when they arrive. Russel, the main author of these documents, explained:

I saw that like with a lot of these things that have come out of the sixties and seventies, there’s been a real experimental, let’s not be organised,

⁷⁵ Kaumātua: Maori elder or spiritual leader.

let's see what happens naturally, sort of approach. I've come into it with the attitude of there's something in that, but there's also something in being organised as well. And you can marry the good parts of both. ... And I've been setting up a bit of a management system ... quite simple stuff, about how you make decisions together as a group without anyone being a dictator, but still having leadership. But the leadership is approved by all the members. ... We want a number of keen adults, as a preliminary goal. ... The people to be part of the team are a slightly rare character. ... [They] need to be ready to let go of whatever they've got on in their life right now. They've got to be ready [for] voluntary poverty. And they've got to believe in the vision. And believe in the public benefit. They have got to be able to get along and communicate with people at least (personal communication, 3 November, 2009).

Avner, who described his role as that of 'farm manager', also expressed a commitment to making Wilderland strong again. He said:

The old Wilderland died because there's no-one here to tell us what it was. ... It died with Thomas and Sigi leaving because they'd been carrying the old Wilderland still, with the old habits ... and they left. ... So in one respect Wilderland has died and this is a new birth, but on the other hand we are going back to Dan's vision. We are saying ... look at this beautiful piece of land that was donated by a guy for a reason, and let's fulfil this reason ... because it touches us in a very deep place. So we might be translating Dan's vision ... We are going backwards to Dan (personal communication, 3 November, 2009).

By the end of 2010 the resident group had set a target to raise \$200,000 to upgrade the dwellings to comply with the Thames Coromandel District Council (TCDC) building codes. In October 2010 they had discussions with the TCDC about the demolition order which was still in place. Through the Wilderland website and via email letters, they had raised \$15,000 in donations from interested and sympathetic people and encouraged people to write letters of support to the council to try to save the buildings. The Council capitulated and the group began the work to upgrade the buildings. By early 2011, several of the dwellings had been upgraded to the Council's requirements.

While the current resident group appear clear in their desire to both revitalise Wilderland and introduce some new systems to create a more stable community, Avner's sentiments seem to reflect aspects of Dan's philosophy. Avner said:

I'm not building securities, I'm not saving money. I'm sacrificing all security for something that is happening now. And for me it's quite easy because this is my passion.... I don't have to enslave myself to the system

of buying land ... but it's a sacrifice as well, because you don't build something for the future. You are living in the here and now and when you go out, you have nothing (personal communication, 15 October, 2010).

Russel added "It's clear to all of us here that what you give here is forever. [It's] part of unconditional love, unconditional giving" (personal communication, 15 October, 2010). The sentiments expressed by this new resident group demonstrate the initial utopian idealism that many individuals express in the early stages of establishing a community, generally before they have invested a large amount of energy and capital, over an extended period of time.⁷⁶

The state of affairs at Wilderland at the end of 2010, along with the sentiments expressed by its new group of core people suggests that in some respects Wilderland is a new community while also being a resurrection of the old one. The utopian idealism expressed by its new group could also reflect the youth and newness of the current resident body.⁷⁷ However, the group also has the legacy of the past to deal with, particularly in upgrading its illegal dwellings and producing a management plan so it cannot be considered to be entirely starting afresh. It also continues to endorse the aims and objectives of the original Wilderland Trust Deed, which provides some continuity and a continued link with the former community. Like Renaissance, the issue of whether this community can be considered to be the same one as it was before in light of intense change, or whether it can be deemed to have survived or not arises.

⁷⁶ This parallels the expressed philosophy of the early residents of Renaissance in relation to their initial views about ownership of houses and other assets. Individuals built their dwellings at Renaissance understanding that they would belong to the trust, despite the fact that individuals financed and built them. As the reality of the lengthy investment of labour and money, and a sense of inequality between the builder's contribution and the contribution of others who would inherit their efforts without having to invest a similar effort dawned, individual attitudes changed.

⁷⁷ In May 2011, none of the residents were over 40 (of the seven, three were in their 30s, four were in their 20s).

Insecurity

The state of instability and insecurity that has evolved at Wilderland shows the effects of an ambiguous purpose and unclear ownership and authority structure on the long term stability and development of a community. The issues underlying the events described in this chapter also demonstrate the community's inability to implement effective processes to resolve conflict and address people's need for a secure structure that would enable them to feel they could make Wilderland their permanent home. Concern about a perceived insecurity of tenure was expressed by most people who had lived at Wilderland for any length of time, whereas this was not an issue for the residents of the other communities in this study. The source of this insecurity was identified as coming from the Hansen's continued authority and ownership, despite their transference of title to the Wilderland Trust. I suggest a further source of insecurity came from the Hansen's denial that Wilderland was a community, which further reinforced a climate of ambiguity around the status of residents there. This is evident in the descriptor 'long-term participant' to refer to committed residents, emphasising an experimental as well as impermanent situation there. In the past, this sense of insecurity culminated in a disinclination on the part of residents to invest money and resources in the property, or to consider Wilderland as their permanent home. The consequences of this are physically evident in the insubstantial nature of the buildings and dwellings (despite the fact that for many years the community generated considerable annual income and could have afforded to build legally permitted and substantial buildings) and the fact that building permission was never sought (except for Dan and Edith's house). It is also evident in the transient nature of the population, the high turnover of people, and the unresolved conflict that dogged the community throughout its long history.

Two core themes emerge: Dan Hansen's influence over the culture and evolution of the community, and the repeated cycle of commitment, conflict, disillusionment and departure on the part of successive groups of residents.

Dan Hansen's influence

Dan Hansen consistently espoused his philosophy (drawn from the teachings of Krishnamurti) that individuals are responsible for their own actions, and that security is illusory and divisive. However, his retention of ultimate authority over the property and permanent status perpetuated an unequal and unclear relationship between him and the people who lived at Wilderland. Ultimately, only Dan and Edith stayed long term at Wilderland; every other person that went there eventually departed.

A further aspect that contributed to the high turnover of people at Wilderland was Dan's emphasis on horticulture and food production as a primary purpose. The steep terrain, sub-tropical climate, basic facilities and organic approach to horticulture makes the labour intensive approach a physically demanding one. As Thomas and others demonstrated, sustaining the necessary work was difficult, particularly in the face of a fluctuating, unskilled, and unpredictable workforce. Possibly, from Dan's perspective, encouraging a transient culture meant that he was more easily able to retain control over the property while living his 'dream' of producing organic food on a large scale and fulfilling a desire to educate young people in the skills associated with this. When people expressed a desire to stay long-term with the associated wish for a sense of security, conflict emerged that exposed the ambiguity of the Wilderland Trust and its purpose. Yet despite this recurring theme, it would seem that Dan was either unable or unwilling to address it. Even he admitted that his life at Wilderland had been "a fairly testing experience in many ways" (Murray, 2001).

Christine:

If [Dan] want[ed] people to be responsible and take on positions like beekeepers, I don't think he could just pay them nothing and [provide] no long term security, if [they wanted] it. So he was betwixt and between I suppose, wanting just WOOFers who didn't want security but who would work hard, and not have to get into the nitty gritty (personal communication, 23 February, 2009).

A further difficulty for Dan must have been his wife Edith's reticence about the direction that Wilderland took, and the fact that she did not share his aspirations. At the same time, he was physically dependent on her for support due to his

paraplegia. Edith tolerated, rather than shared his approach to having people at Wilderland. She was vehemently against giving title of the property to the Wilderland Trust, and this difference of opinion created a severe rift between them Heather, personal communication, 3 November, 2009). Heather believes the act of signing over title of the land to the Wilderland Trust had a profound and deleterious effect on her mother's health.

A further ambiguous aspect of Dan's influence over Wilderland concerns his perceived status with the residents. He was frequently described as charismatic, and residents and visitors looked to him for leadership and direction. However, he was reluctant to assume a leadership role, repeating his belief to media, participants at Wilderland and in his writings, in the importance of initiative coming from the individual, and that "anything which creates a dependence, binds him to a pattern and so perpetuates the society he seeks to break away from" (Wilderland Manifesto, quoted in Sargisson and Sargent, 2004, p. 126). However, as the landowner and instigator of Wilderland, Dan retained ultimate authority and applied this regularly, both directly and indirectly, as I have demonstrated in this chapter. Further evidence of the contradictory nature of his position at Wilderland is in his philosophy of living "in a manner not constrained by any limited concept ...ideology or goal ... [including] following a pattern for living laid down by some idealist or utopian philosopher" (Wilderland, 1995). This statement is clearly both idealistic and utopian - a point also made by Sargisson about the Wilderland Manifesto that was displayed in the community hall in the early years. The manifesto states that "much dissatisfaction with present day society exists and there is a widespread feeling that a new society must be created" and that this can only come about through "initiative in the individual" (Wilderland Manifesto, undated).

The gulf between these statements, Dan's position, and the reality for the 'participants' at Wilderland created a state of perpetual instability and ambiguity about their status there. On one hand Wilderland was open to experimentation, on the other Dan ultimately had the authority to limit and shape the direction that experiment took. This instability was exacerbated by his reluctance to view Wilderland as a community. In 1995 he wrote:

For more than 25 years people have been accepted at Wilderland on a rather free-and-easy basis and this has led to the existence of a sort of loose-knit community, at times comprising 40 or more, mostly young people. However, of recent times dissension and contention have occurred which has broken up anything of a cohesive nature of this group (Wilderland Trust Management Plan, 1995, p. 5).

This statement illustrates the contradictions inherent in Dan Hansen's approach and attitude: on one hand he refers to 'the existence of a sort of loose-knit community' and on the other, laments the break-up of 'anything of a cohesive nature of this group'. He does not seem to have considered that cultivating and acknowledging a community identity might have contributed to producing the necessary cohesive nature for the group to thrive.

Repeated patterns

This chapter has demonstrated how a repeated pattern has evolved at Wilderland: Throughout its nearly 50 year history, people have intended to settle permanently, but left after becoming overwhelmed by the unsatisfactory and ambiguous system that existed there. While this is also a pattern that exists in other communities, I assert that the cause for the ongoing instability at Wilderland derived from Dan Hansen's unwillingness to allow a community identity to develop, and to relinquish control of Wilderland to enable a strong permanent group to feel secure enough to become permanently established. Consequently, the same issues re-emerged. The example of Thomas replacing a previous farm manager who had reached a state of exhaustion only to repeat the same pattern seven years later is particularly candid. The new group now in residence and in control of the trust expresses a firm commitment to addressing the ambiguities of former years and to rebuild the community through putting a set of clear management structures in place. While a decision to reduce the emphasis on large scale food production may go some way to addressing the physical over-extension that previous managers have experienced, and enable more time to build social structures, it also reduces the income made from selling produce at a time when Wilderland needs to generate money to upgrade their buildings. The question of how the new community group will adequately support itself is uncertain. Reducing the scale of food production also means the resident group do not have to be so dependent on a

WOOFing workforce to maintain the horticultural enterprises, thereby reducing pressure on the core group to provide for a transient population and further contributing to the important task of building a community culture and identity.

Despite these challenges the current resident group remain optimistic about the future, believe they have learned valuable lessons from Wilderland's past, and are confident that they will continue to attract new people with practical skills to Wilderland to help build a strong and enduring community. At the time of writing the group are "getting by, although not well enough for individuals to avoid having to work around town for cash needs" (Russel, personal communication, 5 May, 2011). Income has mostly derived from "the sale of honey (60%), and fruit, ointments, teas etc." (*ibid.*).⁷⁸ There is a stable core population of seven, and they have managed to get council approval for the upgrade of five dwellings and two 'cabins' (*ibid.*). In May, 2011, they were preparing to receive a group of eight students and a professor from an American university for a two week stay as part of "an anthropology paper called Community Studies" (*ibid.*). As he moves through his second year at Wilderland Russel reflects "[w]e learn to live with so much uncertainty. In this respect we completely qualify for Dan's requirements of not looking for securities" (personal communication, 5 May, 2010).

⁷⁸ 'teas' refers to herbal teas sold in dried form.

Chapter Six: Tui Community - Golden Bay

Established 1984

We have a big appreciation of people's differences. We like the difference, and it makes us see a more whole picture (Frans, Tui member, personal communication, 23 February, 2009).

At times we've had polarities between the greenies and the healies. There are people who are completely focused on the education centre and others who are wanting to a much more Permaculture system on the land. [But] one of the things that makes this place a really good place is the fact that everybody here has got some sort of spiritual aspiration or outlook (Keith, Tui member, personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Actually, we're bloody organised. It's been sometimes over-organised (Surrendra, Tui member, 24 February, 2009).

This chapter begins with an overview of Tui Community, including its historical context, its physical location and aspects, membership, organisation and enterprises. The second part identifies key changes that have shaped the community, including: changes of membership in the first five years, a shift from a child-focussed community to a 'collective empty nest,' the split into two separate community groups and subsequent restructuring to re-unite the community as a single group. Part three identifies emerging themes and includes a discussion about the main elements that have contributed to the continued vitality and successes of the community.

Part One: Introduction

Overview

Tui community is the most physically isolated community of the case studies in this research. It is also the youngest. It is located at the easternmost point of Golden Bay, at the end of the road to Abel Tasman National Park, and a 40 minute drive from Takaka Township, which is the main commercial centre for the region. The Golden Bay region occupies the north-west corner of the South Island, and is geographically separated from the rest of the Tasman District (and the South Island) by the Takaka mountain range. The only road access to the region is over the steep and winding Takaka Hill. Because of this relative isolation, Golden Bay has developed its own unique identity and sense of community. It attracts a large number of 'alternative lifestylers,' many of them German (Bönisch-Brednich, 2002). This is reflected in the population of Tui Community - around half of its members are German.

Tui is described by Sargisson and Sargent as “one of the most stable and best organised intentional communities in New Zealand” (2004, p.129). They also describe it as “relatively affluent” (2004, p.131). My own first impressions upon entering the community (in February 2009) included a sense that it exuded an air of prosperity and order. The property appeared well maintained and organised, houses were for the most part attractive and cared for and the community house was well-appointed and clearly in daily use.

Tui community has an exceptionally beautiful aspect; the land is north facing, comprising of gently sloping regenerating hills backed by the Abel Tasman National Park and overlooking the Wainui Bay. It encompasses two narrow valleys separated by a rocky spur. Most of the houses are scattered amongst the hills. There is an extensive flat arable area adjacent to the sea, most of which is leased to a neighbouring farmer for grazing. The group do not farm any of the land themselves. A public road leading to the Abel Tasman National Park bisects the community between the flat area and the elevated ground where the community houses and facilities are situated. A part of this flat area has been developed into a

campsite and events centre known as the *Treefield*, or *Eventspark*.⁷⁹ This area has facilities for visitors attending live-in workshops, including a roofed open-air kitchen/seminar space, ablution facilities and semi-permanent canvas-roofed accommodation. Below the community house there are community gardens, orchards, utility buildings, and public parking area. Roadways provide access to members' private houses, many of which have their own gardens and garaging.

The stated charitable objectives of the Tui Spiritual and Educational Trust include the promotion of:

...education within New Zealand on the role and function of sustainable communities, by establishing a living, working example of an intentional community that combines the essential principles of spiritual awareness, earth-care, connection with nature and appropriate lifestyle, where residents and visitors can participate in a variety of educational and spiritual practices (Tui, 2000).⁸⁰

In 2009, the Tui website introduced the community thus:

Tui Community was founded in 1984 with the aim to create intentional community. The group purchased a farm consisting of 50 hectares (125 acres) in Wainui Bay and over the years the community people and processes have evolved. Now it is a blend of an "intentional community" and a "village" where people deliberately come together to share lives in a way that reaches out beyond nuclear family living.

Today 30 – 40 adults and children live in a beautiful place by the sea, Wainui Bay, on the edge of the Abel Tasman National Park in New Zealand's South Island. Among the many activities of the community, we grow a large organic garden, organic orchard and some shared communal meals.

Families live in separate houses and people are responsible for the financing of their own accommodation, some people work in the *Tui Balmes and Waxes* business, and many have independent incomes and occupations. A main focus of community life is the building of genuine relationships based on honest and open communication.

⁷⁹ Tui annually puts out an 'Events Program' that outlines courses that are run in the *Treefield*. The programme is online at events@tuitrust.org.nz. The 2008/09 programme included earth oven and bread baking workshops, yoga, men's and women's gatherings, and 'Tracks' and 'Tides' workshops and facilitator training - Tracks and Tides are charitable trusts "dedicated to providing rites of passage and leadership training for teenage and young men... [and women]" (tracks.net.nz).

⁸⁰ See Appendix C for a full list of objectives.

The Tui Spiritual & Educational Trust is a charitable trust dedicated to the general promotion and enhancement of community life. The aims and objectives of the trust are interwoven in that way of life.

The Trust gains much of its impetus from the working example of Tui Community and some of its objectives are realised by providing programmes in which people may visit, experience and learn the workings of an intentional community. These programmes also include experience in working co-operatively in organic horticulture (Tui).

Historical context

Before purchasing the land in 1984, the founding group began collective life on a rented rural property in the Tasman District they called Tui Tadmor.⁸¹ Tina, a founding member, explained that the initial group formed out of a series of ‘gatherings’ which “in those days were called ‘new age’” (Tina, personal communication, 25 February, 2009). The period during which the group rented the property at Tadmor gave them the chance to get to know each other and to experiment with different ideas for living communally. It was a time when “the conceptual stuff was done. ... Things like legal structures, and childcare and work systems [and] finances ... were all bounced around at that time” (Robina, personal communication, 25 February, 2009). Tina, a founding member, recalled:

In Tadmor we got our constitution together, and we decided what sort of land we wanted and how we wanted to live. ... At first our idea was not to own anything. All in one pot... like at Riverside, [but there were] people who were constantly out there in the cities and travelling around and using the money that the others earned and it was just too unbalanced. It didn't work (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Charitable trust status was chosen as the legal entity to own the land because “the general principle for holding the land in perpetuity was a strong and popular feature” (Barry Broughton, archival paper, undated⁸²). The principles the founding group were keen to adopt involved holding land that “would not be owned by individuals but held in guardianship ... could not be traded or given away, ... the structure seems to fit well with many intended activities, such as the school, bio-dynamics, and healing” (*ibid.*). Tui's relatively late arrival on the New Zealand

⁸¹ Tadmor was the district where the group rented the farmhouse.

⁸² This paper is in a Tui community archive. It was undated and unpaginated.

communal scene meant that its founders had the added advantage of being able to observe a range of other communal groups in action to inform their decisions about how they wanted to organise their own community. As well as this, several members had prior experience of community living, or had been involved in other cooperative ventures before joining the group. An examination of the trust documents of other communities that were already established, including Riverside, Renaissance and Centrepont trusts also helped inform their own decision to adopt a charitable trust as a legal structure to own the land.

A number of founding members had professional backgrounds, a source of independent income and accumulated wealth. Occupations included architecture, nursing, teaching, accountancy, dentistry. Tina explained that amongst the initial group:

There were relatively rich people who had sold houses ... and they could earn quite a bit of money. The value of the land was \$109,000 and we paid off \$90,000 directly. ... And then over five years we paid off the rest (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

The original group pooled their savings to pay off the land. They donated that money “fully unconditionally” (*ibid.*) and for the first five years “you paid a certain amount on top of your normal contribution to food and stuff in order to pay [the mortgage] off” (*ibid.*). This relative affluence not only enabled the community to quickly eliminate the debt of land purchase, but many were also in a position to build their houses rapidly and to a higher standard than those in many other alternative communities. The quality of materials, design and size of dwellings varies considerably at Tui. Lucy Sargisson noted that of the 16 dwellings that housed members, “some are beautifully crafted and imaginatively designed wooden houses, and some are vans and shacks” (Sargisson, 2007, p. 10). Sargisson also commented that “there is always some variation within a group, but it was particularly striking at Tui” (2007, p. 12). The variation between members’ personal circumstances and ways of living reflects the independent income sources of members, and the accommodation of difference that several informants consider to be one of the community’s strengths.

From the outset, Tui has had a predominantly western European membership. Robina McCurdy (a New Zealander), who describes herself as a “founder, pioneer, visionary kind of person with a big-picture look” (personal communication, 25 February, 2009), in her own words “kick-started Tui” (*ibid.*) when she initiated the first meetings to create a community. The group that came together did not know each other, but they:

...kind of pulled together around a vision of living in a community on rural land with a bit of an altruistic intention for healing and education. ... Tui started at the end of the back-to-the-land wave and at the beginning of the rest of the world seeking out places for people to raise their kids in a safe and healthy environment away from all the mayhem (*ibid.*).

The group that formed the Tui Land Trust numbered 13 adults with 9 children. They moved onto the land with an assortment of housetrucks which served as personal sleeping spaces while the community house (the existing homestead and only building on the property at that time) supported their daily needs, including meals, ablutions, socialising and meeting. Robina kept a written account of the phases and stages of the community’s establishment:⁸³

Moving On: Our first month on the land.⁸⁴

- (a) Settling in with our **mobile homes**
- (b) **Broad design** for the land re house sites, services, gardens, forest reserve etc.
- (c) **Planning application** to local council for Specified Departure within our District Scheme.
- (d) Clarifying roles of responsibility and drawing up “**Common Agreements for Daily Living.**”
- (e) Beginning our **community garden.**
- (f) **Establishing our kindergarten** and beginning the steps towards a school on the land for our children and others.

⁸³ Robina teaches Permaculture courses, and is author of a manual called *Grounding Vision, Empowering Culture: How to build and sustain community together* (McCurdy, 2008)

⁸⁴ Emphasis and layout are Robina McCurdy’s.

Organisational Structure:

(a) **The principle of empowered groups** (or individuals for minor areas of responsibility) for management, with policy made or endorsed by the community as a whole. Representatives from the practical working groups serve on these management groups, which are: finance, land, technical development, community facilities, festivities.

This sample of planning and documentation of processes not only illustrates the deliberate and structured approach the founding group adopted in contrast to the *ad hoc* approach of many other contemporary communal groups, but also the advantage the group had in establishing their community after the first wave of communal groups had bought land in the area, and reflects the prior experience that several members had of collective living. It also reflects the cultural influence of a strong western European membership. European approaches to planning, organisation and design are all evident in the physical, social and cultural aspects of Tui. The European influence is discussed later in this chapter.

Community facilities

By the early 1990s the community infrastructure was well-established. The original homestead was modified into a facility designed to support a large number of people, with a purpose-built kitchen, meeting and recreational rooms, library and storage rooms, there was a craft workshop, a barn, healing hut, a spiritual and seminar centre, visitors accommodation and private homes (Robina, community paper, 1994). Robina described the houses as,

...privately owned and owner built. Very individualistic in character, with some interesting and innovative Permaculture features. All built of wood ... with the exception of one earth brick home. ... Most are passive solar designed, with solar panels for water heating and electricity (*ibid.*).

