

Local Identity in Christchurch

WCRA asked its members what they meant by “local identity”. Amongst a number of responses this one from a husband and wife stands out as encapsulating all the others:

I have a strong sense of Christchurch identity born from a ‘sense of place’ through living in Christchurch. This identity this is strongly related to the fact that Christchurch has very local governance.

Loss of control

Christchurch gives me a sense of control and agency, that I have felt lacking in most places that I have lived, yet defining this is complex.

The sense of control I have comes from being engaged locally, and knowing how to make a difference. In Christchurch, I feel that my ‘voice is heard’. A loss of control would mean that I believe my voice isn’t being heard, that I cannot engage locally or influence my environment positively.

Through feeling a sense of control and feeling that I play a small but recognisable part, I feel a sense of place, a loss of control would mean that I would feel that I do not play a recognisable role in engaging with my environment. A loss of control would mean that I merely live in Christchurch; however my sense of control means that I am part of what makes up Christchurch rather than merely living here.

This is embedded in the beliefs that I have about where I live, that I am listened to by people who also share my sense of place. This sense of control clearly comes from my beliefs that I can relate to and influence a smaller (rather than a large) group of key influencers on local issues who I can express myself to about local issues, who I can inform and be informed, and to make local changes for positive improvement.

A loss of control would mean that I would not believe that I am informed or able to contribute towards positive improvement, at the worst – it could mean apathy about where I live. So my sense of place which feeds my identity has an emotional, human quality. It is linked to local organisation and a sense of place.

Loss of identity

The relationship I have with Christchurch is one of identity, attachment and dependence.

I depend on Christchurch as it is integral to my sense of identity, which resides in my interpretation of my environment, and how and why I belong in Christchurch. My identity belonging to Christchurch relates to my preferences, sense of attachment, goals and beliefs. This attachment involves interplay between my emotions and beliefs.

I believe that Christchurch has a ‘local’ feeling, this Christchurch essence, and that gives me a greater sense of ownership of my environment. I feel that I can achieve my personal goals in relation to my environment, clearly and easily in Christchurch, through a shared identity, with other residents. I have an ‘insider’ feeling living in Christchurch, whereas with other previous environments I had an ‘outsider’ feeling towards the environment.

Loss of this identity would be a loss of ownership of the environment and responsibility towards the environment. The sense of heritage that I feel towards Christchurch is related to my rootedness living here, and is embedded in beliefs that I share this same sense of heritage with the Christchurch community.

Facilities that could "move away"

Certainly many services can be moved away: rubbish collection, all purchasing, some planning, anything that crosses boundaries such as management of markets. We feel that the planning department are sympathetic with the character of Christchurch, but could be more effective as part of a larger team.

Sent by e-mail to Jim Biggin of WCRA 18th January 2016