

Matters of proportion, proximity, power and professionalism

The Canterbury Earthquakes have given cause to reflect on the concept of scale. The September Earthquake on the Greendale Fault was 7.1 on the Richter Scale. I was in the North Island and largely unaffected apart from disrupted return travel plans. Viewed from afar, with the fluorescently jacketed Mayor dominating our TV screen, the message was that this was a devastating tragedy. The reality on my return - no one dead and much of Christchurch unscathed - led me to write a slightly tongue-in-cheek opinion piece promoting urban commercial dairy farming in herd homes to replace the flattened parts of Christchurch.

That was to appear in this issue of LPR, but it would no longer be appropriate because the 22 February quake, only 6.3 on the Richter scale, did take lives and cause widespread damage. Again I was in the North Island and so feel a certain 'guilt' when talking with those who were here, but this time it was like returning to a third world city. There could be no doubt that Christchurch was wounded. But as we bemoaned the devastation and tragedy, the 'real thing' struck Japan. That was genuine devastation and tragedy with a death toll almost certainly beyond 20,000 and places transformed to memories.

I doubt whether New Zealanders outside Christchurch could as fully appreciate the Japanese situation as those here. New Zealand lacks the proximity to Japan and proximity is crucial. As Christchurch faces ongoing daily disruption and further damage, already there is talk of 'Earthquake fatigue'; that the rest of New Zealand wants to 'move on' and is bored with daily Christchurch quake-related stories. Japan's quake will also fade swiftly from New Zealand's collective consciousness. Who remembers Haiti's devastating quake of just last year? There is an assumption that developed countries have the technology and knowledge to plan ahead to build resiliently; that we have the power over nature to bend it to our wills, to make us invulnerable. We have had stark reminders of true power and of our own humanity; of how short-sighted is our anthropocentrism that tells us, as we speed around the corners of life, that we are in control. We have also seen how good planning can aid resilience and recovery. Pegasus, designed to withstand liquefaction demonstrates this. We have also seen the value of pulling together, of volunteerism and of building community spirit - of planning that develops social capital. Of a social heritage that stretches beyond buildings and of the value of professional, genuine communication and action.

This community spirit, at a much less significant scale, has been evident among the LPR team and I am proud of their efforts to once again put out a LPR that has only been delayed for a short period. That the current team has achieved this speaks well for the longevity of LPR. They continue to demonstrate their heritage; standards of dedication and professionalism that were honoured by the NZPI Award of Merit at its recent conference. That the profession has recognised the LPR in this way was a much appreciated surprise.

Two members of LPR's Permanent Editorial Advisory Board also received awards at the NZPI conference and I have great

pleasure in congratulating Prof Ali Memon (Gold Award) and alumnus Clare Piper (nee Sargeant) (Lance Leikis Award) for their achievements. These accolades from our professional planning colleagues affirm the standing of Lincoln University and its community of planners and attest to the skills that they bring to the recovery and planning for a future for this region. Well done! Now back to work...



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(and a staff member of Lincoln University)