While individuals own their houses, and are free to sell them, and to set their own price for sale, it can only be to someone approved by the community to become a member:

There is one on the market at the moment for \$100,000. Of course that is only the structure, it's not buying the land, and whether it will sell for that, I have no idea. The person did buy it for 50 [thousand] and spent more than 50 on it, and lived there for only two years (Frans, personal communication, 24 February, 2009).

The private ownership of houses has implications both for the quality and standard of construction, as well as the attitudes of owners in regard to being able to leave the community if they reach a point where they no longer want to stay. The fact that a person can sell their house if they choose to leave, makes it more likely that they will invest in those buildings, and protect that investment by keeping them well maintained. It also enables a person who wants to leave, to do so with a sum of money, helping them to resettle elsewhere.⁸⁵ However, remuneration from selling a house at Tui does not reflect market rates in the wider community, and for those who do not have high earning potential, or accumulated funds, options for buying property elsewhere (particularly within Golden Bay) are limited.⁸⁶

Cherrie points out that:

There is no way that building a house at Tui is an investment. ... It is not easy for those who have no 'outside' investments to leave Tui. If Tui is not fulfilling their needs, they are much more inclined to 'work it out' and change things or themselves (personal communication, 16 May, 2009).

This may be the case for those without outside investments, but for those who *do*, there is the further option of being able to retain their houses and membership at Tui while pursuing other interests, and owning property elsewhere. One member referred to families who are "pretty damn wealthy [playing] their corporate game in the world out there but do not want to compromise the fact that they live on trust land and have got their place here" (anonymous). In reflecting on the pros and cons of collective and individual ownership of houses, Robina considered that "if I started again ... I would go for collectively owned housing, more like Riverside" (personal communication, 25 February, 2009). She believes that collective ownership of houses would not only make it easier for people to leave once they had lost interest in living in a community, but it would also enable the body of

⁸⁵ In comparison, at Renaissance, the fact that individuals financed and built their houses but had no rights as owners to sell them when they wanted to leave, meant that frequently people stayed in the community longer than they would have if they had been able to sell them.

⁸⁶ Banks do not provide mortgages for individuals wanting to buy houses on trust owned land.

community members to “stand their ground and say ... those who aren’t really interested in community life, move on and make space for others who are” (personal communication, 24 February, 2009). Private ownership of houses enables people to be absent from the community for substantial periods. This has both positive and negative implications. Given the relative remoteness of Tui’s location, work opportunities are not necessarily found locally. Members are able to rent their houses to others in their absence, with the approval of the group. They are also able to pursue other interests, both economic and social, and return refreshed. However, Robina speculates that for some Tui members, if they had the option of owning “their own beautiful bush block without neighbours, and ... their own garden and everything, they might be happier even not being in community ... and we’re sort of stuck with it somehow” (*ibid.*).⁸⁷

Membership

Although Frans gave an example of a person investing \$100,000 in a house and then staying for the relatively short period of two years before wanting to leave the community, the process of becoming a member generally involves an extended series of stages. However, it is also flexible, and a prospective member can “set the pace to some extent” (Frans, personal communication, 24 February, 2009). A common pattern is that initially a newcomer assumes short term visitor status for up to one month, then long term visitor status for a further six months, after which they can apply to become a prospective member (for a period of up to 18 months), and finally become a full member. This process has to be approved at each stage by existing members and a person only becomes a full member with the consensual approval of the group. The procedure to become a full member is designed to give both the new person and the existing group time to feel sure the person will fit in well. Frans estimated that approximately one in three prospective members end up staying. He suggested that while:

It looks like a selection process ... really it’s more of a *self*-selection process. We’ve had many ... people just be here and then because we are in some ways quite isolated, after maybe half a year they think oh no, this

⁸⁷ The implications of Tui’s individual ownership of houses in comparison to Riverside’s collective ownership structure is discussed fully in Chapter 8.

is not for me, it's too boring (Frans, personal communication, 24 February, 2009).

As well as the option of becoming a member, individuals can stay as non-members. In 2010 there were 20 members and 25 non-members resident in the community (Jenkin, 2011).

Community Enterprises

There are two collectively owned and managed enterprises at Tui; Tui Balmes and Waxes, and Tui Events.

Tui Balmes and Waxes

The Tui Balmes and Waxes business (referred to as *Beebalme* by members) is run as a cooperative and has evolved into a highly successful enterprise. It began as a small cottage industry when the group first established themselves on the land, initially operating from a room in the community house. By 2009 it had expanded to the point that it operated out of its own purpose-built premises on community land, employing three full time members (for 30 hours a week) and around seven others (10 – 20 hours a week). The business services commercial outlets throughout New Zealand, runs a mail order service through its website, and has distributors in the United Kingdom, as well as “many internet customers throughout the world” (tuibalmes.co.nz). *Beebalme* donates 66% of its profits to the Tui Spiritual and Educational Trust⁸⁸ and 33% to other charitable works, including *Tides* and *Tracks* workshops (run at other South Island venues as well as at Tui) (*ibid.*).

Tui Events

The second community enterprise is the outdoor events centre, or Eventspark, which is based in an area called the Treefield. The programmes that are run there and the associated advertising provides the community with a public face, and serves as an introductory channel for many newcomers interested in living in the

⁸⁸ In 2009 a water reticulation scheme for fire fighting, estimated to cost over \$100,000 was in the planning stages. *Beebalme* was underwriting this project.

community. Events are “co-ordinated or administered by Tui Trust members” (www.tuitrust.org). The emphasis on Permaculture, personal growth and healing reflects the educational objectives of the trust, and the interests of the members. The events programme is managed by the educational group, one of several working groups that hold responsibility for various areas of organisation within the community. The educational group derive personal income from running these events. There is considerable interaction between community members and the participants in workshops, with members joining in a variety of events. Frans believes that the educational focus of the Treefield events provides a positive focus for Tui, particularly as “maybe half of the people ... have energy for what happens there” (personal communication, 24 February, 2009).

Influence of foreign nationals

Tui’s high percentage of foreign nationals sets it apart from the other communities in this study. This has been consistent from the start. The founding group consisted of “50% German, a sprinkling of others, and a few kiwis” (Robina, personal communication, 24 February, 2009). When Frans (a Swiss national) first arrived at Tui six months after it started, he recalled there were about 35 people, “maybe 60% Germans, 15% Dutch. ... a Canadian, an American, a few kiwis and a Yugoslav” (personal communication, 25 February, 2009). Of the 2009 population of 30 members, 8 were New Zealanders and 22 were born elsewhere (Cherrie, personal communication, 16 May, 2009).

The predominance of foreign nationals at Tui is evident in its culture. The concepts of national characteristics and cultural differences between nationalities have already been mentioned in Chapter 2. It remains a complex and difficult subject to discuss without running the risk of being accused of falling into stereotypical comparisons. However, given that Sargent considers New Zealand communities to possess some unique characteristics, and that generalisations are not necessarily applicable to communities internationally, and that he and Sargisson consider Tui to be the best organised community in this country, a discussion of some key differences between New Zealanders and other cultures in communities is relevant.

Differences are often perceived through the way people interact. Bönisch-Brednich writes that “Germans believe that directness and a frank expression of opinion are undeniable virtues” (2002, p. 171) and that conversely, for New Zealanders “the highest priority is not to disturb the personal sphere of the other person more than is necessary, and to preserve your own sphere in the same way” (2002, p. 172). At Tui, the emphasis on interpersonal relationships and addressing and resolving conflict would seem to be influenced by this Germanic directness in their approach to communication. Robert Jenkin (a New Zealander), is a long-time member of another community in Golden Bay called Rainbow Valley, which has a predominantly New Zealand membership. In a graduate paper comparing his own community with Tui, he wrote that “Rainbow is laid back ... while Tui is confrontational, highly structured and dynamic” (Jenkin, 2011). He believes that “as a community, what you give is what you get. Tui gives lots and gets back lots, but Tui is too full-on for the likes of me” (personal communication, 29 March 2011). Jenkins quotes another New Zealander who lived at Tui before moving to Rainbow. She said “I definitely felt Tui was more intimidating, the way that people were confronted in a group situation. I was terrified of their meetings. And they’d have two day group sessions four times a year which was way too much for me, I couldn’t handle it” (Kahu, cited by Jenkins, 2011). This directness is not only a Germanic trait. For Surrendra, who is Dutch,

New Zealanders are very open and friendly, but they don’t really show the back of the tongue. They show themselves till maybe a third in and then they stop. Dutch are straight forward and more to the point when they feel things and express things (cited by Jenkins, 2011).

Robina saw it thus:

You know, the kiwi-pacifika attitude of ‘she’ll be right’ – more flowing and easy, and the German – very precise, very methodical and outcomes-based. Well, we rubbed off on each other in a clashing kind of way. And I think as we rubbed ... into each other we learned to appreciate the best of both cultures and work very well together (cited by Jenkin, 2011).

A casualness underlying the ‘kiwi-pacifika attitude’ is in sharp contrast with the more ambitious and precise German approach. Bönisch-Brednich quotes a German immigrant who, in reflecting on what it meant to be a German living in New Zealand, said:

When I make an appointment to see someone, I expect him to come, please, or if he doesn't come, then he should ring up. And here, it's: I'll come, I won't come, perhaps I'll come. That's the way it is here. ... Precision, punctuality, and so on, carrying out plans, making projects, that just doesn't happen here (Annemarie Koester, quoted in 2002, p. 182).

While I do not suggest that New Zealanders are not capable of being punctual, precise or able to carry out plans, these impressions of cultural differences do illustrate some core differences in relation to attitude, ways of communicating, and being organised. It could also explain why Tui stands out from other communities in this country that have a predominantly New Zealand membership. I assert that the high percentage of Europeans at Tui has shaped the culture of that community, and is particularly evident in the emphasis on interpersonal relationships, a collective willingness to meet and make decisions and then carry them out efficiently, and the community's highly organised approach to managing their affairs.

Part Two: Key Changes

Change in membership in the first five years

Many of the changes Tui community has experienced have been collectively instigated in anticipation of, or in response to, a particular situation or problem that has come to the attention of the group. A high turnover of people within the first five years of settlement is one change that was not anticipated by the group. Although the founding group trialled systems of living together before they bought land, the experience of establishing a community together proved conflict-ridden and difficult, resulting in mass departures and major changes in membership. Although a similar pattern transpired at Renaissance, a key difference for Tui was that the experience contributed to the changes in emphasis the future direction of the community took, including the structures they developed to address conflict. This was aided by members' shared interest in personal growth and an appreciation of the importance of nurturing "genuine relationships based on honest and open communication" (www.tuitrust.org). Consequently, for Tui, conflict is often useful rather than destructive.

Of the original group of founding members, four remain, and of that group, only one has lived there consistently since its beginning.⁸⁹ Frans was living at Riverside when the Tui land was bought, and came to Tui six months later. He recalled that “in the first five years maybe half the people left ... because it turned out to be a little bit different to what they thought it would be” (Frans, personal communication, 24 February, 2009). Keith (a New Zealander), was also living in another community - the Ahu Ahu Ohu - when the Tui land was purchased. He had also previously lived at Wilderland. Like Frans, he arrived at Tui as the first wave of original members was leaving. He recalled:

There was a big emptying out ... a lot of it would have been just frustration of trying to live in a group. ... Jutta and Reinhart [for example] ... had a professional outlook. They had standards and expectations that were probably not being met in the sort of washing machine of communal activities. ... They'd been here long enough to see that their dreams were not being realised the way they thought they would be. ... In the early stages there was a lot of really nasty conflict ... about the ways of going about things. [A clash of] ideologies, yes, but it was also [because of] a lack of relationship skills. ... People would just fly off the handle at each other and have big raging matches (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Keith believes a lot of the initial conflict was a consequence of a group of disparate and strong willed people coming together with few relationship skills, or the maturity to deal effectively with conflicting approaches to doing things. Over time they learned to develop a range of procedures for effectively negotiating and resolving conflict. This community focus on “intentional personal growth” (Cherrie, personal communication, 16 May, 2009) is evident in the charitable objectives of the trust, which promote “life-skills, healing practices, specialised therapies and counselling services” (Tui, 2000).⁹⁰ This emphasis has both positive and negative implications. The ‘new-age’ encounter-group style of therapy, with its emphasis on healing and personal growth, which was prevalent during the 1980s, involved frank and intense emotional encounters, employing a variety of

⁸⁹ One original couple spent seven years living in Wellington and continue to spend extended periods out of the community for work purposes.

⁹⁰ See Appendix C.

approaches.⁹¹ Tina likened it to a “supermarket of ... colours or crystals, or whispering. ... Everybody went to the next fashionable workshop, and the next ... that was going to bring them to nirvana” (personal communication, 25 February, 2009). Keith added that it was “one of the things that threatened to derail the place at times” (*ibid.*). The focus on interpersonal relationships within the community frequently put pressure on intimate relationships. Frans believes that the early years at Tui were:

...pretty hard on couple relationships [because] a couple is used to their way of interacting in the world out there, and they are used to receiving or giving time and energy to each other in a certain – let’s say quota of it, and then when they come to live here that changes completely and if they don’t have the patience to find a new way of being comfortable with that, then the relationship isn’t going to survive it (personal communication, 24 February, 2009).

The pressure on couple relationships in those early years was also in part due to the strong emphasis on the prioritising of community interests over those of the individual, or family in the early years. Frans, reflecting on his own relationship breakdown, believed that:

Living communally was definitely adding some strain. In the first maybe eight years of the community’s existence we lived by the belief that we looked after the community first and then our families. ... The belief was that if you looked after the community well all families will be feeling cared for. ... I do think that helped with creating that community because we had to pull it out of thin air – there wasn’t a community culture here. It was just a farm that we bought (*ibid.*).

Another aspect that may have influenced the high turnover of people during the first five years may have been a geographical one. While the founding group had some ideas of what they wanted in a piece of land, including a list of “non-negotiables ... running water, buffer zone from sprays, a minimum of ten arable acres for growing food” (Robina, personal communication, 25 February, 2009), after initially visiting the Tui property “a couple of things went out the window” (*ibid.*) including the emphasis on fertile land for growing food.⁹² The relatively

⁹¹ Len Oakes’ *Inside Centrepont: The Story of a New Zealand Community*, (1986) provides insight into the therapy-based practices that were popular with some communal groups during this era.

⁹² It could be argued that the leasing of the only flat and arable land in the community to a farmer for grazing was another thing that went out the window.

isolated location also did not fit with the initial intention to establish a Steiner school.

Sargisson and Sargent point out that “change and adaptation to change are essential for a vibrant community” (2004, p. 170). The ability to change and adapt to change is clearly evident in Tui. After the exodus of so many founding members in the early years, some guidelines were introduced:

Through experience over five years it has become clear that guide-lines are required for accepting new members. It is also clear that ... the procedure must be flexible in order to meet individual needs. ... All guidelines and procedures are designed to assist the personal growth of individuals, to support them rather than restrict them. ... The procedure may be altered at any time if experience shows that changes are necessary (General Notes of the Tui Land Trust, September, 1989).

From a child focused community to a ‘collective empty nest’

Most Tui informants referred to a ‘collective empty nest syndrome’ that occurred after the community’s children left home, believing it to be an experience that had a profound impact on the group. 16 of Tui’s children were born between 1979 and 1983 (Cherrie, personal communication, 16 May, 2009). They were a significant and unifying group within the community. By 2000 most of them had left home, leaving the community virtually childless in a very short space of time. Members referred to this rapid departure of their young adults as not only radically altering the social atmosphere of the community, but also as an event that heralded a new era in the parents’ lives, where they began to re-evaluate the things that were important to them. Despite being childless herself, Robina was also affected by this development:

Our children grew up in a pretty tight age range. ... Parents needed to have contact with each other because of the children’s social needs.... When they left home, they left en masse, like the multiple empty nest syndrome. ... There was tremendous loss and emptiness ... in our community for some time and during that, parents [were] re-evaluating what their purpose was here, what they wanted to do with the rest of their lives. ... Regardless of all that was written in our trust deeds, and all the planning and all that, I reckon our community glue ... was our kids.... When our kids left we lost our community glue and we had to struggle to get it back again. ... They would have left about seven years ago. ... Now we’ve got younger families again, or young kids. ... There’s more

of a sense of community again (Robina, personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Cherrie:

These children shaped our lives. When they left it was a huge empty nest. It also left parents in a place of ‘now what?’ and many left or went out of the community for awhile to live elsewhere or study (personal communication, 16 May, 2009).

The ‘now what’ was different for each parent, but collectively the commitment to communal meals, activities and involvement in Tui went through a long slow decline after the departure of the children. Those members who didn’t go elsewhere to pursue other things began to change their focus within the community. The daily community lunch, which had been sustained for 15 years started to falter. By this time, most houses had established independent facilities including mains power systems and telephones. Cherrie noted that as housing became more established, the community became “more of a village and less like a ‘commune’” (personal communication, 16 May, 2009).

From one community to extended and family community groups

The combination of children leaving home and the increased independence of individual households contributed to the withdrawal of many members from community events and activities:

Those parents whose kids grew up in that early era and then left ... are more withdrawn from community affairs. They are leading their own lives as if they were in a village, or not even that – more like a rural suburb. ... The people who are least connected with the community as a whole have their own facilities – from washing machines to letterboxes to lawnmowers ... People in this era don’t have such a strong connection with each other as they had in other [earlier] eras ... The difference is we were in house-trucks and house-buses and caravans conglomerated around the community house [then] and we were interdependent (Robina, personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

The children also linked members through the shared experience of parenthood. With the passing of that era in members’ lives, the inclination to become more focused around individual households and activities rather than community ones marked a significant shift from the previous emphasis on community before

family. People not only became less reliant on each other and the community facilities for meeting their daily needs, but in directing their attention into their individual households, they had less time, energy, and inclination to put into community affairs.

The decline of the community lunches was also associated with this decentralisation. The kitchen was closed for a three month period for renovations, during which time “most people got used to not having [daily communal meals]. We never started it up again” (Frans, personal communication, 24 February, 2009).

⁹³ However, other factors also influenced this shift away from community lunches:

Keith and Tina ... both long time members and really valued residents here, they had both grown out of having kids ... and didn't really enjoy the shared meals because of dietary preferences. And they also started to develop their own veggie garden round their home because they knew they were going to get older and they live way up on the hill (*ibid.*).

Keith saw it from the point of view of efficiency. He said:

We're not in the meal system any more but when we were we would start cooking round about 8 o'clock [in the morning] and not finish till 4 [for a communal lunch] because we would do a thorough job of the meal. And we would have all those distractions and conversations all the way through the day because we were in the community house (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Over time the effects of the withdrawal of long-established members became increasingly evident in the neglect of community facilities and systems, and the decline of maintenance and ongoing care for the land. Keith:

We'd had an energy input system for many years, and it had basically got to the stage where it had just declined to virtually nothing. ... We were on the old decline phase of the cycle like so many others [communities]. And some of us just waited until it got to a stage that where it got so bad that everybody recognised it. You can't get consensus until everybody is actually sick [enough] of it to start doing something about it. A whole lot of effort and energy was needed to revitalise some of the existing systems ... and bring about a few new ones as well (*ibid.*).

⁹³ This also happened at Riverside after the community centre burnt down and there were no community meals for an extended period of time. People became used to eating at home or in smaller groups and it has been difficult to get regular community meals happening again.

To address the problems resulting from the withdrawal of many of the long-term members, a number of special meetings were held to discuss how they might reinvigorate flagging community commitment and get necessary work done.

Tui community have developed a system of special meetings they call *tukis* to address ideological issues that have implications for future directions, including the changing desires and priorities of members. The Tui website describes *tukis* as “a way of deep and open communication adapted from the Māori culture” (www.tui.org). Tina explained it thus:

Every three months for a couple of days we have a *tuki* which is a mix of hui⁹⁴ and tui and talking, and we stay together and talk. At times it [is] really personal stuff and at times ... confrontational structural stuff... it's a real clean-out of old stuff (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

The willingness on the part of members to talk through often difficult and sensitive problems together means that over nearly three decades they have honed their ability to collectively put changes into practice to avoid falling into ‘the old decline phase of the cycle’ as Keith suggested many other communities had. The *tuki* system enabled the community to create an effective forum to acknowledge that the collective spirit was declining and to work out a way to address and accommodate the changing interest level of many of the community members, and get necessary work done. Frans recalled:

Keith and Tina ... approached the community and said we have to develop something ... to allow people to participate when they want to and ... not when they don't, particularly with the view of people getting older and not having the ... energy to participate...so we spent a lot of time in meetings to talk it through. ... We developed [a] document of how that could happen, and that was approved. And then bang! Half the community pulled out! (Personal communication, 24 February, 2009).

For Frans it was “quite disappointing [to find that] as soon as we created this door out, there was quite a rush for the door” (*ibid.*). He was one of a minority of long established members who continued to use the community house daily, preferring to eat and work collectively. The agreement that was generated from the *tukis* made it possible to choose to ‘opt in’ or ‘opt out’ of community activities and

⁹⁴ Hui: gather, meeting (Ryan, 1994, p.17).

involvement. The terms ‘family community’ and ‘extended community’ were adopted to differentiate between those who wanted less involvement and those who wanted to continue having a strong commitment to working and living collectively. Like Frans, Robina also expressed disappointment about the trend towards less community involvement, though acknowledged that for those people who had work commitments outside the community (herself included) it was difficult to sustain a strong involvement in the community. She explained how the system worked:

The people in ... extended community ... would actually be in a village sort of situation ... that means you paid a minimal [sum of money] to the trust and the community and you had no responsibility to do any work [but] neither did you have a right to access things like orchard, gardens, ... whereas the ... family community [were] ... committing to be in community together – community meals, raising the kids together, doing a garden, just like the previous phase (Robina, personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

The withdrawal of long-term residents left the smaller and less experienced ‘family community’ group with the responsibility of interacting with the outside world, orientating and supervising visitors, caring for community gardens and facilities, and generally taking charge of the day to day running of the community. Their lack of experience and smaller numbers made this situation precarious. Frans recalled that it became,

... a them and us feeling. ... You could say that half the people living here weren’t participating. I’m sure it must have been quite confusing for people that came to join us, because that choice wasn’t an option [for them]. For them we said they *had* to participate. So they were participating and they saw half the people were not participating and they thought ‘that’s a bit odd’ (Frans, personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Younger people that were down there [in the community house] with their children felt they had to carry too much of the burden to be representing this place while the elders just lived off in private lifestyles (Tina, personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Resentments and ill-feeling eventually culminated in a situation where the community as a whole felt obliged to re-evaluate the situation and they agreed to attempt to unite as one group again.

Restructuring

Robina referred to the period when the extended and family community groups operated as a time when:

Things were getting polarised and [there were] not good vibes between the two sectors ... so we had the intention ... of becoming one community once more. ... It's been a compromise [but] to make the whole thing tick we all put in money to pay Keith to be the land manager ... and we all put in something for the maintenance of the community house (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Frans:

A small group worked out that ... it took 6 hours a week [of 'energy input'] for each person to keep the place functioning. ... We couldn't find agreement so we settled on 3 ½ (personal communication, 24 February, 2009).

Keith:

We appointed a caretaker [or land manager] to work 16 hours a week to get things happening around the place rather than just leaving it to the 3 ½ hours a week voluntary contribution (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

To monitor the new system, and in an attempt to introduce accountability, a 'Job Transparency Board' was erected in the community house on a trial basis. The board listed member's names alongside a space for individuals to record the hours spent, and a description of their 'energy input' for each month. Those who did not wish to participate had the option of paying an hourly rate to someone else to do their share of 'input.' Not everybody was filling in the board at the time of my visit, and the scheme was to be reassessed after a trial period. Members were cautiously positive about the process. However, despite finding "some sort of middle ground again" (Keith, personal communication, 25 February, 2009), Frans considered that "the communal-ness has reduced" (personal communication, 24 February, 2009).

Change of name for the trust

The Tui Land Trust (1984) was formed “to create an Intentional Community Village for holistic living” (community document, 1994). The original trust deed was adapted and the name changed to the Tui Spiritual and Educational Trust in 2000 because the group considered that the language of the original document did not fully represent the purpose of Tui community (Surrendra, personal communication, 24 February, 2009). References in the original document’s objectives to religion and the provision of a church reflected the requirements of the Charitable Trusts Act (1957) rather than the aspirations of the Tui group.

The Tui Spiritual and Educational Trust outlines eight primary objectives and purposes, including the promotion of educational, spiritual and sustainable practices, and principles of cooperation and spiritual wellbeing. An archival paper outlining the core values of the group, describes “alternative values, including group purchasing, non-ownership, shared resources and shared activities” (archival paper, no author or date). These core values are immediately followed by a qualifying statement: “Notwithstanding this, we are moving with current times. Things are continually changing and the opportunity for further change remains open” (*ibid.*).

This demonstrates the highly organised, adaptable and pragmatic nature of the Tui group, and their ability to collectively implement strategies to accommodate individuals’ as well as the group’s changing needs and preferences. The shift away from a close community focus to a more individualistic and privatised approach demonstrates a change that Kanter identified in her study of communal groups. A discussion of this shift from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* is discussed in Chapter 8.

Part Three: Discussion

The present: a different era

In 2009 Robina described the present as “a different era ... an individualistic era” (personal communication, 25 February, 2009). She was referring both to general societal shifts, as well as the expectations of newcomers to Tui and long-

established members. When they first settled the land, the founding group were obliged to create an infrastructure and build a community from scratch. This contrasts markedly with the situation that new people who come to Tui now encounter. They are presented with an established community with comfortably housed and independent members, and thus have greater expectations of what the community will provide for them. Robina spoke about young families who visited Tui but, despite expressing an interest in joining the community, felt unable to stay because there was no accommodation provided. She believes their attitude reflects a wider societal pattern in which the current generation have a more materialistic outlook and expectations, in contrast with her generation, who were raised with “a more do-it-yourself ethos” (personal communication, 25 February, 2009). From the newcomers’ perspective, they are not only presented with an established community, but also with a number of long-established people occupying positions of authority. Robina referred to numerous young people attending Permaculture courses at Tui who expressed a desire to live collectively, but were not interested in joining a community like Tui because “they don’t want to come into something that’s already existing, already built [and] held in place by a whole lot of people who have already done it” (*ibid.*).⁹⁵

However, the long-established members also have higher expectations of a standard of living, and exhibit a greater individualism themselves, with increased private ownership of assets, equipment and vehicles and less inclination to collectively share resources. Evidence of this increased individualism is apparent in changes to collective food purchasing. Before the formation of extended and family community groups, the community bought bulk food staples such as rice, beans, oil etc. All members contributed a fixed sum to a community fund that purchased those items regardless of the number of people in their household. Effectively, those without children subsidised families, and everyone took what they needed for their personal consumption. This process now operates under a user pays system. Robina said “now, it’s just like a shop: you do your own weighing and purchasing, but everything’s gone under the umbrella of individual

⁹⁵ The issue of young people not being attracted to joining communities is returned to in Chapter 8 in the context of ageing membership and obstacles to attracting young people into established communities.

purchases” (personal communication, 25 February, 2009). Frans does not consider the shift towards a user pays system to be “looking for an alternative” (personal communication, 24 February, 2009). He would prefer more community involvement, including regular communal meals, communal gardening and food production – “I like the efficiency that comes with it. It’s a visible [way of demonstrating] that we care for each other in a very practical way” (*ibid.*).

Key elements contributing to the vitality of the community

A commitment to addressing issues collectively

Most importantly, Tui has developed systems and structures that enable them to make changes and adapt when issues arise. This collective ability is partly aided by acknowledgment on the part of members that people have different needs that can and should be accommodated rather than expecting everyone to conform to one model or set of expectations. Whereas other communities in this study have demonstrated an inability to identify the causes of problems or disharmony, or an inability to address them, Tui members have developed effective systems for decision and policy making, enabling them to trial new approaches and accommodate differences. This is not to suggest that this does not create its own set of issues, as the introduction to extended and family community groups demonstrates. People become disillusioned and leave Tui as they do in other communities. Others who remain in the community also express negative views or dissatisfaction about various aspects of the community. Some have made reference to Tui spending ‘long periods in the dark’ or being ‘on the decline phase of the cycle.’ Others are uncomfortable with the disparity in wealth, involvement and choices amongst members. The difference that this group demonstrate, however, is a willingness to experiment with new ideas to address concerns. This is greatly aided by their system of *tukis* which provides a forum to get to the core of ‘heart’ issues rather than trying to deal with them in a community meeting setting.⁹⁶ It is further reinforced by the community’s statement that Tui strives to be “a living, working example of an intentional community” (www.tuitrust.org), to outsiders. This is helped by their educational workshops which include courses that focus on

⁹⁶ A comparison of Tui and Riverside’s meeting systems is discussed Chapter 8.

teaching and learning positive ways of interacting and managing conflict. It is also evident in the emphasis of the community agreements. In the 'General Notes' of Tui's Common Agreements (archival paper, 1991), it is stated that the community agreed by consensus (in 1989), that unresolved 'major conflict' in the community was unacceptable, and a process involving community meetings and facilitation was to be followed if and when serious conflict arose. The notes also reiterate the agreement that "if we always seek to resolve conflicts ... there will be no serious misunderstanding or problem" (Tui, 1989). Sargisson and Sargent observed that Tui members have "become expert at negotiating interpersonal conflict" (2004, p. 151). Most members identified the group's collective willingness and ability to deal with conflict as a shared attribute and strength, and a central reason why the community manages to maintain a level of dynamism and the ability to deliberately implement change.

Independence and innovation in economic arrangements

Employment has always been challenging for members because of Tui's distance from urban centres. In the early years while they were establishing the infrastructure of the community, many members depended on welfare for income. This was a deliberate community decision during the establishment phase of the community, to enable the founding members to stay on the land while they built the infrastructure and developed a community spirit. Keith:

There was a period of time when the community functioned because it was on the dole. ... And people were able to take the time to cultivate relationships. ... It was probably a good thing in terms of a phase of development, but I don't think it should stay firm because it breeds an unreality (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Cherrie recalled the initial period of Tui's community building as one in which members "were heavily subsidised by government benefits, including the DPB" (personal communication, 16 May, 2009). Most members pointed to the *Beebalme* venture as having a positive impact on the community, particularly in light of the fact that as the business expanded and provided employment to members, it enabled people who had previously been dependent on welfare benefits, or had to leave the region to find work, to live and work within the community. Keith considers it to be a "major boon to the place. ... Almost everyone has worked for

Beebalme at some stage” (personal communication, 25 February, 2009). A further benefit of *Beebalme* is the fact that a percentage of its profits are reinvested into community projects.

The other commercial enterprise run from Tui, the Events programme, not only provides employment for members, but also generates a stimulating social and educational focus, both for people living at Tui, and for outsiders with a strong interest in alternative living practices. Frans commented that “a number of people that became interested to live with us came in through that doorway” (personal communication, 24 February, 2009). Educational courses include training in conflict management and personal empowerment as well as sustainable living and permaculture systems. These courses reinforce the aims and objectives of the trust, while stimulating the group by bringing in people with skills and interest in those areas.

A further factor identified by members as contributing to the community’s vitality is the “blend of communism and capitalism” (Keith, personal communication, 25 February, 2009), that underpins the community’s structures. This is not only evident in the private ownership of houses and assets, and individual responsibility for income generation, but also in the decision to employ a member to be caretaker to look after the land, and financing his wages through contributions from other members. It is also evident in the user pays system of bulk food purchases, and the agreement on a set number of ‘energy input’ hours that each member is expected to invest in community work.

Stability of core membership/ collective control over who joins

While people continue to leave, and new ones to join Tui, a long term stable group has been resident for at least 10 – 15 years. Keith emphasises the importance in being selective in accepting new members. He believed that “in the current economic times people are starting to scrabble around looking for alternatives and community living is one of the things. ... At the moment, our door is open but it’s like this [ajar] (personal communication, 25 February, 2009). He explained that it was important to closely manage the admission of new people because:

People need to go through the development phase in terms of understanding what works and what doesn't work, and if you lose them too fast or you get too many people coming in [it destabilises the community] (*ibid.*).

Surrendra:

When people are actually settled in the structure they actually know each other quite well. ... When you have a big group, and the influx of new people is too big it disturbs the main body too much. ... So [new members] need to be kind of drip-fed in so that the people that come in get used to the society as a whole ... (personal communication, 24 February, 2009).

In more recent times the community has targeted a younger age group. Following the collective empty nest phase, a cap was put on the age of new members, limiting it to those under 35 in order to prioritise and encourage young families with children to join the community. It appears to have been effective. When I visited early in 2009 I was told there were 14 children living at Tui.

The combination of people and their abilities

For Keith, the success of any community,

... comes solely down to who's there. ... You get some people who *do* and some who wait and that sort of thing, but it's really the mix. There are people here, like Barry ... He has brought incredible skills here. ... He can fix tractors, he can get out on the land and work hard practically, he's got accountancy skills, he's got business management skills - he's got so many skills! If you've got people like that in your mix then the chances of you succeeding are going to be much higher than if you've got people without those types of skills (personal communication, 25 February, 2009)

The culture that develops out of the combination of people with particular skills or drive or effectiveness determines the sorts of people who are attracted to the community. For Robert (the Rainbow Valley community member), Tui is too organised, and "high-powered" (personal communication, 2011) for his tastes. This demonstrates the 'self-selection process' that Frans referred to being in place, influencing the types of newcomers who are drawn to that community.

The combination of people and the emphasis on enabling individuals to live independently within the community also shapes the community's culture. For

Robina, the blend between communism and capitalism, that Keith considers to be a key to their success as a community, has leaned too far towards capitalism:

Now, people might start [living here] by renting a house – they start in a more separate kind of way. ... What I see at Tui is ... keeping pace with changes in our wider society. You need such intent and such passion to keep on that track of community values if you want to sustain it against the tide rushing in of individualism and capitalism and owning houses and all that stuff. ... The structure has shifted more towards the individualism side than the collective activity side [to the extent that] there's an obvious lack of common vision. There's been some wonderful people coming and trying it – who would be really good community people ... but they've all left ... because it wasn't going far enough towards collective endeavour and sustainability (Robina, personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

The tendency towards individualism sits uneasily alongside the 'alternative values, including group purchasing, non-ownership, shared resources and shared activities' outlined in the archival paper referred to above. The acknowledgment that 'things are continually changing' could be seen as providing a further 'opt out' clause to free members from being obliged to uphold the core values of the trust. The modification of group purchasing, shared resources and activities to a user pays system reinforces Robina's observation that the community is keeping pace with changes in the wider society. This aligns with Metcalf's (2004) assertion that alternative communities are becoming more mainstream. At the same time, Tui's ability to be flexible and to 'move with the current times' demonstrates their adaptability and thus their ability to remain dynamic, strong, and attractive to new people.

Chapter Seven: Riverside Community – Lower Moutere

Established 1941

It's a beautiful place to live. And it's a healthy place. I appreciate that I know my neighbours who care for me and I care for them. We are there for each other. It's a good way to live - to be working with, not working for personal gain. And that makes me feel good. It's a wholesome way to live somehow. Everybody here has agreed to be in this thing together, to take responsibility of working with each other. ... There's no reward apart from that. We don't get financially rewarded by our work. We are rewarded by the achievement of it - or not (Barbie, Riverside member, 27 February, 2009)

Riverside Community is the longest surviving intentional community in New Zealand (Sargisson and Sargent, 2004), having been in existence for 70 years. Lynn Rain's book *Community: The Story of Riverside 1941 – 1991* (1991) provides an overview of its first fifty years. As this research is primarily concerned with the life of Riverside from the 1970s to the present it does not examine the history of the community prior to this time at length. However, the first 30 years of Riverside's life had a profound influence on the shape and culture of the community, and its founding principles remain an intrinsic part of Riverside's philosophy, objectives, and organisational structures. To understand the community in the present it is necessary to consider it in the context of the past.

This chapter introduces the community with a brief overview of its history and describes the community as it was at the time of this research. Part two identifies and discusses key changes the community has experienced throughout its long life, including the dropping of the Christian requirement for membership, relinquishing the requirement that members donate their assets to the community, changes in income sources and the implications of a push to become organic, and the increased presence of tenants in the community. Part three discusses the implications of these changes for the future of Riverside.

Part One: Introduction

Overview

Riverside Community is situated between the inland and coastal highways that link Nelson and Motueka in the Tasman District of the South Island of New Zealand. Riverside is remarkable, not only because of its longevity, but because the community has consistently supported itself from its own efforts for its entire 70 years. The community was founded in 1941 by a group of Christian pacifists, and while the requirement that members be practicing Christians was dropped in the early 1970s, the community's Statement of Intent (1990)⁹⁷ expresses the commitment of members to "live according to all great religions: to do good, to avoid doing harm." The Statement of Intent also includes the core principles that underpin the community's philosophy of equality; members "choose limitation and equality of personal income" and reject "private ownership and private profit." These principles have a fundamental bearing on the very nature of the community, from its struggles to stay viable and to uphold those principles, to the types of people it attracts, and the ways people interact with each other and work together. In 2008 the community published a brief orientation for visitors:

Riverside Community consists of 208 hectares of both flat and rolling hill land, with our main income coming from our dairy farm and export quality pear orchard. We also have the Riverside Garage and Riverside Cafe. Most members work on the property, but a few work "out", and money earned out of the community is added to the pooled income.

Income is divided according to family size, not occupation. All Riverside Community assets are owned by a registered charitable trust, so there are no privately owned houses or cars. The community's general fund helps to meet the basic needs such as health care dental care, and electricity, while other needs are subsidised, like education, and travel costs.

We see our way of life as our main contribution to peace making. We are working to create a society based on equality, cooperation and sharing as opposed to exploitation and domination.

⁹⁷ See Appendix D

In 2010 Riverside had reached a challenging point in its history. Membership had fallen steadily over the previous fifteen years, and in 2009 it was down to twenty-one from a comfortable level of between thirty and forty.⁹⁸ Of those twenty-one, three were elderly, and of the rest, the majority were in their mid to late fifties. The decline in membership, along with the phasing out of a commercial apple orchard in the 1990s, which had been a primary income generator, contributed to a drop in economic revenue for the community. This, along with a lack of members with specialised skills needed for some of their business enterprises, made it necessary to employ outsiders, thus reducing their profitability. Consequently those businesses have struggled to generate enough income to remain viable.

As a consequence of the decreased membership, around half of Riverside houses in 2010 were being rented to non-members, creating a new social dynamic within the community. Members were engaged in ongoing discussions about how they might attract new recruits (particularly younger ones), as well as how they might reverse the present situation of running at a deficit. This situation has been developing for many years. In 1996, Bill Metcalf referred to Riverside's poor recruitment being a serious problem, speculating that along with several other long-lived communities, it "may have just sort of run out of steam. They have an ageing and ... decreasing membership, and their original *raison d'être* seems to have evaporated to some extent" (Metcalf 1996, p. 190).

A brief history

Although the group who established Riverside Community formed before 1941, the first formal business meetings were held that year and it is largely considered to be the date when the community officially began (Rain, 1991, p. 12, Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 102). An early member, Courtenay Archer, recalled that the first meeting "gave some form to what had been an informal living and working

⁹⁸ 'comfortable' reflects the assertions by three of my informants that it takes this many members to manage all the activities and business enterprises in the community with relative ease. The community has 22 dwellings and capability to house 70 people, including children (Barbie, personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

arrangement” (quoted in Rain, 1991, p. 17).⁹⁹ The land was initially owned by Hubert Holdaway, a Methodist with strong pacifist beliefs. Riverside came about “largely at his instigation. He brought together a number of mostly local Methodists who shared his views about war, and who were willing to commit themselves to an experiment in Christian community” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 102). Members were required to,

... belong to a denomination recognised by the World Council of Churches. Most were in fact Methodists and a Methodist church was eventually built on the property. Members were also expected to be pacifists and members of the New Zealand Christian Pacifist Society” (*ibid.*).

Throughout World War II a number of the community’s men were incarcerated in detention camps for extended periods for their stance as conscientious objectors.

Despite their non-conformist approach and marked differences from mainstream New Zealand society during the 1940s and 1950s, the early community was conservative. Gender roles followed traditional lines where women were “defined first as wives and mothers” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 103), and men were responsible for farming and orcharding and made many of the decisions. Divorced people were not considered suitable to become members. Sargent also points out that despite the traditional division of labour:

The simple picture of community women as wives and mothers in a patriarchal setting was, while true, much more complex. From its origins, Riverside women were active well beyond their traditional roles and it is also worth remembering that at the very beginning many of the men were imprisoned for long periods and the survival of the community depended on the women (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 103).

Those non-traditional roles included the charitable works Riverside women were actively engaged in, including “social outreach ... giving accommodation and work to alcoholics, ex-prisoners, youths of probation, and also for protest and witnessing against injustices ... in the wider society” (Rain, 1991, p. 23). They also took in wards of the state, and others who needed a place to rehabilitate. An early member reflected that those early years were about “a frugal life of service and sharing,

⁹⁹ According to Sargisson & Sargent: “Although there is some disagreement on the precise dates, 1941 is the most commonly accepted date for the founding of Riverside” (2004, p. 102).

having everything in common ... very much the old Calvinistic work ethic” (John Woodley, quoted in Rain, 1991, p. 20).

The community went through a major readjustment when the men returned to the community after being released from detention camps after WW2 ended. Rain refers to a gathering in 1946 of the community, in which members reinforced their purpose, including their commitment to pacifism and the Christian faith. At that time they also resolved to hold daily early morning devotional meetings, and agreed that each family would receive a weekly allowance. Over the next decade the community expanded its land holdings and by 1950, membership had reached 20 members, with children comprising over half the population (Rain, 1991, p. 24). Community members had shared the experience of both Depression and war. They also shared a sense of outsider-hood that resulted from their collective commitment to pacifism which, during the war years attracted considerable hostility from the greater New Zealand populace. Marj and Merv Browne joined Riverside in 1949. Merv had spent the war years in detention camps. Marj wrote:

A legacy of the war years was the “we/they” syndrome. For at least five years, a hostile society had banished, ostracised and tried to shame pacifists into submission. Riverside, with its weird collection of non-conformists must have seen particularly threatening and in 1949 it was growing from strength to strength (Browne, 1987).

Rain describes the shared experience of detention camps and commitment to pacifism as a “unifying source” (Rain, 1991, p. 24) amongst the men. A visiting man who had not shared this experience expressed a sense of exclusion when he came to Riverside, referring to “the strong bonds which were apparent among those who shared the detention camp/ jail incarceration” (*ibid.*). Following their return, houses were built collectively by the community, many from rammed earth as the clay soil that was abundant and available on site provided raw material, enabling houses to be built cheaply. Dwellings were functional and modest, designed by a committee of members in consultation with the family that it was built for. “From 1946 until 1962 the community was continually building – houses, packing shed, workshop, church” (Rain, 1991, p. 31).

In 1953 the community formed the Riverside Trust Board. Previously it had operated as a trading company with shares held by community members, but “this form of organisation was very close to capitalism – something that Riverside was trying to escape from” (Rain, 1991, p. 35). Its main purposes were the promotion of religion, education, “in particular moral and ethical education and education on economic principles and agricultural science and instruction in agriculture, handicrafts and manual industries [and relief of] indigence and infirmity, physical and mental” (*ibid.*).

Meetings and decision-making

Riverside meetings, with their emphasis on the cooperative nature of running the community, always promoted the rights of all members to speak, though “‘management’ was a male affair” (Rain, 1991, 39). While there were first monthly, then weekly meetings, over the years day to day decisions were generally made around the daily devotional meetings. These early morning meetings were not always well attended. The women, particularly, being responsible for domestic duties, mostly had young children to attend to at that time of day. However, the devotional meetings persisted up until the mid 1970s.

Business meetings were often difficult, with members recalling that members were “often divided about our aims and objectives” (Marj Browne, cited in Rain 1991, p. 39), and that they were “very exhausting and troubling at times” (Hannah Gamlen, *ibid.*). While for many years Hubert Holdaway and Barry Barrington - “articulate men with strong ideas” (Rain, 1991, p 46) - frequently dominated discussion, the community always resisted the notion of leaders. Holdaway, however, was “a born teacher and he led from the front. ... He set the tone and maintained the standard hour after hour” (Merv Browne, quoted in Browne, 1987). Marj Browne referred to the principle of shared decision-making frequently motivating discussion more than a particular issue itself (in Rain, 1991, p. 46). Another former member (resident from 1955 – 1961) expressed concern about “the conduct of our meetings; the vehemence and sometimes bitterness of our discussions; what would appear to be disharmonious personal relationships; the lack of agreement on some fundamental principles of community etc” (Leo Ball,

cited in Rain, 1991, p. 58). Ball was also critical of the community emphasis on agricultural work, saying “some, with all the goodwill in the world, are physically and temperamentally unsuited to it” (*ibid*). Despite these tensions, the 1950 and 1960s were stable years, with a permanent core population remaining stable and managing to reduce the community’s debts. The commercial orchards were developed and provided a good income for the community. However, few people joined the community during the 1960s and there was a slow decline in membership, although there were eight associate members during this time.¹⁰⁰

Pressure on women

Despite the traditional gender roles, Riverside women were vociferous and actively involved in outside activities as well as within Riverside. The Riverside Women’s Community Group “made a significant contribution to the Nelson branch of the NCW [National Council of Women]” (Browne, 1987), presenting remits against nuclear testing, the sending of troops to Vietnam, and participating in debates about abortion. Within Riverside they expressed their concerns about the inequality of labour roles and the different expectations of men and women’s positions within the community. One member observed that “when the men needed help they needed only to ask and help was available. A woman, however, was expected to cope no matter what” (Nancy Willetts, cited in Rain, 1991, p. 55). Nancy Willetts referred to a further burden that was placed on women who were expected to host “no-hoppers”¹⁰¹ (*ibid.*) when they were already struggling to meet their family’s needs and community obligations. Hubert Holdaway considered this to be “a heretical view” (*ibid*). Nancy believed “he would have been more accurate to call my ideas “feminist”” (*ibid.*). Marj Browne recalled that

The real pressure on facilities, and on the energy of members, were all those lonely people who came and went in a never-ending procession of need. With few exceptions, Community families took their turn in providing meals for these single people. ... Their needs were complex and they were often very demanding, irrational men and women (1987).

¹⁰⁰ According to Rain, the main difference between associate and full membership is that associates kept their assets, including private cars. They did not attend community meetings either. Associate membership was dropped as it was deemed “unworkable, giving rise to resentments and misunderstandings” (1991, p. 76).

¹⁰¹ Willetts was referring to outsiders such as alcoholics, ex-prisoners, and people on probation or with other needs that the community agreed to support as part of their outreach programme.

Marj also remembered “the feeling of guilt. I found it so hard to be both a ‘good’ mother and a ‘good’ Community member” (*ibid.*). Marj and Merv Browne left Riverside in 1970, after 22 years of membership. Their departure came not long after “three long-term permanent members died, and each of them left a considerable gap in Community” (Browne, 1987, p. 34). This included founding member Hubert Holdaway. For some time before they left, the Brownes had campaigned for changes to be made enabling more flexibility for permanent members, including “full membership of short-term duration” (1987, p. 38), and before their departure they were actively involved in evaluative discussions about the community’s direction. These discussions included reflection about the changes in women’s roles in the wider society during the 1960s.

The new generation of the 1970s

The Browne’s departure from Riverside coincided with what Marj described as

... the era of the “flower people”, the gypsy groups who might arrive unannounced with all their uncommunicative children and worldly possessions drawn by horse and cart. Our sort of Community, geared to its daily work routine and its annual profit margin, was unlikely to suit their chosen simple lifestyle. Maybe it did work in practice. We were not there to see, and for the moment we had no regrets about turning our backs on this strangely fashionable “Community Cult” (1987, p. 40).

The ‘era of the flower people’ had a profound and lasting impact on Riverside Community, and their influx into the community completely altered the culture and identity of the place. Phillip Vincent was one of that generation and has lived at Riverside since the early 1970s. He recalled the community when he first arrived:

I came here in my early twenties, in the seventies, with a whole lot of other young people. I was married, had two children. Had been living in Wellington, and Yvonne, my then wife - she grew up here. All our friends were moving out of the city and getting bits of land and moving to the country. ... A lot of the younger people who came [to Riverside] were of a similar inclination ... enough to make a social group. It was interesting times – exciting times, really. ... The late seventies and eighties were really the flowering of Riverside I’d say, in terms of number of people here, and affluence. We had money to give away in those years. Orchardring was full on, the farm was improving rapidly. We

had boysenberry crops, apple export crops which earned a lot of money. And farm subsidies were still in place. The farming sector was very buoyant in the eighties (personal communication, 11 December, 2009).

Phillip believes that “when the economic strains began, the community membership dropped” (*ibid.*). Towards the end of the 1980s farming profitability fell, exacerbated by the Government’s termination of farm subsidies. Phillip recalled the effect this had on Riverside: “It quickly changed after subsidies were dropped [in the] late eighties, early nineties. And there was a kind of mini-recession in the farming sector. Riverside was affected quite badly by that. We felt suddenly quite poor, and it hasn’t really picked up since” (*ibid.*).

Part Two: Key Changes

The dropping of the Christian requirement in the early 1970s

Sargisson and Sargent refer to the community’s decision in the early 1970s to drop the requirement that all members be practicing Christians as “the single most important issue in Riverside’s history” (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 103), and believe the changes that it heralded were “revolutionary” (*ibid.*) because “the people who joined in the 1960s and 1970s ... gradually took over the community, eliminating the Christian character, [and] in the process, founding and early members either left the community altogether or were marginalised within it” (*ibid.*).

By the mid 1960s the community had begun to acknowledge that membership was declining, and existing members were ageing. Colin Cole was born at Riverside and in 2009 had spent most of his 63 years there.¹⁰² He believes that the membership crisis confronting Riverside in 2009 had a number of parallels to the one it experienced in the late 1960s, when his father was the same age as Colin was then:

Riverside had been going for nearly 30 years ... and it had always been expected that ... the Church would provide a pool of new recruits ... but

¹⁰² Several generations of the Cole family are well represented in the community, with two adult children from that family recently returning to the community with their own families, to become provisional members.

that wasn't happening. ... Riverside at that time was an ageing population and needed to rejuvenate itself and it wasn't going to happen if they held onto that requirement that members should be practicing Christians (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

Sally Lang, a former member said:

The main purpose [behind dropping the Christian requirement] at this point was to change and survive. ... The older members were fighting hard to hold onto their original belief in what they had established, and yet knowing in their own hearts that they needed to change and adapt to new ideas and attitudes in order to breathe new life into their old dreams (cited in Rain, 1991, p. 91).

Colin believes it was much more obvious to members at that time than the present what they needed to do in order to boost membership, because "in the seventies the new people coming in didn't want to be Christians. There was a fair bit of anti-church" (personal communication, 27 February, 2009). In 2009, however, this was no longer an issue, and Colin believes "it's not so clear what we need to do [to address the decline in membership]" (*ibid.*).

The surge in membership that occurred subsequent to the dropping of the Christian requirement was unprecedented, and reflects the extent of the interest and enthusiasm for communal living that was prevalent through the 1970s and 1980s in New Zealand. In the first 30 years, 77 people joined the community. In a nine year period from 1971 to 1980, 81 people joined. However, only 29 of them stayed for more than three years, and by 1991, only nine of them remained (Rain, 1991, p. 116). In 1971 alone, seven new members became either probationary or associate members (Rain, 1991, p. 91), which was a new experience for Riverside. Barry Barrington, a long-time member wrote at the time "we have an exciting new group pushing in – very likeable and enthusiastic folk, but wanting a rather different set-up and approach" (cited in Rain, 1991, p. 91). The different approach included a rejection of the community's "fixed pattern of work" (*ibid.*) which included a 44 hour working week. In describing the new wave of members that joined during this period, Colin said "I suppose you could call them the hippie generation. That was when other communities ... were founded. And to a very large extent, we've drawn on that social movement for our membership ever since" (personal communication, 27 February, 2009). The 'hippie generation' had markedly

different attitudes, behaviours and beliefs to the conservative long-term Riversiders. Many were caught up in the excitement of the times, the newness of the movement, and had unrealistic ideas of what community living was all about. From Sally Lang's perspective:

It seemed to me for awhile that everyone had a different idea of what the Community should be. For a few years in the early seventies people came and went in rapid succession, each looking for some poorly defined goal of community living with most not really being sure of what it was they were looking for (cited in Rain, 1991, p. 91).

The new generation that inundated Riverside completely altered the character of the community. It changed from a conservative community with a strong Methodist tradition, including traditional gender roles and where "parsimony was a way of life" (Marj Browne, personal communication, 11 May, 2010), to one where nude sunbathing, marijuana use, and single mothers were just some of the challenges confronting the existing long term community members, for whom "understandings and values all had to be reappraised" (Rain, 1991, p. 96). Further challenges were associated with divergent principles to do with environmental practices that the new members brought with them, most significantly, a desire to farm organically. The prevalence of 'new age' spiritual beliefs that diverged from the traditional religious practices and beliefs further shook the ethos that had been intrinsic to the existing community. These differences produced, as Sargisson and Sargent noted, "Riverside's most fundamental crisis and changed the nature of the community, presumably forever" (2004, p. 101). Although the community dropped its requirement that members must be practicing Christians, they retained the pacifist ideals that were at the heart of the original founding group's principles, and which remain an important aspect of the community's mission statement.

Change from a strong body of young members to an ageing membership

30 years on, the alternative lifestyle generation are now, as Colin pointed out, approaching retirement age themselves. He observed that Riverside "is getting too top-heavy, we're too old" (personal communication, 27 February, 2009), and that while there were a few younger members, there were not enough. Most of the

people who have expressed interest in joining Riverside in recent years continue to be from the alternative lifestyle generation. Klaus and Verena, for example, joined in 2005, after living at Renaissance Community for nearly twenty-five years.

While they brought with them experience and commitment to living in community, they did not bring assets or accumulated wealth. Nor did they have a means of generating income independently. The cost of supporting each member was around \$25,000 annually, and “for a member to make enough money ... from their work on Riverside, is quite hard, it seems, at the moment” (Barbie, personal communication, 27 February, 2009). Colin explained that while they want more members, “the dilemma is how to support them. We can’t keep accepting members without increasing our [income] otherwise it just means a smaller slice of the cake for everyone and a lot of people feel their slice is small enough as it is” (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

Dropping of requirement that new members relinquish their assets

In the early decades of Riverside’s history, when a person became a member it was mandatory that they donated all their assets to the community. An intrinsic aspect of this expectation was the assumption that membership was for life. It also reflected the community’s philosophy of equality in all things, including the distribution of wealth. Marj Browne campaigned for this requirement to be changed in the years she lived at Riverside, because she saw it as restrictive and creating an obstacle for recruiting members who would otherwise be interested in joining. She wrote:

I believe that if we evolved a scheme for short term membership we would encourage some very interesting people to Community, and could dispense with much of the hired labour which is a real weakness in the promotion of Community ideals (Browne, 1987).

Rain referred to a number of situations where couples and individuals interested in joining the community ultimately declined to become members because they were not prepared to relinquish their assets. Several stated that because they did not necessarily see membership as a permanent thing, the requirement that they donate all their assets to the community stopped them joining. Unsurprisingly, those without assets found it easier to join. Barbie Cole was one, and freely admits that

“I had nothing, so it was easy for me to come in” (personal communication, 27 February, 2009). She acknowledged that “people who had assets and had worked really hard [to] accumulate those assets ... found it really hard to give up what they had earned the hard way” (*ibid.*). Rain also makes the point that people who have joined Riverside have tended to be those with “very few capital assets, because the people attracted to Riverside have not been those who value material possessions highly, and have been mainly not in professional or highly-paid jobs before they joined” (1991, p.169). This is understandable given the core principles that reject private property and a capitalistic economic model. It was eventually acknowledged that the requirement for members to surrender their assets to the community was an impediment to attracting new members with expertise. The decision was made that new members could retain their assets, with the proviso that for the duration of their membership those assets would remain frozen and any interest or income from the investment of them was to be given to Riverside.

Changes in income generation

Until the 1990s the community derived most of its income from dairying and commercial apple orchards, but the orchard enterprise was phased out in the early 1990s, partly in response to a poor return on apples, and the expense of paying wages to the necessary seasonal labour. As well as this, a division between members within the community about the use of chemical sprays vs. an organic approach to orcharding meant several members did not support the commercial venture. In 2009/2010, the dairy farm and the export (organic) pear orchard were the only community enterprises that were operating profitably. One explanation for the poor performance of businesses put forward by members was the cost of paying outsiders to operate them. The mechanic business, previously operated by members, was contracted out, and the cafe employed a chef and other staff, as the community did not have members with the necessary skills, or the numbers to fully staff them from its membership pool. They also employed an accountant to manage financial affairs. A new community centre, built on the site of the original church which burnt down in 2001, is hired to the public for functions. Income is also drawn from the renting of houses.

Because of this situation, the most urgent issue affecting the community at the time of this research was a financial one. The dairy farm was the primary income-earner for the community. Riverside's first economic base had been the apple orchard; it was the primary source of income from the 1950s until the early 1990s. The disagreement within the community about organic versus commercial methods of agricultural practice produced prolonged debate (Rain, 1991, 132 – 133; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, 104). Because of the community's dependence on orcharding as its main source of income, many of the older members were concerned about risks associated with abandoning the established practices, and doubtful that an organic approach would be successful. Rob managed the apple orchard for several years during the 1980s, in spite of his own ideological conflict with Riverside's ethos of commercial orcharding at that time. He said:

It wasn't organic, and that was something I struggled with. ... There was a real clash of cultures within Riverside around how it made its money, which was commercial orcharding, which in those days was even more chemically dependent [than it is now] (personal communication, 28 January, 2009).

Rob eventually left the community, and the orchard was left without a manager. However, it was not only the organic issue that precipitated the phasing out of the apple orchards. Barbie recalled that:

With the orchards several things happened: we didn't have a member who could manage it so we had to employ a manager. ... Then we weren't being paid so much for our apples, our membership was down so we had to [employ more people to pick the fruit]... We lost money for quite a long time, and then we pulled [the orchards] out (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

Although the small organic pear orchard produces a modest profit, it does not generate anywhere near enough to boost the community finances. The Riverside café, which has existed for several years, was also operating at a loss at the time of this research, and the community had not finished paying off loans they took to establish that business or the rebuilding of the community centre. Reasons given for the poor return from the café were the costs associated with employing a chef

and waiting staff, a recent proliferation of new cafes in the region, and a drop in passing traffic.¹⁰³

Riverside remains asset rich, and cash poor. While its land holdings are extensive, and there is considerable discussion in community meetings about different enterprises they might develop, for a community that has always based its economy on agriculture, the possibilities to develop new enterprises is daunting.

Colin points out:

It's no longer easy to make a living from farming and horticulture. ... We've got a good strong land base ... but if we were to convert say 30 or 40 hectares of land to orcharding or growing grapes or something ... you're talking 50 or 60 thousand [dollars] a hectare. ... We're not going to take on a debt like that (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

Change to having non-members resident in the community as tenants.

A number of younger people live at Riverside, but they have the status of tenants rather than members or probationary members. They rent the houses that became vacant as membership dropped. Their contribution to the community is primarily a financial one, as there is no obligation that they take any responsibility for community involvement or affairs. While some tenants are involved in community affairs, it remains purely voluntary. It is unsurprising that tenants are not interested in becoming members, given they are able to enjoy the benefits of living in the community, while retaining financial and physical independence and are not obliged to contribute labour to community enterprises, or to participate in the meeting and decision-making processes. Their presence benefits the community; as well as providing much-needed income, several are young parents and bring a new generation of children into the community. However, the effects on this large sub-group on the committed long-term community is of concern to some members, who feel it creates uncertainty about the benefits of membership over tenancy. A discussion paper circulated amongst members (undated) expressed concern that

¹⁰³ The coastal highway developed during the early 2000s to become the main route between Nelson and Motueka resulted in a sharp decrease in traffic using the Moutere Highway that passes Riverside.

“tenancy is divisive and ... is a distraction from our goals of being a unified group working together.” The paper proposed that the community “give notice to tenants to vacate as we want our houses for membership. We will then have empty houses in an environment where housing is a very attractive option, but only available with membership” (*ibid.*). Sylvia and her partner were probationary members in 2009. She believed that some members felt “at a disadvantage because they say [to tenants] “you have all the benefits of this place but you don’t have the responsibility for running it” (personal communication, 2 March, 2009).

Sandra is a long-established member:

In the 1970s, our generation - the alternative lifestylers - flooded in. A lot of the houses were built in that era. They all filled up with people. Then slowly that movement drifted away, as it did in most communities, and we were left with houses with not enough members to fill them, and we’ve drifted into tenancy. ... It totally changes the dynamics of the community. ... [It left us with] less people to work the place, less people who are a cohesive group (personal communication, 2 March, 2009).

Other members are not so concerned about the difference between membership and non-membership. Phillip considers that:

It’s rather artificial to be ... kind of exclusive about who’s a member and who’s a non-member. ... A lot of non-members make a big contribution. Even the term ‘non-member’ is rather disparaging. I want it to be more inclusive. But some of the old-time members felt really uncomfortable with non-members being included (personal communication, 11 December, 2009).

After a year at Riverside, Sylvia and her partner began to question the benefits of their probationary membership status over being tenants:

Mathew said to me recently that with all the things he’s learning about Riverside ... it’s a great place to be a tenant and not so great to be a member. ... In fact it would be quite nice to hand over a rent cheque every week and sit back and enjoy the place (Sylvia, personal communication, 2 March, 2009).

In 2010 Sylvia and Mathew decided to do just that. They put a hold on their application for membership and decided to take time out by living in Riverside as tenants rather than probationary members. After a few months of this they “felt so much better that it was clear we were much happier not being members, and we wrote to the meetings saying thanks, and could we continue renting until March when we would find somewhere else to live” (Sylvia, personal communication, 26

January 2011). One of the things Sylvia found attractive about relinquishing probationary membership status was that she was no longer required to participate in the community meetings which she found arduous and difficult. She explained:

I'm an action-orientated person and being thwarted by other people not being able to compromise or come to a common solution feels like a terrible waste of my energy. ... It's demoralising, because if I see something that I think needs to be fixed, I want to go and fix it (personal communication, 2 March, 2010).¹⁰⁴

Early in 2010 Sylvia and her family left Riverside and bought their own property in the nearby town of Motueka.

Reduced community meals and events

In 2003, the community centre at Riverside burnt down. The building complex included the church, community centre, kitchen and ablution wing. It had been the place where members met, shared community meals, socialised and held their meetings. Riverside had consistently shared a meal on Saturday nights, as well as less regular meals during the week, depending on the willingness of volunteers to prepare them. The community borrowed money to rebuild the complex, and during the rebuilding period members occasionally held pot luck dinners in their own houses (and continued to do so after the new complex was built). The new building - the Riverside Cultural Centre, is multi-purpose. As well as containing facilities for the community, it is hired out to the public as a function and conference centre, as a way to generate income. Consequently, Saturday night dinners are no longer a regular community event as the hall is often unavailable then. At the time of this research the community had not reinstated regular community meals. The general reluctance of members to return to regular dinners reflects the decline in regular community meals in other communities. Colin:

When the hall burnt down ... the kitchen was out of action for nearly two years, and we've never been able to pick it up in the same way as we did before. ... I have to say it was the same people doing the cooking and they just got tired (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Approaches to meeting processes and decision-making are discussed in Chapter 8 in the context of other communities.

The decline in community meals also reflects the drop in numbers. Sandra recalled that when she first came to Riverside there were a lot more community meals and activities: “38 people can do a lot more ... there are more people to share the workload” (personal communication, 2 March, 2009).

Part Three: Discussion

Work and income

When I visited Riverside in 2009, Sylvia had been resident for five months with her partner and young child as provisional members. At that time they were unusual in terms of the usual demographic of prospective members; they were young with a professional background. Sylvia had previously worked in the corporate sector and she and Mathew were in the process of establishing a proof reading business. Because of the financial situation at Riverside, they became the first prospective members who were asked to contribute financially to the cost of supporting them. Sylvia explained that:

When Mathew and I came here there was a new precedent set. ... We were asked to contribute \$20,000 [annually] from outside the community towards the cost of supporting us here. ... I think it's fair enough, but then, if it was really fair I think everyone in the community should be asked to do that (personal communication, 2 March, 2009).

Some of the discussion amongst members was around the notion that members may need to start working outside of Riverside to generate income for the community. Colin felt this was an obvious and inevitable direction that they would need to take in the near future, but there was a general reluctance to take this step. Sylvia:

A few weeks ago I heard that there were a lot of [apple] picking jobs going in the area. I took a list [of jobs] to the meeting ... and I said here are some numbers – if a bunch of us went out and picked apples we could offset some of the downturn in Fonterra payouts.¹⁰⁵ [But] people have lots of little bitsy commitments around that make it hard for them to have another job (personal communication, 2 March 2009).

¹⁰⁵ Fonterra is a dominant dairy company in New Zealand.

The 'bitsy commitments' involve the numerous areas of responsibility that members maintain in the day to day operation of the community and make working outside the community problematic. Members point out that living in a community is an occupation in itself. Internal commitments do not necessarily generate income, but are intrinsic to the continued support and wellbeing of the community. They include such things as maintaining the community gardens and grounds, supervising and working with WOOFers, caring for young children and elderly members, and holding office for various voluntary community areas of responsibility. There is a strongly held view amongst members that a fundamental aspect of Riverside's success is the fact that income is generated from within Riverside.¹⁰⁶ Colin:

It's not just *pooling* income ... we've *created* income together. Being self-supporting, not relying on social welfare systems keeping us afloat. ... It's one of the major things that has made us unique and enabled us to survive for 70 years. And the fear is that if we change our economic structure things will fritter away, crumble away, and we'll lose [our] identity and uniqueness and become just a bunch of people living in a nice place doing their own thing, which has really happened to most of the other communities (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

Verena believes that protection of the shared income ethos is paramount:

If we compromised that we would lose what Riverside is about... People would just run out and do their own thing. ... This way we are forced to work together. ... I think that people who come here decide they want to live like this. It's a kind of security and comfort... getting taken care of (personal communication, 28 February, 2009).

For Barbie, pooling income "is one of our main bases. It makes us who we are. We *have* to work together to make it work" (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

A problematic aspect of income sharing is a tendency for some members to feel less personal responsibility towards generating income, in contrast to those in other communities who are responsible for supporting themselves. At Riverside where individuals are responsible for monitoring and organising their own

¹⁰⁶ Except for the old age pension.

workday, it is easy for a casual and inefficient attitude to working to develop. Rob recalled that in the years he lived at Riverside:

For Riversiders to actually work ... and not get the income for it, they feel like they don't have to put the effort into it because it's not a proper job. In the orchard at times ... I felt we had to set an example to paid workers. ... It's easy in the Riverside structure to just be slack. If I've got a bit of a sniffle or I'm not feeling too good I don't ... have to take responsibility for [going to work] because I'm part of a group (personal communication, 28 January, 2009).

Sylvia suggested that the onus on being part of a team rather than being personally responsible for generating income meant that people who have a tenacious or entrepreneurial attitude to work and earning money are not likely to be attracted to a community which pools all its income:

A lot of people who are not interested in joining communities have said to us what would ever motivate anyone to get ahead by living in community?... and [they're] absolutely right ... I think there are probably some people here at Riverside - the enterprises they're involved in, they're shielded from the effects of that. So there's not a lot of motivation to improve [their performance]. ... From a new person's perspective I don't see much of the fire that drives business people to achieve really well (personal communication, 2 March, 2009).

The notion of 'getting ahead' is, of course, intrinsic to a capitalist economic model, and in a sense runs counter to the ideology of Riverside. However, as the community is dependent on all its members generating income, it is also dependent on its members working effectively and operating profitable business ventures to keep the community afloat. Phillip pointed out that

[i]f you've got aspirations to get more and more and sort of climb the ladder of acquisition of material goods then you wouldn't want to be here. And in a lot of ways I think it's probably true of all socialist systems – it's a bit dampening on individual enterprise and initiative (personal communication, 11 December, 2009).

There is the risk that living and working with the same people for a long time can also dampen enthusiasm and drive. When Barbie worked outside of the community at the Steiner School in Motueka, she found the experience stimulating:

It was challenging and new, and I got to meet lots of new people. ... They were really wonderful to be with - really alive. I got the feeling that

those people were more alive than us at Riverside (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

The main changes identified here reflect a cyclical element, both in terms of a generational turnover of membership as well as wider trends in fluctuating farming and horticultural practices and profitability. Riverside, as an organisation, is vulnerable to the same financial uncertainties as the wider economy, but it is less insulated from the effects of a downturn in the farming sector. This in turn impacts on the prosperity of the community and thus the sorts of people who are attracted to living there. The core of Riverside members are ageing and tend not to be developing new skills or entrepreneurial ideas to generate income from new sources. The emphasis for much of the community's life on agricultural enterprises has contributed to the creation of a workforce that has not diversified or developed entrepreneurial skills to remain innovative. Short of sending members outside the community to work for wages in the horticultural sector, it would seem that they are not in a strong position to generate more income at this time.

Having tenants and members in the community provides welcome income, but creates a degree of ambiguity about the benefits of membership. If a person can enjoy living at Riverside without sacrificing their autonomy or income, then the benefits of membership would need to be quite clear in order to attract people who will commit to being members.

Despite the profound change that Riverside experienced in the 1970s with the influx of the alternative lifestyle generation, the original ideology and legacy of the community's early years has had a profound impact on the way the community has developed and the problems it faces in the present. The emphasis on equality in all things including income has always generated philosophical discussion and debate amongst members. It has also had the effect of making the community attractive to a smaller pool of potential new recruits. Those who do express interest in becoming members are generally motivated by similar ideological principles rather than more individualistic or opportunistic reasons.

Chapter Eight: Comparisons

Tomorrow will be the same, but not as this is.
(Title of painting by Colin McCahon, 1958-59).

This chapter identifies common themes that have emerged from this study, and the generalisations that can be drawn from them. The problematic nature of making generalisations about intentional communities generally, as well as specifically is discussed. The cyclical nature of change in long-lived communities is also discussed and examples of the way history tends to repeat itself are given. Common themes include the tensions between individualism and collectivism, the tendency for communities to become less communal over time, obstacles to attracting new recruits, and contrasting motivations for joining and remaining in communities. This is followed by a comparison of the contrasting approaches to decision-making and planning in Riverside and Tui communities, to demonstrate how meeting processes can influence the vitality and dynamism of a community.

Generalisations

In the process of drawing comparisons and making generalisations I acknowledge Sargisson and Sargent's point that "communities are, in some respects, very much alike, so that comparison is possible, but ... they [also] differ profoundly, so that generalisations have to be made with great care" (2004, p. 160). I also concur that generalisations are not necessarily universally applicable; existing studies of intentional communities mostly focus on communities in the UK, US or Israel, and there are "significant national differences, at least between the New Zealand and the US" (*ibid.*). I suggest significant national differences encompass these areas; national character, historical influences, political and economic differences, population size, and geographical location in the world. National differences are discernable in characteristics that are linked to cultural identity. This was discussed in the Tui chapter in reference to German and New Zealand characteristics, along with Colin James' observations about New Zealand's national character being shaped by historical influences (refer Chapter 2). National

differences can be discerned in attitudes, style (architecture, dress etc), and ways of communicating, organisation, and expectations. In a general sense, the national character of New Zealanders assumes a casual ‘do-it-yourself’ approach to things, while the German national character suggests a greater degree of formality and adherence to tradition (see Bönisch-Brednich’s (2004) chapter *What it Means to be a Foreigner*). Bönisch-Brednich refers to some New Zealanders finding Germans “rude, blunt, too direct and insensitive” (p. 172) while to some Germans, New Zealanders appear to be “devious, dishonest and superficial” (*ibid.*). She writes: “tact, politeness, euphemism and a virtuoso use of subtle hints ... are the basis of interchanges between people in New Zealand. ... Immigrants, on the other hand, often ... interpret them as a lack of honesty” (*ibid.*). In the context of this research, a German influence in Tui community can be discerned in the community’s approaches to organisation, work, systems of interaction and decision-making, while at Renaissance, casualness towards group organisation and interaction and aspects of a kiwi ‘she’ll be right’ ethos underpinned the founders’ approach and ideology, and continues to predominate.

A further reason for caution when making generalisations is the dynamic and ever changing nature of intentional communities. Patterns that seem particularly relevant or dominant in the present are by no means static; they do not necessarily reflect earlier emphases within a community, or represent times to come. However, despite the variations that exist within and between communities, the examples included in this study demonstrate that change is often cyclical, and that history often repeats itself, so despite their unpredictability, themes and issues tend to re-emerge across time, and patterns can be discerned as a result of this. An example of the unpredictable nature of change arose during the last months that this research was being written up. In reference to Riverside’s declining membership and apparent inability to recruit and retain younger skilled members, early in 2011 seven young people became probationary members - the largest influx of new probationary members at one time since the early 1970s. Further, they have useful occupations that can benefit the community (one is a chef, another is an electrician), as well as young families. Whether or not those new

people persevere to become permanent members remains to be seen,¹⁰⁷ but this situation illustrates the unpredictability of communities, and thus the problematic nature of making generalisations about them. It also illustrates the fact that an apparent decline in membership is not necessarily a permanent situation. Frequently new people arrive to give a community a boost and enable it to revive – either temporarily or for longer periods. I have pointed out the potential for this to occur at Renaissance.

The potential for new people to revitalise a community is also evident in the present situation with Wilderland. In recent years it came close to collapse. Russel, the current general manager, considers that “a continuing thread” (personal communication, 3 November, 2009) still links the old Wilderland and the present one, but acknowledges that it “got quite thin” (*ibid.*). For him, the previous structure of Wilderland reflected a common approach of the 1960s and 1970s. That is,

... a real experimental, let's not be organised, let's see what happens naturally [sort of approach]. I've come into it with the attitude of there's something in that, but there's also something in being organised as well, and you can marry the good parts of both. ... In a sense it's a new community, in a sense it's going back to its original roots (*ibid.*).

The idea that Wilderland can be considered to be a new community draws attention to the distinction drawn earlier in this thesis between continued collective ownership of land and the people that make up a community being two distinctive aspects of survival and longevity. This is returned to later in this chapter.

The Cyclical Nature of Change

The recurrence of themes, both within and across communities, the sense that history repeats itself and the cyclical nature of change emerge from an analysis of these long-lived communities. While the details may differ from community to community, familiar elements recur, demonstrating that communities experience cycles of vitality and decline. Keith's comments about Tui demonstrate this when he said:

¹⁰⁷ One member estimated one in three probationary members perseveres to full membership status.

At the moment I think we're picking up. We're definitely on an 'up' phase. We've been through a phase where we were on the old decline phase of the cycle like so many other [communities] (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Riverside's decline phase has existed for many years and involves an ageing and shrinking membership. More than 30 years ago the community found itself in a similar predicament. When Colin, who grew up at Riverside, returned as a young adult to become a member in the 1970s:

It had been going for nearly 30 years ... and the original members were in their fifties. ... Basically Riverside at that time was an ageing population and needed to rejuvenate itself (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

On a personal as well as collective level old patterns also repeat themselves, as they do in the family life cycle generally. Colin again:

My father was almost at retiring age when I joined. I was 25 and I've been here 35 years, and now I'm at retiring age. ... I've supported Riverside for 35 years and the expectation is that Riverside will support me for the next 30. That's how it worked for my father, and it's worked well for him, and I hope it will do that for me (*ibid.*).

While this pattern of change is applicable across societies and is not peculiar to intentional communities, in a small interdependent rural community such as Riverside, its prosperity depends upon a replacement generation coming through as well as a robust economic base to support the group. This is intensified by the small population size of the community.

At Wilderland, history would seem to have repeated itself for the Hansen family and the two communities they were involved with. The events that evolved after Dan and Edith Hansen transferred ownership of the land to the Wilderland Trust closely paralleled the events that unfolded at Beeville decades earlier, when the Hansen family transferred ownership of that property to a charitable trust, then unresolved conflict polarised the group, produced factions and marginalised the Hansens (Fyfe, 2004; Jones & Baker, 1975). A further example of history repeating itself at Wilderland is evident in the case of one exhausted and overburdened couple who took responsibility for managing the place being replaced by another, who then repeated the same process over the course of two or

three years before also departing. The cycle of commitment and disillusionment is repeated in communities generally, as new people join with great enthusiasm and high ideals then leave within the first few months or years when their expectations of what living communally involves are not met. Zablocki refers to the flow of people in and out of communities being “rapid and fairly unrestricted” (1980, p. 141) with many participants considering the experience to be a temporary rather than long-term commitment from the outset. In exploring reasons why people leave communities, Zablocki identified them as being either ideological or relational (1980, p. 137).¹⁰⁸

For core resident groups, the assimilation of new people can be destabilising while simultaneously being vital for a community’s survival. This is also evident in the comments made by long-established participants in existing communities about newcomers:

Amelie (Renaissance):

[There were] all these new people coming in, but they were at the start and the community wasn’t. They came in with their bright ideas, wanting this, wanting that, and you would think, you know, ‘been there’ (personal communication, 26 March, 2006).

Colin (Riverside):

The challenge is trying to integrate [new people] wanting to reinvent the wheel. ... You’ve got – two approaches – you can say we’ve been there, done that, and give people a picture of what happened in the past, or sometimes you have to say oh well, we’ll do it again (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

Keith (Tui):

The old guard has to hand over in a good way and make space for the young ones to do all the mistakes, try it all again. To stand back and say, mmm, we know it doesn’t work, but ... (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Peter Cock observed that at Moora Moora in Australia,

Socialising new members demands considerable energy. New members often come in with a gung-ho attitude which is terrific for new energy,

¹⁰⁸ Ideological reasons include disillusionment with the community ideology, or a desire to pursue goals elsewhere. Relational include a breakdown in relationships within the community as well as the attraction of others outside the community.

but is also disruptive. Understandably, they have no sense of history and why things are as they are. After 21 years, there is fatigue at having to go over the same issues yet again. The older we become as a community the harder it is for new people to join, as our web of relationships and patterns of community organisation become more established (1995, p. 160).

These examples also demonstrate that integrating new people into long-established communities is challenging regardless of whether clear structures for assimilating them are in place or not. Difficulties in assimilating new members not only reflect differences in age and experience, but also the fact that long-established members need to find a balance between relinquishing control and withdrawing from participating. These examples also demonstrate that a high degree of idealism is often present in newcomers, whereas it would appear to have been replaced with a more pragmatic attitude in long-established members. It is evident in the aspirations of the new resident group at Wilderland, who expressed strongly utopian sentiments in relation to rebuilding that community (referred to in Chapter two in relation to post-utopianism replacing utopian idealism). A key difference between Wilderland and the other communities in this study however, is that the Wilderland group have the advantage of starting afresh together, without having to negotiate or assimilate with existing or established members. At the same time they have the advantage of inheriting an established existing infrastructure which enables them to focus on rebuilding the social aspects of the community. Again, this draws attention to the two distinctive aspects of community – people and place. The place encompasses the land, buildings, history and economic base. The people are new and engaged building a new social structure as though they are a newly formed community. In this sense, they are, and so Wilderland can be described as a new community.

Individualism and collectivism

The communities in this study demonstrate a common trend that is apparent in intentional communities internationally and historically; over time they tend to evolve from a stance of close communal sharing to a focus on independent households and individual pursuits. Kanter referred to a tension involving “two pulls in social life” (1972, p. 148) in 19th century communities. That is, between an

emphasis on the interests of the group (*gemeinschaft*) and an emphasis on self-interest (*gesellschaft*).¹⁰⁹ Kanter found that “[t]he predominant movement of many of the successful nineteenth-century groups was away from a heavy emphasis on community towards the predominance of *gesellschaft*” (*ibid.*). This was evident in a shift in emphasis from production being secondary to the fostering of community relations, to a “transformation into a specialized organisation” (*ibid.*). Kanter gives the example of Amana, a US community which evolved from “a highly value oriented *gemeinschaft* community ... to a business-oriented system, hoping nevertheless to maintain its now secondary spiritual and human concerns” (*ibid.*). Despite the obvious differences between the commune movements of 1840 – 1860 and 1960 – 1970, Kanter identified important similarities:

Social movements surfaced around the same kinds of issues: women, blacks, and even temperance (alcohol then, drugs today). Religious revivalism was at its height in the 1840s and 1850s, serving many of the same expressive, emotive and interpersonal contact functions as the encounter group movement today. Similar dissatisfactions with capitalism were expressed (*ibid.*).

An important difference she identified between religious and secular communes, however, is that “‘doing your own thing’ is a pervasive ethic in many contemporary communes, which places the person’s own growth above concerns for ... the welfare of the community” (1972, p. 167). Tui’s shift to accommodate ‘extended’ and ‘family’ community groups, followed by their resolve to reunite into a single community group once more demonstrates this tension between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*. Their decision to attempt to re-unite as one group reflects a business-oriented attitude: members agreed to contribute a minimum of 3.5 ‘input’ hours a week to community service,¹¹⁰ and to contribute financially

¹⁰⁹ Kanter writes that the concept of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* has at its core, the notion that “it is impossible both to satisfy individual needs and to work towards the collective good” (1972, p. 148). *Gemeinschaft* includes “nonrational, affective, emotional, traditional and expressive components of social action, as in family; *gesellschaft* relations comprise the rational, contractual, instrumental and task-oriented actions, as in a business corporation” (*ibid.*). The originator of these terms was the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies who developed a theory of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (in 1887) to “sketch an evolution from ancient to modern society. ... Tönnies argues that societies of the earlier form are organised around family, village and town. The economy is largely agricultural and political life is local. *Gesellschaft* societies ... are organised at the larger levels of metropolis and nation-state. ... Importantly, Tönnies did not conceive of this evolution ... in unilinear terms. [He] conceived of any society as always to some degree both *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*” (Deflem, 2001).

¹¹⁰ Which can be traded with others.

towards the cost of employing one member to be land manager. A business-oriented approach is also evident in the shift to a user pays system of bulk food purchasing, and entitlement to community-produced food.¹¹¹ In finding a compromise between conflicting desires and need on the part of some members for greater autonomy and independence and others for more community commitment and involvement, the group have attempted to bridge the gap between divergent desires of individuals and the welfare of the community.

Peter Cock points out that humans are social beings. He writes, “We came out of a tribal village heritage [but] we have gone to the other extreme of individualism” (2011). He suggests the main reason behind the move away from close communal societies was a response to the often extreme and oppressive social environment that tribal living generated. He believes that if humanity is going to foster greater collective responsibility for society and the environment, it needs to swing back from the stance of extreme individualism towards a more community orientated and cooperative way of living. While intentional communities aspire to this in the first instance, the tension between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* remains. Cock points out that a basic difference between tribal village living and the present era is that we now have a great deal more choice about our lives. This is evident in Hugh Gardner’s conclusions after studying thirteen 1970s-era American communities. Gardner considered that “in essence, modern communards were always individualists more than communalists” (1978, p. 245) and that communities fared best when they included “conventional American values like private property, the profit motive, and individual self-reliance” (*ibid.*).

In advocating a return to more collective responsibility Cock acknowledges the importance of choice, and points out that it is also important that communards are not confined within a single community. Choice, however, assumes a degree of affluence. A notable difference between Tui and the other communities in this study is the contrasting degrees of economic wealth (and thus choice) that exists amongst its members. For some Tui members a wide range of outside options

¹¹¹ The user pays system reflects trends in the wider New Zealand society. Whereas previously all members contributed the same amount to pay for bulk food staples for the community and then helped themselves as they needed to (thus childless people subsidised families), “now it’s become like a shop – everything’s gone under the umbrella of individual purchases” (Robina, personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

exist, while others are constrained by limited financial means. When Sargisson visited in 2001 she observed that while “there is always some variation within a group ... it was particularly striking at Tui” (2007a, p. 12). She also observed that there appeared to be “little sense of shared ethos amongst the group” (*ibid.*) at that time. Sargisson’s visit coincided with the collective empty nest period the community experienced when the first generation of children left home and soon after her visit the two separate groups in the community were acknowledged. Regardless of this, Robina considers that Tui members have always been too diverse to share a common purpose (personal communication, 25 February, 2009). Inequalities between different members’ economic circumstances and priorities remain. Paradoxically, these differences also contribute to the ongoing dynamism of the community. Given that Sargisson considered Tui to be the best organised and the most vital intentional community of the 50 New Zealand communities that she visited, this diversity of purpose and emphasis amongst members challenges the notion that one of the defining characteristics of intentional communities includes participants sharing a common purpose and vision.

In contrast, the emphasis on egalitarianism at Riverside precludes the issue of economic inequality. Its shared economy not only reflects a long-established precedent of egalitarianism, but members are obliged to work together for the common benefit. Their collective commitment to voluntary poverty reinforces their inter-dependence. In an article entitled *Friends Have All Things in Common: Utopian Property Relations* (2010), Lucy Sargisson explores “utopian practices that challenge dominant property narratives” (p. 22), suggesting that for communities such as Riverside, choosing voluntary poverty means a “commitment to minimal personal possessions, a life without private property, a non-materialist ethos and a re-evaluation of humanity” (2010, p. 26).¹¹² Most significantly, these core ideals emphasise a fundamental ideological difference between Riverside community and the wider society, at the centre of which is a different attitude to material possessions, individualism, and the accumulation of wealth. In this

¹¹² It is important to distinguish between voluntary poverty, and poverty. Poverty assumes deficiency, or not having enough money to take care of basic needs. This is very different to voluntary poverty which emphasises simplicity and a rejection of materialism. ‘Voluntary simplicity’ is often used in the same sense.

respect, Riverside does not demonstrate the tendency of intentional communities to become more mainstream in their practices despite a reduced communality over time.

A practical challenge that Riverside faces in sustaining its shared economy is the community's continued ability to maintain an adequate level of economic prosperity to support its members comfortably. This is particularly challenging in the face of an increasingly materialistic and individualistically orientated wider society. As one long-time member pointed out, it is not only important that members have enough money to live comfortably *within* the community, it is also important to be able to sustain relationships beyond it in the wider community, including having "enough money so your children can hold their own with their contemporaries" (Joy Cole, quoted in Sargisson, 2010, p. 29). The obligation to work within the community and the modest allowance members receive limits individual choice. Verena pointed out that "You can't do some bold new thing because you haven't got the money and you have to think about the community" (personal communication, 28 February, 2009). This, combined with the emphasis on consensus in decision-making has a major impact on the ability of individuals within the community to explore innovative new ideas for generating income, as well as involve themselves in outside activities that might assist both their own, as well as the community's development.

Riverside's shared economy has also been identified by informants as a primary reason for low recruitment levels. However, at a time when they need more members the community is least able to support them financially (evident in the request that Sylvia and her partner contribute financially to the community for their support when they became probationary members). Reduced membership has resulted in the community employing people from outside to sustain their businesses, which in turn reduces profit margins. A further complication arises when potential new members who are looking for an alternative to what they have previously done, express interest in joining:

Many people come here because they want to do something different. That's often a problem. We say why don't you continue doing what you did before [work-wise] and live here? And they say why would I come

here, then? I might as well stay there, because I would have more money (Verena, personal communication, 28 February, 2009).

Riversiders' commitment to the ethos of a shared economy and rejection of private property clearly identifies it as alternative to the mainstream. As Sargisson points out, "property is a powerful idea; it lies close to the heart of global capitalism, informing key paradigms of (individualist) ontology" (2010, p. 23). Sargisson asserts that groups who choose utopian property relations "value co-operation, selflessness, service, surrender and responsibility" (*ibid.*). A somewhat more pragmatic view was expressed by Verena when she said "we're all in it together. ... If the ship goes down we all go down with it" (28 February, 2009). While Riverside's economic structure is acknowledged by its members as a cornerstone of its identity, reinforcing its ideological foundations and ensuring the community remains cooperative, the community in the present struggles to economically support its members. It presents the greatest challenge to Riverside's continued survival as a thriving and dynamic community.

Diminished communal involvement

In 2004 Bill Metcalf wrote that over a 30 year period most alternative communities in Australia had become less communal, radical, and countercultural, and in the process have slowly blended into the larger society (2004, p. 47). As a consequence of this diminished communality, he likens many communities in the present to simply "living in a pleasant neighbourhood" (2004, p. 52). Peter Cock reiterates this when he reflects on changes that his own (Australian) community, Moora Moora, experienced over 21 years:

Some members see Moora Moora as merely a backdrop to their private lives, while others bemoan the lack of community activity and enterprise. Moora Moora is not a commune. Sometimes it is very cooperative, while at other times little different than a friendly rural suburb (1995, p. 160).

Cock's observations about Moora Moora equally apply to Tui community, including the disparity between different members' desires, some of whom prefer more, and others less, communal involvement. He also draws attention to the inconsistent nature of cooperative activity. As Keith noted about Tui:

We haven't had working bees for a while, but I certainly wouldn't bet on them staying away. ... When we did the sewerage scheme there were a lot of working bees. Some people really cry out for it and others don't want to know about it. But if ever there came to be a real need for it then that would coalesce people (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

Metcalf suggests that one of the reasons why communities become less communal is because they fail to live up to their original ideals. This carries the underlying assumption that they were founded with the intention to “make a real contribution to social improvement” (1996, p.187) through closely sharing resources, space, and a collective common purpose. Not only does this reflect the shift from utopian to post-utopian outlooks in long-established participants, but also exposes a paradox. While the idealism that motivated many founding groups included a desire to address social inequalities, and foster a sense of collective endeavour and enterprise, founding members were (and are), frequently headstrong, opinionated and highly individualistic. Cock observed that “rather than being an attack on our culture of capitalism, alternative lifestylers are generally affirming the rightist predominant concern with freedom and individualism, although not defining it so exclusively in materialistic terms” (1985, p. 13). This is evident in Metcalf's observation of “a vague and naïve notion of individual freedom that was often used as an excuse by communards to avoid collective action even when such action might benefit everyone” (2004, p. 89). The notion of individual freedom can mask unwillingness on the part of individuals to compromise, or to sacrifice personal autonomy in the greater interests of the community. This is evident in Renaissance's central emphasis on individual freedom, which assumes people will take collective responsibility for the wellbeing of the community. On reflecting on the beginnings of Renaissance Klaus said:

There were some very ambitious people ... who were quite instrumental in the setup of the community [and] had a vision and very strong personalities ... but they might not have been the people to be communal. ... It seems to me now that it was a bit of a battleground for two of the strong personalities of the early people. ... John was using the label of anarchism to bring as many as possible people onto his side, which was reasonably easy to do ... to talk about that we are all into freedom. ... I think our belief that we were all equal – you know, the idea that we might be anarchists – I don't believe that was really a fact. I think [some people] were mainly concerned that ... authority, even if it was the authority of the group ... might be too much control, and this might

apply to me one day – people might ask *me* what *I* do here (personal communication, 22 April, 2006).

Brown (2002) writes that “ideological movements, such as communitarianism, generally originate with intellectuals [who] often interpret the experience and the particular desires of the general public through their own particular lens” (2002, p. 5). While such people might initiate communal projects,

It is often more an intellectual blueprint than a plan of action. And even when there is a plan of action, that plan is often systemic, seeing general problems and requiring an overall change of the entire society in order to solve the perceived problems but often not paying much attention to the specific problems of a small group of people (*ibid.*).

This is evident in the foundation of the Renaissance Community. The gulf between the idealism underpinning the trust’s purpose and the realities of the unregulated environment it created has never been addressed or overcome. Despite this radical departure from usual approaches to organising groups, in a sense Renaissance can be seen to have blended into the larger society. The social problems that have dogged that community reflect wider societal issues that exist in New Zealand, including a growing underclass and social problems associated with drug and alcohol dependency.

Decentralisation

Another cause for diminished communal involvement is the decentralisation that occurs as houses are built and people become more orientated towards their private spaces. In their early establishment periods all four communities were reliant on shared community facilities. The arrival of separate households and young children contributed to a reduced interest in sharing many of the everyday aspects of domestic life. Interviewees referred to the practicalities of feeding and putting children to bed in the evenings affecting the social dynamics of their communities, particularly the practicalities of sharing an evening meal. Although Tui sustained a daily communal lunch for its first 15 years, they became progressively less well attended as other commitments made the lunch break in the middle of the day less practical for many members. Geographical aspects, including the distance houses are from each other and from the community centre have a further impact. At

Wilderland and Tui communities, the hilly bush-clad topography creates physical barriers between houses. At Renaissance the land is flat and comprises a smaller acreage than the other three communities, but the houses are screened from one another by plantings, and situated round the edges of the property. Their siting reflects the involvement of the builders in community affairs. John's house for example, is sited closest to the main house, while the house Jill and Ray built is furthest away. Jill explained:

I didn't really want to live in the middle of everybody. I just had that sense of wanting my own space. ... I was interested in communal living from the point of view of sharing resources, but not necessarily living in people's pockets, or living *with* people" (personal communication, 21 April, 2006).

At Riverside the close siting of households around a central grass oval where recreational games, concerts and gatherings are held reflects the emphasis on community, and ensures regular and informal contact between members as they go about their daily affairs. Further, the emphasis on working together ensures interaction is more easily sustained without relying on organised gatherings. Clustering of households also makes it easier to supervise children in the evenings, and is more conducive to social encounters between households within the community.

Narrowing of the gap between mainstream and alternative

Metcalf's assertion that long-lived alternative communities have slowly blended into the larger society could also be seen as evidence that the distinctions that once existed between the alternative ideals that communities were founded on in the 1970s and 1980s, and those of the larger society that they are situated within have become less clear over time. Thus, while alternative communities may have slowly blended into the larger society, so too has the larger society adapted and assimilated some of the values of communal groups. This blurring of the differences between mainstream and alternative is particularly evident in more recently established intentional communities.

Eco-communities

Most often referred to as eco-communities, eco-villages, or co-housing initiatives, contemporary eco-communities are the fastest growing area of the alternative living movement in the present (Brignall, 2009; Dawson, 2006; Kozeny, 2003).

¹¹³ The term ‘ecovillage’ began to emerge in the late 1980s, influenced by cohousing movements and an emphasis on sharing of resources, restoring a sense of community, and reducing overall consumption (Dawson, 2006, p. 12). Many new initiatives appear to seek to distance themselves from stereotypical notions of 1970s-era hippies and communes, much as the 1970s communards wanted to distance themselves from open-land communes. Gavin Alder writes of Australian eco-communities in *Return of the Commune* (2007), “the ads might sound like advertising for the latest housing estate, but the New Age communities they feature are a modern twist on the hippie lifestyle” (p. 16). This ‘modern twist’ emphasises “being part of a like-minded community but retaining your personal space” (*ibid.*). Referring to the movement in the UK, Miles Brignall writes that “today, those living in co-housing projects are just as likely to have a conventional job, and occupy their own space as they are to be spending their time growing vegetables or living in a teepee” (2009, p. 6). Brignall also points out that many of the 1970s-era communities that have survived have developed successful business enterprises, such as organic farms or alternative conference centres (*ibid.*).

Further evidence of a blurring between alternative and mainstream values is apparent in changing attitudes towards communal groups on the part of local territorial authorities. Metcalf observes that many Australian local bodies have shifted from a stance of negativity to one of encouragement of rural eco-communities. He suggests this reflects the fact that as ‘developments,’ many new communal ventures take responsibility for roading, water, power requirements and waste management systems (Metcalf, cited in Alder, 2007, p. 16). Further, eco-communities are winning environmental and architectural awards for sustainability and design. Mark Tutton (2010) points out that the use of sustainably sourced timber, solar power, heat recovery systems and high levels of insulation not only

¹¹³ Jonathan Dawson’s text *Ecovillages: New Frontiers for Sustainability* (2006) provides an excellent overview of this movement.

makes them 'green' but can put this form of community building in an exclusive category. In referring to a particular development in the U.K, he writes "this kind of green living doesn't come cheap with new ... homes on the market for up to \$900,000, a far cry from the inclusive ideology behind archetypal hippie collectives" (2010, p. 8). Tutton's description of contemporary eco-communities reads very much like an advertisement in a current lifestyle magazine:

As today's urbanites become more concerned about reducing their carbon footprint, some are finding that modern eco communities offer them a way to live sustainably without foregoing their home comforts (*ibid.*).

These newer community developments demonstrate how the core premise that alternative values are synonymous with a rejection of capitalist values has become increasingly subsumed and incorporated into the dominant paradigm. The new model of alternative living emphasises the core ideals of alternative community living and sustainability while remaining firmly based within an individualist and capitalist economic model. An adjustment of language is part of the appropriation, evident in terms such as 'co-developers' replacing 'property developers.'

This appropriation reflects the present age, which Ulrich Beck refers to as a "risk society" (Adam, Beck, & Loon, 2000). This refers to the simultaneous globalisation of modern institutions, while "everyday life is breaking free from the hold of tradition and custom" (Giddens, 2006, p. 119). Within this risk society, the demarcation between traditional capitalist values and "the activities of groups and agencies operating outside the formal mechanisms of democratic politics, such as ecological, consumer or human rights groups" (Giddens, 2006, p. 121) is not so clear. An example is a 1987 report commissioned by the United Nations – *Our Common Future* - following which, Giddens suggests, "the term 'sustainable development' came to be widely used both by environmentalists and governments" (Giddens, 2006, p. 942). That report pointed out that "the use of the Earth's resources by the present generation was unsustainable" (*ibid.*). 'Sustainable development' was defined as "the use of renewable resources to promote economic growth, the protection of animal species and biodiversity, and the commitment to maintaining clean air, water and land" (*ibid.*). The linking of economic growth with environmentalist concerns demonstrates the way mainstream practices appropriate what were previously seen as alternative or green

politics to incorporate them into the dominant paradigm.¹¹⁴ It illustrates the blurring of the gap between mainstream and alternative perspectives, and reflects Beck's assertion that institutions are breaking free from tradition and custom to become more heterogeneous. For alternative rural communities, environmental sustainability is a central concern. Miller notes that "environmentalism was everywhere in the commune movement, and some communities were specifically devoted to becoming environmental demonstration projects, pointing the world towards a future of lessening the human race's adverse ecological impact on the planet" (1999, p. xxv). The example of the appropriation of the term sustainable development given here demonstrates in part, the changing parameters of the term 'alternative' in relation to being distinctly separate from mainstream practices.

Ageing membership / obstacles to attracting new young recruits

A common theme amongst alternative communities, and indeed intentional communities internationally, is the overall ageing of core populations (Metcalf, 1996, Metcalf & Christian, 2003). This is not peculiar to the contemporary communal movement. Kanter identified an inability to retain the second generation as well as to recruit new members contributed to the dissolution of long-lived 19th century communities (1972, p. 147). With a few exceptions, generally the next generation is not inclined to return to the communities they grew up in to raise their own families.¹¹⁵ Nor are significant numbers of other young adults committing themselves to permanent membership. Core populations remain primarily those from the 70s-era generation. In 2003, Metcalf and Christian wrote that "Australian research found that the mean age of intentional community members was in the high forties and increasing at about half a year per year" (p. 674). In 2011, that would put the mean age of communards in their early fifties. Metcalf and Christian further assert that "relatively few community children

¹¹⁴ It also raises questions about the nature of 'sustainability' and what it encompasses both in terms of community and mainstream practices (see Andelson, 2011).

¹¹⁵ Exceptions tend to include religious groups, such as the Hutterite and Bruderhof communities (now known as the Church Communities International Group) communities, where a high percentage of young adults stay in their communities. Amongst the alternative communities included here, a small number of the next generation have returned as adults to live in the communities they grew up in, but not in great enough numbers to offset the ageing of the membership.

remain in their communities once they become young adults, so it is common to find a fairly narrow age cohort, ageing gracefully” (*ibid.*). In terms of the communities studied here, this is variable. Wilderland currently has a new young resident group all under the age of 40. Renaissance also has an established group of young adults, though it still retains a large core population of older people (mainly men). Tui has prioritised young recruits by placing a cap on the age of new members to address their ageing core population. Riverside has young people living in its community, though not as committed members (though as previously mentioned, a new group has recently joined). Nevertheless, the long-established resident bodies of these communities are acutely aware of their ageing and that they need to actively encourage young people to join to keep their communities vital. While young people are choosing to live in communities, they do not necessarily consider it to be a long-term choice. Some of the older members speculate that they may well become communities of old people in the not-too distant future. The concept of another kind of intentional community or cohousing initiative designed to cater for the needs of elderly people is a topic that is increasingly emerging amongst ageing baby boomers in community. The different needs of that generation and the previous one who are currently living in retirement villages is an area that warrants further research, particularly with reference to the current eco-village and cohousing initiatives outlined above. Further, a study that specifically focuses on exploring the reasons why the next generation of environmentally conscious young people is not choosing to start their own intentional communities is a related area that warrants further research.

Generational differences

One reason given by young adults attending Permaculture courses at Tui for not wanting to join an existing community is that joining an established community run by a group of generally ageing members is not an appealing idea. Their perspective contrasts with the experience of the first wave of founding and early members who settled bare land in the 1970s as young adults. Frans said “We had an empty canvas and we had to form community. ... We could just paint over the canvas with bold strokes – we weren’t painting over other people’s paintings” (personal communication, 25 February, 2009). But Frans also pointed out that

younger people who come to Tui in the present have an attitude to community living different to that which the original group held:

It feels like they are not willing to input as much as we used to. But of course it's a different thing. Now you have ... older folk around who say yeah, we tried that already. ... Also, when we came, nobody was established on the land so you couldn't say oh poor me, I don't have a house; I have to look after myself. So when we have new people come, they first start looking after themselves, and the community is already there and it looks like they don't have to put energy into that, and that sets a dynamic in place that's very hard to change. ... They might want to have more [communal involvement] but are not willing to give up their time, so they are therefore resigned to putting up with less, I guess (*ibid.*).

This reluctance to 'give up their time' is consistent with Metcalf's observation that "many contemporary people seem to be commitment-shy" (2004, p. 108) when it comes to investing their energy in community living. From the point of view of young adults who might be interested in living communally, the prospect of joining a community in which the majority of members are their parents' generation, hold entrenched positions of power, and live fairly independent lives, not only sets a precedent, but it does not exactly represent an alternative. This reluctance to commit to an established community is not peculiar to the current generation. It is reflected in Verena's comments about Riverside when she first visited in the early 1980s, as well as Barbie's when she joined Riverside in 1976. As a young woman, Barbie recalled that she too felt an initial aversion to joining because:

It was too established – everything was already in place, and when I came to meetings I got this feeling that no-one was really interested in listening to each other. ... I thought how did these people make decisions when they all seemed to be pushing their own barrow? But what actually happened was, the more I got to know these people, and saw what they were doing ... it was alright. It wasn't how I initially thought it was. ... Decisions would come out of those meetings (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

Verena recalled that Riverside,

... felt too tight - too regulated. I was at a stage in my life when I needed space. ... I wanted something more based on the free spirit of Renaissance. ... Maybe I've tempered down a bit my need for complete freedom. I've realised the need for some structure. ... But at the same time, Riverside opened up, so we came closer to each other (personal communication, 28 February, 2009).

The views of Barbie, Frans, and Verena expose the conflicting perspectives, experiences and expectations of different generations. The pioneering attitude, and the desire to start with ‘an empty canvas’ as Frans described settling new land, starkly contrasts with the younger generation who do not appear to have the same willingness to start from scratch and rough it that the older generation had. Robina considers that the material expectations of the next generation who come to Tui in the present are very different to the founding generation who lived in housetrucks and tents and ‘made do’ in the early years of settling the land:

The generation I was raised with had a more do-it-yourself ethos, to give things a go and start from the beginning. [Now] it’s a different era. [While there are] young families wanting to come ... there’s not a house to rent so they [feel they] can’t stay here (personal communication, 25 February, 2009).

However, the established members who made do in the early years also have greater material expectations in the present. Robina concedes that the well-established community members at Tui set a bench-mark for standard of living expectations, and that new people coming in expect to enter on that level.

An awareness of the need to recruit younger people has been present in that community since its first generation of children grew up and left en masse. Although they continue to have a core population of ageing long-term members, they also continue to attract a trickle of younger people, though they still largely tend to be foreign nationals rather than New Zealanders (Robina, personal communication, 25 February, 2009). The interest of younger people in Tui partly reflects the community decision to limit new membership to people aged 35 or under. While members acknowledge that an essential part of the process of assimilating new members is for the older ones to consciously stand back and relinquish some of their control, this may have contributed to the justification on the part of long-term members to withdraw from community involvement altogether. However, as part of the attempt to remove the distinction between extended and family community groups unite as a single community again, the Tui group acknowledged that while new recruits need to be given the chance to explore ways of collectively doing things without the more experienced ones

dominating or interfering, they also need the example of involvement from experienced long-term members.

The effects of ageing populations

While the earlier cohort may have had more of a pioneering mentality in their approach to communal living as young adults, the emphasis is changing as they approach their older years. Robina observed that many members who have lived at Tui a long time “really want and like their own private lives. ... Basically they’ve become more conservative and more like the *status quo*” (personal communication, 25 February, 2009). The people in this study who have lived in community for a long time are generally in their late 50s and 60s and their needs and circumstances have changed considerably since they first joined communities in their 20s and 30s. The example of Tui’s children being the community glue that united the adult body in its early years illustrates the bonding effect of shared experience. When their children grew up and left home, parents entered a different stage of their lives, reflected in their changing interests and priorities. In the present many are grandparents. For some, their physical energy is waning along with their interest in actively participating in community activities.

There are, of course, exceptions. Verena, who is in her late 50s and has lived in communities for most of her adult life, describes herself as “a person that needs to work with people to realise my dreams. I didn’t go to live [in community] to have a pretty piece of land to do my thing” (personal communication, 28 February, 2009). She acknowledges the challenge of attracting younger people to established and ageing communities like Riverside, particularly in being “open to them and allowing them some space.... Because the system is quite limiting, it makes it hard for them to come and live here” (*ibid.*). Limitations not only include a commitment to voluntary poverty but also in regards to,

...decision-making and being your own boss. Other people always having a say in what you want to do. ... It narrows people. ... I think that’s probably part of the reason why Riverside isn’t flourishing the way it might do if it was run a different way, because part of being creative and entrepreneurial ... is having space to do that. ... That’s one of the big challenges for Riverside. ... How can we change that particular way of limitation into something that’s more open and dynamic and at the

same time not lose that togetherness, and the fundamental basis which Riverside has operated on for so long (*ibid.*).

Decision-making processes

A comparison of Tui and Riverside's decision-making processes is useful for exploring the effects of different approaches to managing community affairs on a community's dynamism and ability to adapt. Riverside and Tui communities both employ consensus decision-making in their meeting systems but their approaches to this diverge. Rosbeth Kanter wrote "the problem of establishing a viable and satisfying system of power, authority and decision-making is among the most difficult for communal orders" (1973, p. 143) partly because "it is generally antithetical to communal values to institute systems in which authority automatically passes into certain hands without intervention of the group" (*ibid.*). Riverside's emphasis on equality in all things includes all members being actively involved in "policy making, discussion and planning" (Riverside Community, Statement of Intent). At Tui, while the whole community also form policy, the emphasis is on empowered management groups who are authorised by the community to make decisions concerning various areas of responsibility. In a chapter called *Towards Sacred Society: The Life of Tui Community, Aotearoa/New Zealand* (1999) Robina explained Tui's process of empowerment:

Empowerment means that the person or group is actively given the trust to make decisions and act on behalf of the community. Only people practically involved in that area of work on behalf of the community, serve on these management groups. The groups are: finance, land, garden, technical development, building, community facilities, festivities. Before a group needs to work on an issue, broad policy has already been formed and endorsed by the community as a body. If it is an entirely new area, the group will bring it forward to the community for a policy decision, often with a proposal already formulated for discussion. Since we have adopted the small group and empowerment system, our community meetings are less unwieldy, less frustrating, not overloaded, more efficient, lighter and more fun (McCurdy, 1999).

Sylvia lived at Tui through her teens, and more recently spent two years as a probationary member at Riverside. She found the Riverside democratic meeting system intensely frustrating in its slowness:

Riverside meeting rule is consensus minus one.¹¹⁶ In practice they try to get complete consensus where possible, which makes things even more drawn out. For some (perhaps longer-time) members there is great value in this because they feel that a better decision is made in the long run; for me it was too frustrating and is making the community stagnate. ... Because of the emphasis on everyone having a say the meeting system caters for those who are absent to have the opportunity to be heard so decisions are often postponed. It also allows people to waffle on and use up valuable time. ... Contentious issues come back week after week and it is very difficult to reach a decision. Meanwhile the issue grows stale (personal communication, 28 February, 2011).

Sylvia's impatience might reflect her youth and energetic nature to an extent, but Riverside's meetings have always been challenging for members (Rain, 1991; Browne, 1987). Rain refers to hidden conflicts, "often of very long standing, between some members, which find their expression in meetings" (1991, p. 147). While strong and proactive facilitation is critical for effective meetings, unresolved interpersonal issues, inclusion of all members in the decision-making process, and differences of viewpoint make progress difficult. Barbie:

At the moment we've got quite a few people attending meetings. Awhile back, we had a much smaller number ... maybe nine or ten. Most of those people had been here quite awhile and there wasn't a lot of conflict and it was quite easy to make decisions. [I recall] when we had maybe 20 or 30 people at meetings and how cumbersome it was because everybody had to have their say. It took a long time to make decisions on topics that were controversial [and] it's happening again now. ... The work areas don't tend to be discussed much. We've got a whole backlog of agenda items [and] sometimes the matters arising can take an hour. Then we have finances – someone might be asking for something. Then we have agenda and agenda business and it still takes ages. And then something comes up that has to be discussed that night and then other things get put off (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

Colin:

Even if you have everybody talk for two minutes, it's an hour. It's a bit difficult if you've got ten subjects and people want to talk for 20 minutes, and there's plenty of people like that. ... So then you have committees and people go away and talk about things and come back and make reports, but then they all want to talk about it again anyway, of course. ... It's the personal and interpersonal things that take up the time [and] you can't have a committee to deal with those things (personal communication, 27 February, 2009).

¹¹⁶ Meaning that if more than one person does not agree, a decision cannot be passed.

An inability to separate business from interpersonal issues creates this situation. The Tui group instigated their *tuki* system which they called ‘heart meetings’ for that purpose, freeing up community meetings to focus on practical and business affairs separately from personal issues. Sylvia compared their approaches:

When we first went [to Tui], community meetings were once a week and they would last until one o’clock in the morning and my memory was that they were very conflicted. And in a short period they really addressed it and they got their community meetings down to about an hour and a half. ... If somebody already said what you were going to say, you’d just say “I agree with so-and-so” and you don’t have to waste all that time saying it again. ... They had a whole range of things that made things [move] really quickly (personal communication, 2 March, 2010).

The ‘whole range of things’ includes a number of devices aimed to streamline the process, such as the use of coloured cards to distinguish between discussion and decision-making, ‘hand gauging’ which involves members indicating where they stand on an issue through an agreed system of gestures, and other “tools and techniques for group clarity within a meeting” (McCurdy, 1999). *Tukis* are held three or four times a year, and focus expressly on interpersonal relationships and ideological discussion. The contrasting approaches that the two communities have to their systems of meetings reflect their ideological emphases: Riverside upholds its aim to share responsibility in all things, including decision-making and discussion. Tui has a business-oriented approach to managing its affairs and has divided interpersonal and business issues. Their inclusion of various devices to streamline meetings reflects their highly organised approach to managing community affairs.

Divergent motivations for joining and staying: Ideological vs. lifestyle choice

A reluctance to relinquish a certain level of material comfort or standard of living identified by Tui members as a reason why younger people are not inclined to join the community suggests many contemporary people are interested in community living as a lifestyle more an ideological choice. This reflects Alan Butcher’s reference to participants being motivated by opportunistic or self-interested reasons rather than a commitment to a greater vision or ideology between shared goals (1996). This also seems to be evident at Riverside, where there is no

shortage of young people interested in living in the community as tenants, but they do not appear to want to commit themselves to membership, with the attendant commitment to sharing income, resources, work, and responsibility for collective decision-making with the rest of the group. This reluctance is particularly pronounced in a community as long-established as Riverside, which has a long tradition of particular ways of doing things, and a fully inclusive approach to decision-making. From the perspective of an outsider, the benefits of membership over tenancy are not clear. Commitment to membership at Riverside assumes commitment to its ideological foundations. This is a fundamental difference between Riverside and the other communities in this study. Riverside's core tenet of equality in all things including income, and a rejection of private property emphasises a utopian ideology, as Sargisson stated in her (2010) article about utopian property relations. Thus commitment to membership at Riverside assumes an ideological choice, whereas to live there as a tenant enables more self-interested motivations.

While Wilderland also has a history of being an income sharing community insofar as the resident group have worked collectively to generate income for the community from growing and selling produce, an important distinction between it and Riverside is that individuals at Wilderland retain a high degree of autonomy and independence; there is no requirement that participants relinquish personal income or assets, or commit themselves to membership. The distinction between community living as an ideological choice as opposed to a lifestyle choice is a subject the new resident group at Wilderland has discussed. Russel explained that as far as he is concerned:

The community isn't the purpose. [In] other places perhaps the purpose is that - there is a community and it's for the people there. With this place, we're like a project really. We're working together for something for the world.... I kind of feel that what was set up here before, it had already achieved its goal a long time ago, which was just to *be* and to be a group of people. ... When people come here and I see that they're looking for a lifestyle/living situation, then I'm not really enthusiastic about that. But when people come here and you can see that they're really excited – like all of us here and some other people who are waiting to come, you can just tell that they're really interested in the public benefit. ... A very important part of my vision, and it seems evident that was part of Dan's ... is that you don't privately invest here, because that in itself causes

divisions. All those places that have it, you end up with a slow divisional settling into private living (personal communication, 3 November, 2009).

With this emphasis, like Riverside, Wilderland becomes attractive to a smaller pool of people who are ideologically motivated. As Russel points out, “the people to be part of the team are a slightly rare character. ... They’ve got to be ready [for] voluntary poverty. And they’ve got to believe in the vision, and believe in the public benefit” (personal communication, 3 November, 2009). From this perspective there is a clear demarcation between mainstream and alternative practices. Thus both Riverside and Wilderland demonstrate a desire on the part of participants to carry out “a shared lifestyle with a common purpose” (Metcalf & Christian, 2003, p. 670). They also demonstrate the intention to share a core vision, values and practice. In this respect they demonstrate the defining characteristics of intentional communities that have been identified by communal scholars.

Tui and Renaissance, each in their different ways, is attractive to people looking for a lifestyle/living situation. Both communities demand little personal sacrifice from participants, who retain a high degree of personal choice and autonomy in their day to day lives. Newcomers to Tui are presented with the seductive example of people living comfortably in a beautiful coastal setting amongst like-minded others. There is an emphasis on health and wellbeing. There are options to work on-site in the Beebalme business, or to generate income independently. Houses can be purchased at a considerably cheaper price than elsewhere in the district and can be resold if or when a person should choose to leave. There are also strong social networks both within the community and in the wider Golden Bay region. Tui provides a safe and supportive environment for raising children, and the educational events programmes attract other like-minded people emphasise the community’s values, a social focus, and opportunities for personal development.

Renaissance also provides a lifestyle option, but its open door ideology has shaped the culture of that community in a very different way. Although it is also located in a beautiful rural setting, unlike Tui, the ideological commitment to total freedom of choice for participants has resulted in a community that does not

emphasise health and wellbeing. Rather, it supports a culture of drug and alcohol abuse. A lack of expectation and accountability makes it an attractive environment for people interested in a different sort of lifestyle. In a paper entitled *Total Freedom of Conscience: What Happens when there are no Rules?* (2002b), Timothy Miller examines several communal groups that “opened the doors and let all come as they would” (*ibid.*). In all cases the patterns Miller describes align with Renaissance’s experience. That is, each “soon had more than its share of deadbeats and even criminals, although a contingent of productive members kept the community afloat” (*ibid.*). Miller suggests that:

A tacit underlying precept in the founding of these communities was, typically, that high-minded persons pursuing truth and enlightenment would attract other high-minded persons pursuing truth and enlightenment, and the community that these exemplary enlightened souls would build would perfectly realise the highest human aspirations (2002b).

The founders of Renaissance support this description. They were perhaps overly idealistic and naïve in the assumption that others would aspire to the same ideals. Despite the social problems it was assailed with, Renaissance functioned well for the first ten to fifteen years because of the commitment of a strong contingent of productive members. The other basic premise that Miller explicates that is equally applicable, is that “where total freedom has been espoused, most communities have attracted low-lives, become overwhelmed with problems, and eventually dissolved” (*ibid.*). Renaissance however, has not dissolved. I argue in Chapter Nine that this is because of the solid nature of the ownership structure of the Renaissance Trust. After 25 years resident there Verena saw the community as,

...the last stop, like a train station. Because we made it so easy for people to come in, it became a refuge-type place. ... Often people end up there coming from hard places in their lives. In a normal society they have a struggle surviving. So then they go up there and it’s really easy money-wise. It doesn’t cost much. You might get free milk, veggies. Basically live a cheap life. Nobody criticizes you. And then you’re able to sustain your habits easily. ... At Riverside you couldn’t do that, because there is quite a process of entering the community. ... To come here first of all you have to accept you’re part of a group that makes decisions together, and you are part of a shared-income situation. So you’re required to pull your weight, work your 40 hours, and bring in income as you’re doing things (personal communication, 28 February, 2009).

The refuge-style culture that developed at Renaissance reduces the attractiveness of that place to ideologically motivated individuals who might be interested in the aims of the Renaissance Trust. Once established in a house in such an undemanding and open environment, for a person with few employment skills and no external support or savings, there is little incentive to leave. Thus it becomes difficult for that community to change its direction or emphasis. As Robina noted about the long-established members of Tui who are no longer interested in community living but retain membership because they are attached to their homes, the community ends up being ‘stuck with them,’ making it difficult for a different emphasis to develop. At Riverside, the shared income model attracts a different type of person, although it too risks becoming stuck, but in that case, stuck in a culture of dependency, inefficiency and unreality on the part of the workforce. Colin believes Riverside’s structure enables people to be unrealistic in the ventures they take on; if a venture is impractical or unprofitable the effect is not directly felt by those individuals responsible for it because they are cushioned by being part of the group. Further, it can be difficult to sustain a high level of motivation and enthusiasm over the long term when there is no incentive of extra reward for extra effort.

While Riverside attracts social idealists who are drawn to the principles of pacifism, egalitarianism and the opportunity to be part of a community that strives to work collectively for the benefit of everyone, it also attracts people seeking an environment that provides comfort and security, “kind of like a family” (Verena, personal communication, 28 February, 2009). It is less attractive to independent and entrepreneurial people who enjoy personal freedom and the challenges associated with pursuing new ventures and interests. But while the long-term members may be less entrepreneurial than those in a community such as Tui, they remain committed to the charitable objectives of the trust and its concept of alternative values. In this respect Riverside has adhered to their stated objectives and original idealism more than any other community in this study.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions

Today, as in the past, those attracted to [community living] are small groups of idealists, people of sensitive social conscience, dreamers and doers, and with them, too, a conglomeration of escapists seeking an easy solution to their own particular problem, with no broad commitment on the individual's part (Oved, 1998, p. 483).

This research set out to explore the extent to which four long-lived New Zealand intentional communities have sustained, adapted or abandoned their original ideals and aspirations over time. It also questioned whether longevity and survival can be considered to be the same thing, and explored the relevance of the assertion that long-lived communities share a common purpose and a desire to live beyond the mainstream. I approached this study through an exploration of five research questions. The core question involved identifying key changes that each community has experienced and how those changes have influenced the long-term development and culture of each community. The other questions included an analysis of how the ideologies, foundation structures and stated purposes of each community have driven those changes, the identification of elements that might have contributed to the vitality or decline of each community, how the communities have balanced individual and collective needs over time and the impact of this on the culture of each community, and what common patterns (if any) enable generalisations to be made.

This chapter is in two parts. The first summarises the findings for each community in response to the research questions. The second part includes a discussion of whether or not survival and longevity can be considered to be the same thing in relation to the changes intentional communities experience over the long-term, whether they can still be considered alternative in the present, and the implications of charitable trusts for the longevity of intentional communities. Aspects that emerged from this study that warrant further research are also identified.

Part One: The communities

Renaissance

Discussion about Renaissance has centred on two fundamental aspects; the ideological foundations of the Renaissance Trust, and the implications of its sustained open-door policy that entitles the people of New Zealand to visit or live on its land without discrimination.¹¹⁷ These two elements have directly or indirectly driven the changes that have occurred and profoundly shaped the culture that has developed over the 30 years that Renaissance has existed. Key changes identified here have included the departure of important founding people and later long-term residents who made up the core of productive participants, and their replacement with a resident group who for the most part do not actively strive to uphold the trust's stated purposes. Other key changes that have driven the long-term development of Renaissance are the early emergence of factions, including a split between the core productive participants due to conflicting views about structure and the trust's purposes, and a third faction comprised of opportunistic and peripheral people. A further significant change that influenced Renaissance's culture was the gradual shift from a stance of self-reliance and economic independence to a reliance on welfare (especially the unemployment benefit), which enabled people who otherwise would not have chosen to live there, to settle at Renaissance.

The change from a core body of residents at Renaissance who were interested in food production and building a self-reliant community to one where most residents do not prioritise those things, illustrates an important development that is relevant to all the communities discussed here. The particular combination of individuals who make up a community are central to the culture and emphasis of that community, irrespective of the structure that is in place. A strong core group of skilled and effective people who interact effectively can keep a community working despite a peripheral presence of unproductive people. When that balance

¹¹⁷ Although the Renaissance Community Trust documents refers to 'the people of New Zealand', in reality it does not discriminate between New Zealanders and any other ethnic group.

changes and key skilled people depart, vitality is lost. The balance between a strong productive core group and a peripheral unproductive group is a delicate one that can be tipped by the addition of one or two people whose destructive or disruptive behaviour drains the cohesive energy of the group. This is evident from the observations of a resident of Christiania, a large urban intentional community in Copenhagen, Denmark. Christiania is made up of thirteen different self-governing areas:

I always say the strength of a community is based on a balance between the people who have energy and the people who lack energy. ... In the area that I live in, there is a good balance. There are maybe 70 people, and there are two pushers.¹¹⁸ There are maybe three alcoholics, which means that the balance is okay. We have areas where the balance is spoilt – there are 20 people but ten are alcoholics. ... A community lives – a city lives – a country lives, with the balance of people who have energy being in balance with the people who need help (Søren, personal communication, 24 August, 2008).

The balance can also be tipped by the steady increase of a more passive but non-contributing body of peripheral people or the addition of people who do not share an ability or desire to work together. Renaissance Community managed to thrive for the first 15 years despite the existence of conflicting factions and presence of a peripheral group of unproductive people. This is partly due to the impetus carried by the original group that settled the land, and partly because the two main factions continued to work the land, produce food, develop their skills and maintain relationships with one another despite their differences. In this respect they carried out “a shared lifestyle with a common purpose” (Metcalf & Christian, 2003, p., 670). They were also a large enough group to overcome the negative aspects of the smaller peripheral one. A balance between productive and non-productive participants is critical.

With the gradual departure of productive participants at Renaissance, the balance shifted until the peripheral group became dominant and overwhelmed the productive core. Thus the dominant culture of the community changed slowly but profoundly. Although the initial resident group had divergent views concerning the anarchic ideology of the trust, they nonetheless shared a common vision, which

¹¹⁸ hash dealers.

included the desire to cultivate a self-reliant and sustainable lifestyle with like-minded others. Despite attempts over the years to introduce structures and rules, the lack of an authoritative structure to enforce them rendered them powerless. This enabled people who were not interested in the aims of the trust to become firmly established as a core resident group. The Renaissance Trust has not adapted its original aspirations to address these issues, despite the admission by one of the trustees that the resident group cannot for the most part be considered to uphold the principles of the trust. Nevertheless, the entitlement of all New Zealanders to visit and live at Renaissance means the potential for that community to thrive again remains present. In the absence of an entry criteria, including the requirement that participants abide by a set of terms and conditions, a community tends to become populated with people whose reasons for living in a community do not necessarily reflect the aims and objectives of that community. This in turn makes it difficult to attract new people who are interested in those aims and objectives.

In the present it is more accurate to describe Renaissance as a circumstantial rather than an intentional community. It has experienced a long slow decline as the productive community-minded individuals have steadily departed, leaving a disparate and ineffective resident group to become the established population by default. Despite erratic efforts by a few individuals, there is no productive core group in the present, nor is there evidence that the resident body demonstrate an active interest in the aims and objectives of the Renaissance Trust. The potential remains, however, for a new core group of productive and determined individuals to become established and to change the emphasis of the community to one that reflects the original purpose of the trust.

Wilderland

The most recent change that Wilderland has experienced – the complete change of resident group and the change of trustees that occurred during the period of this research, is very recent and so it remains to be seen how effectively they will implement the changes they have put in motion. At the time of this research the resident group appears to be determined and well-organised. Key changes that

have shaped Wilderland prior to this recent change centre on the original owner and founder of the community, Dan Hansen, who used his authority as owner to instigate an important change of emphasis in that community when he banned all drugs at Wilderland included alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs. The departure of almost all the residents as a result, heralded a new era in that community. Other important changes include the transference of ownership of land from the Hansens to the Wilderland Trust, a protracted legal challenge to the Wilderland Trust and the subsequent departure of five committed residents, and the death of Dan Hansen in 2006.

Dan Hansen's influence was central to the long-term development of Wilderland. Although he transferred ownership of the land to the Wilderland Trust he still maintained authority and control over the trust. Despite his philosophy of being 'open to whatever occurs' he strongly influenced the direction and culture of that community. He encouraged the transience that characterised the community through his commitment to large scale food production that required workers to make that production possible. His stance of seeing Wilderland as an educational place where people could learn skills while remaining reluctant to acknowledge that it was also a community reinforced a culture of impermanence and insecurity. This is evident in the unsubstantial nature and quality of the dwellings, the fact that no-one apart from Dan and Edith have lived there permanently, and informants' repeated reference to a sense of insecurity stopping them from feeling they could make it a permanent home. Dan's emphasis on food production also, paradoxically, contributed to the vitality and productiveness of that community – for much of its history, the resident group has sustained the practice of working cooperatively together, and in turn has been supported by that effort. In this respect Wilderland has sustained its founding principles – it has provided an environment to enable people to learn the skills and carry out the objectives outlined in the Wilderland Trust (Appendix B). The emphasis on Wilderland being a drug-free environment has meant that despite its open door and absence of a membership system, a selection or screening criterion exists, enabling it to avoid the problems associated with alcohol and drug abuse that Renaissance experiences.

In terms of balancing individual and collective needs, the emphasis on food production created a clear demarcation between collective and individual areas of participation. This expectation of labour was reinforced by the presence of WOOFers, who are required to abide by the WOOF organisation guidelines which state that members are expected to work four hours a day for their hosts in exchange for their keep. The collective needs of participants (food, shelter, basic support) were met through income from the sale of produce, enabling people to live at Wilderland without having to leave the community to generate income independently. Beyond the obligatory contribution of labour, individuals were free to pursue their own interests. There was no requirement that residents contribute any money to live at Wilderland. Nor did individuals own their dwellings. This meant the balance between individual and collective needs was fairly uncomplicated, and participants chose the degree of their own independence. In the present, the emphasis is changing and it remains to be seen how the new focus will shape the culture of that community.

Tui

Some key changes that have shaped the culture of Tui community include: changes in membership during the first five years, when almost half the founding group left and were replaced by a subsequent wave of people; a shift from a child-oriented community to a collective empty nest; a split from one united group into extended and family community groups and the more recent decision to unite as a single community once more. The emphasis of Tui's foundation structures on personal and spiritual growth and the promotion of education in the principles of community and cooperation (see Appendix C) have shaped the culture of that community. Over time the resident group has developed their expertise in the processes of addressing conflict, reflecting the statement that "a main focus of community life is the building of genuine relationships based on honest and open communication" (www.tuitrust.org). This, combined with a collective willingness to accommodate differences and individual needs where possible, has resulted in a degree of dynamism and flexibility that makes Tui exceptional in this study.

The dominance of foreign nationals, particularly Germans, has also influenced the culture of Tui. This is evident in the level of organisation and entrepreneurialism in that community – the highly successful *Beebalme* venture that employs up to ten members and the Events programme run by the educational group reinforce the educational purposes of the trust. The acknowledgement that everyone is different and that it is necessary to accommodate difference where possible has also contributed to a shift over time from a strong focus on community to a greater accommodation of individual desires. External interests and work commitments have also contributed to this. For some, this requires travel out of the region, resulting in prolonged absences from the community. The contrasting occupational interests and personal wealth of members further contributes to the different priorities and reasons for living at Tui on the part of long-term members. However, the strength of that community is their strong committed core group, most of whom have been members for a long time, and have developed effective skills in managing their affairs collectively. This provides a sense of continuity to the community, and despite the gradual shift to a less communal focus, members remain willing to contribute to keeping their community functioning well. This is evident in the agreement to attempt to reunite as a single community again after dividing into two separate groups. A sense of pride in the community is clearly evident. It is reflected in the way members speak about their community's successes, the physical appearance of the place, the participation of members in regular meetings and community 'input', the commitment to attend *tukis*, and the success of the educational Events programme. While there are aspects of that community that are unsatisfactory for some members, of all the four communities in this study, Tui most effectively demonstrates an ability to adapt the community's original ideals and aspirations to remain dynamic and to accommodate the changing needs of its members.

Riverside

Key changes at Riverside include: the dropping of the founding requirement that all members be practicing Christians; relinquishing the requirement that members donate their assets to the community; changes in sources of income generation and

the push to become organic; the increase of tenants living in the community as a result of declining membership.

Despite the major change that occurred in the early 1970s when Riverside dropped its requirement that all members be practicing Christians resulting in an influx of alternative lifestylers, it has maintained the essence of its original objectives – that is “to live according to the basic teachings common to all great religions: to do good, to avoid doing harm” (Riverside Statement of Intent, undated). It has also maintained its core ideological principles that include a rejection of private property and private profit, limitation and equality of personal income, the aim to be self-supporting, and the sharing of responsibility for decision-making, planning and discussion (*ibid.*). These ideological foundations have influenced the type of people who have chosen to become members, attracting people for ideological more than lifestyle or self-interested reasons. It has also added to the challenge to continue to attract new (especially younger) members, particularly given the increasing emphasis on materialism in society generally, and the economic challenges Riverside has experienced in recent years to sustain profitable business ventures. These aspects have contributed to the community’s struggle to maintain membership and prosperity. However, it is asset-rich, and the potential for new ventures to be developed, and new members to join, remains. An outcome of its emphasis on shared responsibility for planning, discussion and decision-making is a tendency for the community to lose its ability to be innovative and adaptable, and unresolved differences can slow progress, as I discussed in Chapter 8.

However, Riverside has also demonstrated the unpredictability that characterises intentional communities, with the influx of several new probationary members early in 2011. There are also changes occurring in some of their business enterprises, so it remains unclear how the community will fare in the next decade of its existence. Riverside remains unique amongst intentional communities in New Zealand, for its sustained survival for more than 70 years with a shared economy and commitment to its principles of egalitarianism. It most clearly demonstrates that it has upheld its core ideological principles of the communities in this study.

Part Two: Survival and longevity

Lyman Sargent wrote, “While longevity can be a measure of success when combined with other factors, alone it is meaningless” (Sargent, 2010, p. 47). Scholars begin to diverge when identifying what factors must be present in order to consider that a community has been successful. However Yaacov Oved writes that:

All those who have studied the history of the communes agree that the presence of an ideologically motivated core of members who adhered to their doctrine or religion as well as the predominance of their central principles was an essential element that ensured the communes existence and its survival (1988, p. 370).

Oved adds that the “first and last of communal life” (p. 376) is the existence of a belief or ideological structure upon which the entire communal system is based (*ibid.*). From this perspective, of the four communities in this study, only Riverside could be considered to have clearly survived, as it is the only one that has consistently adhered to its central founding principles of egalitarianism and shared property relations. Renaissance and Tui, it could be argued, have evolved from their beginnings when they *were* populated by an ideologically motivated core of members to a point where members and/or residents’ motivation for living in those communities now represent a variety of motives. Renaissance’s entire communal system ensues from an anarchist (or, perhaps more accurately, a libertarian) ideology, and remains so, but I suspect that Oved would not consider Renaissance to be a community in the sense in which he uses the term. I suggest that an ideologically motivated core of members is an essential element for the *genesis* of a community, including the initial period of settlement. However, as the communities studied here have demonstrated, over time commitment to ideological principles often diminishes or is abandoned as the motivation and circumstances of long-established and subsequent participants changes. This parallels the shift in kibbutzim from a utopian to post-utopian emphasis. I have demonstrated here that the founding members of intentional communities are initially ideologically motivated and support a strong emphasis on communal sharing and enterprise, or *gemeinschaft*, but over time they tend to become more orientated towards individualism to the extent that in several cases, the distinction

between community living and living the wider rural neighbourhoods they are surrounded by is hard to distinguish.

I have emphasised two important factors that need to be taken into account when considering survival and longevity in long-lived rural communities: the legal structure that owns the land and the combination of individuals who make up the resident body of a community. These two aspects represent the physical and human elements that comprise a community.

Legal structures: charitable trusts

In 2011 the youngest community in this study (Tui) has been in existence for 27 years, the oldest (Riverside), for 70. Apart from Wilderland (47 years) they all have a core of long-established residents. I consider that a central underlying reason for their long-term stability is the fact that they are all owned by charitable trusts. Charitable trusts enable land to be held in perpetuity. They preclude the rights of individuals to assume ownership of any of it. It stands to reason that if the land a community is built upon (both physically and metaphorically) cannot be sold unless all the trustees agree, and that any money made from that sale must be donated to charitable purposes in keeping with the trust's principles, it is unlikely that communal land will be sold, or the trust dissolved.¹¹⁹ Further, trusts have charitable purposes, and whether these are adhered to or not, they remain the legal *raison d'être* for a community owned by a charitable trust, and therefore evidence of the existence of visions and values, and a point of reference and continuity for the people who make up that community, both in the present as well as the future. This is demonstrated by the new group at Wilderland who have based their new management plan on the original objectives of the Wilderland Trust. The solid nature of charitable trusts as legal entities able to hold land in perpetuity may shed some light on Sargisson and Sargent's observation that New Zealand has a high percentage of long-lived intentional communities. When asked why he thought this

¹¹⁹ It is also unlikely that if all the existing members leave, the land will cease to be occupied. Given that the properties the four communities are established upon are beautifully situated and appointed (and very valuable tracts of land), and that possession of a house involves a fraction of the cost of buying one elsewhere, it is almost certain that there will always be people interested in living on them.

might be so, Sargent wrote that that he and Sargisson never arrived at an answer that they were comfortable with, but they noticed that:

The legal status of the land frequently made it difficult for the land to revert to private ownership. This means ... that communities have held on, sometimes weakly, sometimes periodically revived (personal communication, 23 July 2010).

I have demonstrated that the existence of charitable trusts as foundation structures make it very difficult for land to revert to private ownership and that therefore they are central to both the longevity as well as the future security of the communities in this study. Within the first five years of settling Tui, half of the original group, who donated most of the initial cost of purchasing the land to the Tui Land Trust, left. Had the land been purchased under another structure which enabled individuals to take their money out, force a sale, or otherwise gain personally by selling the land or their share of it, then it is quite possible they would have done so in those first five years, as was the case with numerous other short-lived communal groups who purchased land during the 1970s and 1980s under shared ownership systems. The vegan community that Heather joined (referred to in Chapter 4), which lasted six months is one such example. Further, in commenting on the division at Tui that resulted in the extended and family community groups, Robina speculated that “if we had been a freehold structure, some people might have left. But they didn’t have the equity to start again” (in Jenkin, 2010). This exposes another aspect of charitable trusts that contributes to people remaining in communities long-term – the ability to exchange a home on trust land for another outside the community is limited, because they are worth much less than freehold houses. Nor is it possible to borrow money from banks as an individual to invest in a community owned by a charitable trust. The difference in value between community houses and freehold ones has become particularly acute in recent years as the cost of rural property has risen dramatically in areas such as Golden Bay, Motueka and the Coromandel where many intentional communities are concentrated. This may be one reason for Sargisson and Sargent’s observation that compared to intentional communities elsewhere, New Zealand communities have a high rate of stable long-established populations.

At Wilderland, the sense of insecurity expressed by informants who have lived in that community for varying periods was identified as stemming from the Hansen's retention of ownership/control of the land. Despite the transfer of ownership to the Wilderland Trust, that sense of insecurity remained because Dan Hansen retained control of the trust, and thus authority over the use of the land and who could be asked to leave it. Had Dan and Edith retained ownership of the property, it would have passed back to the Hansen family upon the death of Dan, and the community would have been closed down. This was the expressed wish of Heather Hansen after her father died.

At Renaissance, the eventual departure of most of the ideologically motivated core members did not threaten the continued existence of the community because not only did those core members lack the power to evict the people who did not adhere to the ideological principles of the trust, but they also did not have the authority to sell or remove their houses, privatise parts of the property, close the community down or sell the land. Further, some of the Renaissance trustees in the present are long-established residents with a vested interest in the trust continuing to own the community land. The non-resident trustees remain supportive of the ideological principles of the trust including its non-intervention in community affairs. Thus the likelihood of the Renaissance Trust being wound up and the community dismantled is remote. This, of course, was the intention of the creators of the Renaissance Trust.

The status of residents also being trustees is the case in all four communities in this study. This dual interest further reinforces the unlikelihood of any of the trusts being wound up and the communities disbanded. I consider this dual interest to be a weak area of charitable trusts, as it creates the potential for conflicts of interests and a blurring of boundaries between trustees and the beneficiaries of a trust. The example of Dan and Edith Hansen's retention of power as trustees is a clear example of this. At Renaissance some trustees are also community residents and this presents a conflict of interest when faced with having to make decisions in their capacity of being trustees that might be unpopular with their neighbours. Further, cliques can form within trust groups, and differences of opinion can paralyse the trust body, making it difficult to move forward. The implications of

trustees being owners of the land as well as managers of community affairs is a cloudy area, and worthy of further exploration. The role of charitable trusts for holding land in perpetuity in comparison to other structures that hold land is another area for further research, particularly given that issues of inheritance are becoming a topic for discussion amongst communards and their adult children.

People

While charitable trusts ensure the continued existence of the physical aspect of community, the other aspect is the people who populate them. I have demonstrated through a comparison of these communities that the combination of participants not only determines the culture of a community, but dictates its ability to thrive socially, physically and economically. The ability to work together effectively, and the combination of skills, personalities, experience, maturity, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds all influence the culture that evolves. Tui has members with a range of interpersonal, practical and business skills that help that community to thrive. Riverside's ethos has always emphasised equality in all things, thrift, and working for the collective benefit. It has tended to not attract or retain entrepreneurial, ambitious, or highly driven people. The community has an ageing population and most of its members have lived together for a long time. There are long standing differences between some members that have not been resolved and which contribute to an inability for the community to move forward in new directions. The community struggles to attract new people who will contribute dynamically to the community. At Renaissance the initial productive core group kept the community functioning effectively for its first 15 years despite its social problems. The open and unregulated environment attracted highly individualistic people with a range of reasons for living in community. It also attracted people seeking a place of refuge. As Søren from Christiania pointed out, if the balance between productive and unproductive participants is overwhelmed, a community cannot thrive. At Wilderland, the practical emphasis on horticultural labouring influenced the culture that developed there. As Thomas pointed out, this tended to over-ride artistic, spiritual or other creative interests. The new resident group are attempting to address this through shifting the collective emphasis away from growing and selling food as a core activity, and are keen to attract more people who are ideologically motivated rather than simply looking for a rural retreat or lifestyle. They appear to have forged a strong alliance and have control over who joins them in the future. They possess both organisational and practical skills and are determined to rebuild the community, including presenting a clear vision and values that newcomers are obliged to accept if they want to stay.

I wrote in Chapter 8 that in one respect the presence of the new resident group at Wilderland can be considered to be a new community because they are starting out together, without existing or previously established members being part of the equation. As they are also trustees they are able to renegotiate the way the community will operate and who will be eligible to join them. In a sense they are a founding group and the community is starting afresh. Thus it is a new community. However, the land is still owned by the Wilderland Trust and the aims and objectives of the trust continue to dictate the purpose, emphasis and ideological belief system of Wilderland as well as influence the management plan that the new group have devised. In this respect it continues to be the same community. In a related vein, I have demonstrated through discussion about Renaissance and Tui that a community is not necessarily a single entity; that sub-communities can exist within it. Further, a community in the present might not resemble or align with the community it was in the past. This also illustrates that communities can simultaneously or interchangeably survive and be reborn over time. The combination of people who reside in it at any one time is central to the culture and vitality of a community.

Are they alternative?

The charitable trusts that underpin these communities have mission statements that demonstrate, “The existence of a belief (or ideology) [as] an activating and establishing principle on which the entire communal system is based” (Oved, 1988, p. 370). However, as I have demonstrated, while their ideological principles may have motivated the founding groups, a tendency over time has been for the long-established members/residents to become more self-interested and orientated. This is in line with international trends, including kibbutzim, as discussed by Near (2010). A utopian perspective assumes that people choose to live in community because they are ideologically motivated. Post-utopianism suggests the ideals and aspirations of single people in early adulthood change as they pass through different stages of life that external influences shape community emphases, and that initial utopian idealism is often replaced by the desire for a comfortable lifestyle. As is evident in the sentiments expressed by the current resident group at Wilderland, and the comments of long-established communards about newcomers,

new people entering existing communities often hold strongly utopian ideals in contrast to those who have lived in community long-term. This research also demonstrates that frequently, people choose to stay in community long-term because they are attached to their homes, or do not have the economic or psychological means to move rather than because they are motivated by utopian ideals or a desire to live an existence that is distinctly alternative to the wider society. While utopian ideals may have originally influenced their decision to create or join an intentional community in the first instance, in many cases this has become less relevant over time, with reasons for staying reflecting more practical and economic factors. Others who were not necessarily motivated by ideological reasons in the first instance include those with a desire to live a rural lifestyle, but lack the financial means, ability or impetus to make it happen on their own. Some simply want to live quietly in a rural environment; they do not aspire to set any example to others, to live according to any ideals, or even to consider that they live an alternative lifestyle. Still others are attracted to living communally because they are very sociable and/or “essentially lazy” (John, personal communication, 30 April, 2006) and realise that sharing land, work and financial commitments is less arduous than doing it solo, and that full responsibility is not likely to fall on their own shoulders. Then there are those who just ‘fell into’ community; with no plan, philosophy or ideological motives directing their lives, they simply turned up and never left. In this respect these communities are not necessarily alternative, but reflect the diverse motivations of people in the wider society to live a particular way.

However, if we accept Sargisson’s premise that a cornerstone of mainstream Western society is the concept of private property, materialism, and the accumulation of wealth, (2010, p. 23), then all four communities in this study are alternative. Regardless of their differences from one another, and their tendency to become more individually and materially orientated, they still collectively differ from the wider society that surrounds them. That is, participants are in most cases concerned to live in a way that involves voluntary simplicity and environmental sustainability. With one or two individual exceptions they do not prioritise the accumulation of wealth, and for the most part value living in small communities where they know and support their neighbours and share resources with a low

environmental impact and sustainable focus. It is important to most participants to live simply on the land with a close connection to nature, and to cultivate a lifestyle that does not contribute to the degradation and depletion of the environment. These shared values set these communities apart from the mainstream society they are situated within.

A curious aspect of collectively considering these four communities also involves a contradiction of the previous paragraph. While they are alternative, they are also microcosms of the greater society. Both individually and collectively they mirror the changes that occur on a national level over time. They are representative of the disparities that exist in the greater New Zealand society, and mirror the changes that occur on a national level over time. Renaissance has always provided a refuge for single mothers with minimal family support, as well as damaged, disaffected, and unemployable members of the urban underclass, and people with psychiatric disorders. It has also struggled to cope with the social problems associated with drug and alcohol addiction. These problems are not peculiar to that community; they exist in New Zealand society. In its early years Renaissance was also home to extraordinarily innovative and do-it-yourself pioneering individuals who not only resurrected the old farming implements of their 19th century forebears, built their own houses, and practiced pioneering arts of self-sufficiency, but they produced large quantities of food and survived with very little money.¹²⁰ These elements reflect aspects of New Zealand society and its colonial history as well as influences that shaped the New Zealand national character. Tui community, with its high percentage of foreign nationals (particularly German) is an example of the increasingly multi-cultural society that New Zealand has become in recent decades. Its member-operated industries demonstrate the independence, innovation and success of many small alternative businesses in this country. Riverside has upheld strong traditions of pacifism, egalitarianism, and protest against injustice. It has also moved from a dominant Christian orientation to a more secular one, as has the rest of New Zealand. All these elements represent the multi-layered and ever

¹²⁰ This is another example of history repeating itself – the founding of Renaissance parallels many of the experiences of John Park Salisbury and his brothers, English settlers who, in 1853, first settled the land that Renaissance community was later founded upon, and worked the land and created shelter. Salisbury's son later built the community house (in 1910).

evolving social fabric of New Zealand society. In this respect the communities discussed here are both alternative and representative of the wider population.

So, do New Zealand communities possess distinctive characteristics that are peculiar to New Zealand as Sargisson and Sargent (2004) assert? Despite the fact that they share many common factors with other intentional communities throughout the western world, they have also been shaped by cultural and geographical aspects. New Zealand is a small island nation geographically distant from the northern hemisphere and this relative isolation has contributed to the national character discussed in Chapter Two and above. This in turn has influenced the cultures of intentional communities in this country. The geographical remoteness has made it attractive to foreign nationals looking for an alternative way of living to what they perceived Europe has to offer (Bönisch Brednich, 2002). However, despite these characteristics that are peculiar to the New Zealand context, as Metcalf points out, intentional communities in New Zealand also share many common characteristics with Australian communities (2003, p. 705). Metcalf also points out that the movement in both countries is thriving, with many new communities being established (2003, p. 711). This sharing of characteristics is understandable given the close alliance of the two countries due to their proximity in the South Pacific, their relatively recent colonisation by Europeans, small populations which enable accessibility to undeveloped rural land and a choice of lifestyle and opportunities that are not available in many European countries.

I have demonstrated in this thesis that founding ideologies profoundly shape the culture of intentional communities, despite the changing emphasis and resident populations over the decades. Intentional communities are both the people who reside in them and the places they are built on; they are sometimes highly communal and other times individually orientated. Their residents do not necessarily share a common purpose but they do share common values. They pass through periods where they can be considered to be utopian, non-utopian and post-utopian, as well as circumstantial and intentional. They represent an alternative to mainstream practices, but it is sometimes difficult to distinguish them from the wider rural communities they are situated within. They are microcosms of the

larger society, and thus as disparate and as contradictory as that wider society.

Community forms and reforms repeatedly; it is not a static or singular thing.

Charles Gide's words, written in 1930, seem to me to encapsulate my conclusions:

The real proof of vitality lies not in continuance, but in rebirth, and this characteristic is possessed in the highest degree by the communities of which we are speaking: they are continually being born again from their ruins (cited in Oved, 1988, p. 477).

Two popular whakataukī, or Māori proverbs, that reflect the thoughts, values, and advice of ancestors epitomise for me the two fundamental aspects of community – people and the land. They seem an appropriate way to end this thesis:

He aha te mea nui o te ao?
He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!

What is the most important thing in the world?
It is people! It is people! It is people!

Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ka ora ai te iwi.

With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive.¹²¹

¹²¹ (*Korero Maori*)

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Appendix A: Renaissance Community Trust Deed (1977)

[T]he parties deem it expedient that a body of trustees should be established in New Zealand for the purpose of holding land as public land where the people of New Zealand will be free to visit, live and commune with the land and each other, in order to foster the spiritual, intellectual and physical advancement of the people in this country, and to develop through co-operative effort environmentally sound methods of farming, and for such charitable works in connection therewith as the Trustees may from time to time determine.

Application: AND IT IS HEREBY DECLARED that without extending the charitable nature of the foregoing provisions the Trustees may in their discretion apply such property, the profits and income therefrom, in erecting and maintaining halls, barns, holiday homes, family homes, houses for the aged and the sick, children's homes and such residential accommodation and public buildings as may from time to time be required in connection therewith.

Appendix B: Purposes of the Wilderland Trust (1995)

- 1) To provide the environment, facilities and resources necessary for the whole education and development of people (children, youths and adults) and to maintain an open response to whosoever would wish to learn. (While the value of academic, technical and economic skills are readily to be recognised, the educational work of the trust should encompass pupils and teachers understanding relationship, this ability being seen as providing a life-long opportunity to learn and live happily).
- (2) To advance and encourage education and the acquiring of skills including accepting pupils people wishing to learn practical techniques including orcharding, carpentering, beekeeping, organic gardening, machinery maintenance, welding, roadmaking, baking as well as retailing, artistic and cultural skills, and including the establishment and maintenance of a reference library.
- (3) To carry out research and experimentation into methods of organic growing/biological control to promote ecological balance and good health and to participate in the introduction of new plants and the development of new food crops.
- (4) To promote the discovery, development, and use of low impact and renewable energy systems.
- (5) To encourage personal creativity and initiative.
- (6) To maintain any property of the Trust as an area for living free from drugs and as far as possible all harmful substances.
- (7) To protect the purity and sustainability of the natural environment and in particular to facilitate the regeneration of native flora and fauna on land held under title or control of the Trust.
- (8) To maintain and facilitate the further development of Wilderland as a common ground whereon people can come together simply as human beings undivided by status, nationality, race, culture, sex, religion or any ideology, such a meeting place being significant to whole education and the realisation of world peace.

Appendix C: Charitable Objectives of the Tui Educational and Spiritual Trust (2000)

The primary objectives and purposes for which the Trust is established are:

- (a) To promote education within New Zealand on the role and function of sustainable communities, by establishing a living, working example of an intentional community that combines the essential principles of spiritual awareness, earth care, connection with nature and appropriate lifestyle, where residents and visitors can participate in a variety of educational and spiritual practices.
- (b) To promote a holistic approach to education within New Zealand through teaching the principles of community and co-operation, the need for social, cultural and environmental awareness and the importance of physical and spiritual health and well-being.
- (c) To promote and provide vocational training and research within New Zealand in the practice of Permaculture, organic agriculture, horticulture, arts and music, cottage industries and manual trades.
- (d) To promote and provide seminars and workshops within New Zealand on the design and function of intentional communities and to promote the establishment of such communities.
- (e) To promote research within New Zealand on the development and production of environmentally appropriate technology.
- (f) To promote spiritual well-being within New Zealand through the unification of religious, cultural and other differences, in order to bring about renewal of love, creative energy and universal wisdom.
- (g) To promote physical, mental and spiritual well-being within New Zealand and provide facilities for healing and relief of suffering through education and the provision of life-skills, healing practices, specialised therapies and counseling services.
- (h) To promote the creation of a holistic nurturing environment that enhances and sustains a quality of life that does not exploit the environment or people and that is permanent, healthy and sustainable for future generations.

Appendix D: Riverside Community Statement of Intent (1990)

We are a group of individuals who have come together in a community to live according to the basic teachings common to all great religions: to do good, to avoid doing harm, in all aspects of our lives, to the best of our ability. This is the responsibility of each community member.

We accept all human beings as our brothers and sisters and choose to behave towards them with love and not violence.

We reject private ownership and private profit.

We choose limitation and equality of personal income.

We choose to share responsibility in policy making, discussion, and planning, to work together in the development and maintenance of the community, and to make the best use of each individual's strengths and talents.

We strive to develop a fruitful, beautiful countryside and to make our living in ways that do not harm the planet: and to study and put into practice environmentally safe horticulture, farming, and living.

We aim to be self supporting and to produce goods of the best quality at a fair price.

We do not want to escape from the world, but to use our pooled resources to help it through service to others and practical involvement in social, peace, and environmental movements.

We accept the responsibility to hold Riverside and its values in trust for future generations.

We ask each member to contribute to the group according to their ability: the community strives to meet members' needs fairly.

Appendix E: Interviewees and dates of interviews

Renaissance

Peter Whittle, current resident, 24 April, 2006, 19 February, 2009
John Glasgow, former resident, 30 April, 2006; 27 October, 2006, 20 February, 2009
Verena Gruner, former resident, 22 April, 2006, 28 February, 2009
Christine Piper, trustee, neighbour, 23 February, 2009
Rob Francis, former trustee, former member of Riverside, 28 February, 2009
Jill Seeney, former resident, 21 April, 2006
Heather Lindsay, former resident, 29 April, 2006
Muni Dubrau, former resident, 26 March, 2006
Amelie (pseudonym), former resident, 26 March, 2006
Klaus Wendlandt-Gruner, former resident, 22 April, 2006
Sandra Campbell, former resident, 28 April, 2006
Sally Austin, former resident, 20 April, 2006,
Peter Topping, former resident, 28 August, 2006
Marie Cook, current resident, 25 August, 2006
Kenny, resident at time of interview, 25 August, 2006

Wilderland

Piet Radford, former resident, 20 January, 2009
Thomas Muhlbacher, resident at time of interview, 21 January, 2009
Rob (WOOFer), visitor, 22 January, 2009
Heather Hansen, neighbour, daughter of original owners, 4 February, 2009
Christine Grove, former resident, 23 February, 2009
Archie Hislop, former resident, 23 February 2009
Avner Cain, current resident, 3 November, 2009
Shaki Cain, current resident, 3 November, 2009
Russel Mooyman, current resident, 3 November, 2009
Jon Pat Myers, resident at time of interview, 3 November, 2009
Hippie Tim (pseudonym), resident at time of interview, 22 January, 2009

Tui

Surrendra van Susteren, member, 24 February, 2009

Robina McCurdy, member, 25 February, 2009

Frans Muter, member, 24 February, 2009

Keith Orr, member, 25 February, 2009

Tina Jansen, member, 25 February, 2009

Cherrie Wainui, member, 16 May, 2009

Interviewed but not quoted:

Sam Osborne, resident, grew up at Tui, 26 February, 2009

William, member, 26 February, 2009

Guinevere, visitor, 26 February, 2009

Riverside

Colin Cole, member, 27 February, 2009

Rob Francis, former member, 28 February, 2009

Verena Gruner, member (former resident of Renaissance), 28 February, 2009

Barbie Cole, member, 29 February, 2009

Sylvia Bauer, probationary member at time of interview, 2 March, 2009

Sandra Coad, member, 2 March, 2009

Phillip Vincent, member, 11 December, 2009

Marj Browne, former member, 11 May, 2011

Also interviewed but not quoted:

Emery Jones, associate member, tenant, 12 November, 2009

Kirsty Cole, grew up at Riverside, visitor, 27 February, 2009

Chris Palmer, member, 12 November, 2009

Appendix F: Sample Consent Form

DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIETIES AND CULTURES
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Olive Jones
Phone +64 7 8557644
odmj@waikato.ac.nz



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Intentional Communities from the 1970s to the Present

1. This research project is about the nature of intentional communities as they were in the 1970s and 1980s and as they exist now. This project has been given ethical approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

2. I would like to interview you about your views and involvement with your community.

3. I would like to record the interview so that I can obtain an accurate record of your views.

4. When I am not using it, the recording and any transcript of it will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office and no-one else will have access to them. You may choose to have the recording returned to you at the completion of the research.

5. You may choose to be anonymous in this research project. This means that no-one else will know that you have been interviewed and you will not be able to be identified in any published report on the findings of the research.

6. The results of this research will be included in my PhD research. It may also be presented to academic conferences, published in academic journals, and will be presented at the University of Waikato Department of Societies and Cultures seminar series.

7. If you agree to take part in this interview, you have the following rights:
- a) To refuse to answer any particular question, and to terminate the interview at any time.
 - b) To ask any further questions about the interview or research project that occurs to you, either during the interview or at any other time.
 - c) To remain anonymous, should you so choose - anything that might identify you will not be included in conference papers, academic articles or any other report about the findings of the research.
 - d) To withdraw your consent at any time up until one month after your interview by contacting me at the address on the letterhead.

e) To take any complaints you have about the interview or the research project to the University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences' Human Research Ethics Committee (University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand), or you can email its secretary, fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz .

I wish to remain anonymous (circle) YES NO – *to be confirmed at end of interview*

I consent to be interviewed for this research on the above conditions:

Name of interviewee:

Signed: *Interviewee* _____ Date: _____

I agree to abide by the above conditions:

Signed: *Interviewer* _____ Date: _____

Appendix G: Sample questions for interviewees

- How long ago did you join the community, and what were the circumstances that lead you here?
- Where did you come from?
- Why do you live in a community?
- Why this community and not some other?
- Can you identify some of the things that influenced you to structure the community the way you did?
- What was it like when you first arrived?
- What are the most obvious changes that have happened in the time you have lived here? (physical, social, political, philosophical)
- What do you think caused these changes?
- If you were to draw a timeline of the community, what would be significant milestones?
- What has the effect of becoming established had on the group dynamics?
- How have you (personally and collectively) overcome major problems?
- How does the community deal with conflict?
- Would you say there are recognised leaders in the community?
- Are there informal or unacknowledged leaders?
- How much do you feel you have to sacrifice personally to be a part of the community?
- What do you gain from living here that you don't get elsewhere?
- Do you find there is a tension between your identity as an individual and your identity as part of the community?
- What would you identify as the greatest challenges to living communally?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages?
- What do you think attracts people to this way of living?
- What do you think are the main causes for people to leave?
- What do you think are the biggest problems communities face to stay vital?
- Do you have a picture of the future (for yourself, for the community)?
- What would you say are the best and worst aspects of living collectively?
- How much do you think the community has sustained or departed from its aims and objectives?
- What do you consider to be the community's greatest strengths and/or successes?