

Creating a Participation Society
(Mike Doolan, Keynote address: Hull, UK, 9 November 2012)

I was recently in Amsterdam and had the great pleasure of witnessing Rob van Pagee being awarded a knighthood by the Queen of The Netherlands for his services in the promotion of family group conferencing – take a bow Rob!!

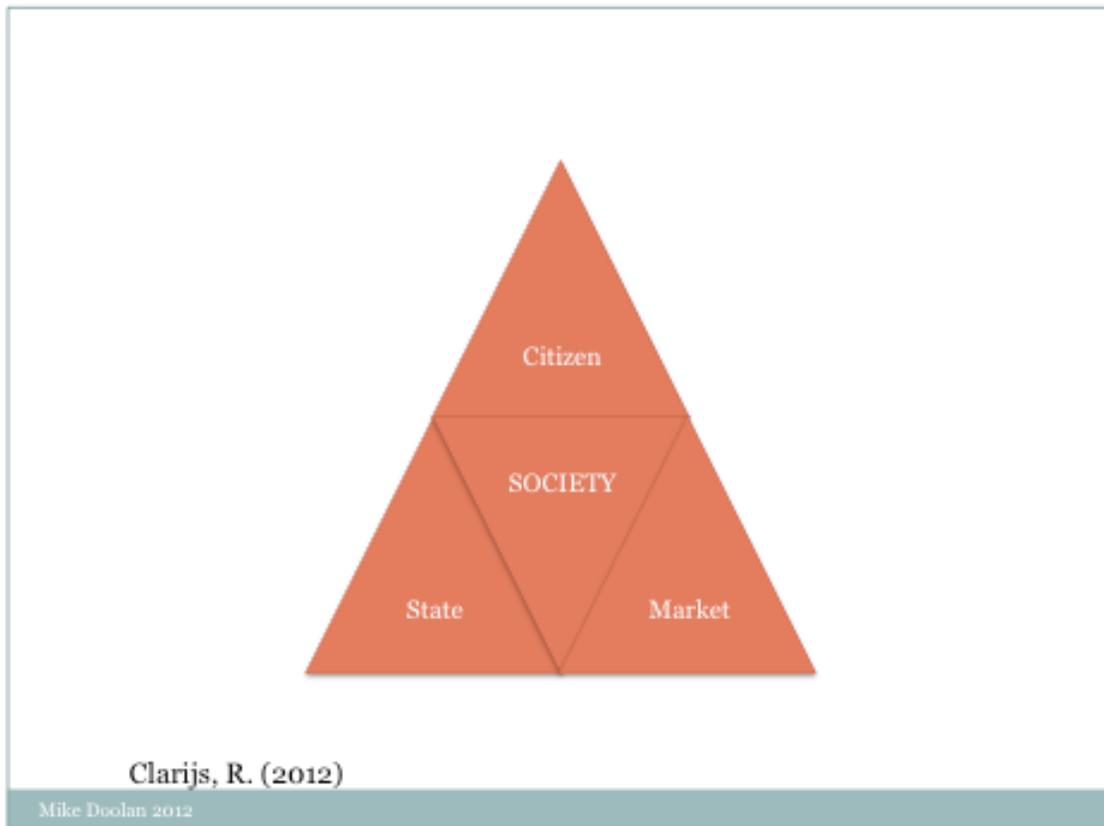
Apart from its personal worth to Rob and his family and colleagues, the award is significant in that it recognizes something that is still somewhat counter-cultural in Western Societies – Taking back our power as citizens in the management of our personal affairs.

On that same trip, I visited a small Dutch village near the Belgium border. My host, in walking me around the village, took me to the centre of the village green where there was a large tree several hundred years old with a wooden seat built around it. Another tree nearby, already one hundred years old will house the seat when the old tree died, and nearby stood a sapling already growing for use well into the future. The village will maintain the tree with the seat in perpetuity as a reminder of the days before the Industrial Revolution, when they were fully in charge of their own affairs. Each Monday morning the town's mayor and alderman would come to sit on the tree seat while the citizens gathered about them. There, the affairs of their town and environs were debated and agreed.

So, that was the way life once was. What does it look like now? Writers in continental Europe in recent years having been talking about the Colonization of the LIFE WORLD. What is the Life World? It is that set of personal, familial and community relationships and places that sustain us and give meaning to our lives. Once, human life worlds were geographically bounded whereas today the things that bind our life-world are more weighted towards our relational connections.

The general thesis is that the powers of decision-making citizens once enjoyed in their life world have been systematically eroded by the development and growth of the State in their lives, and the growth of the open market.

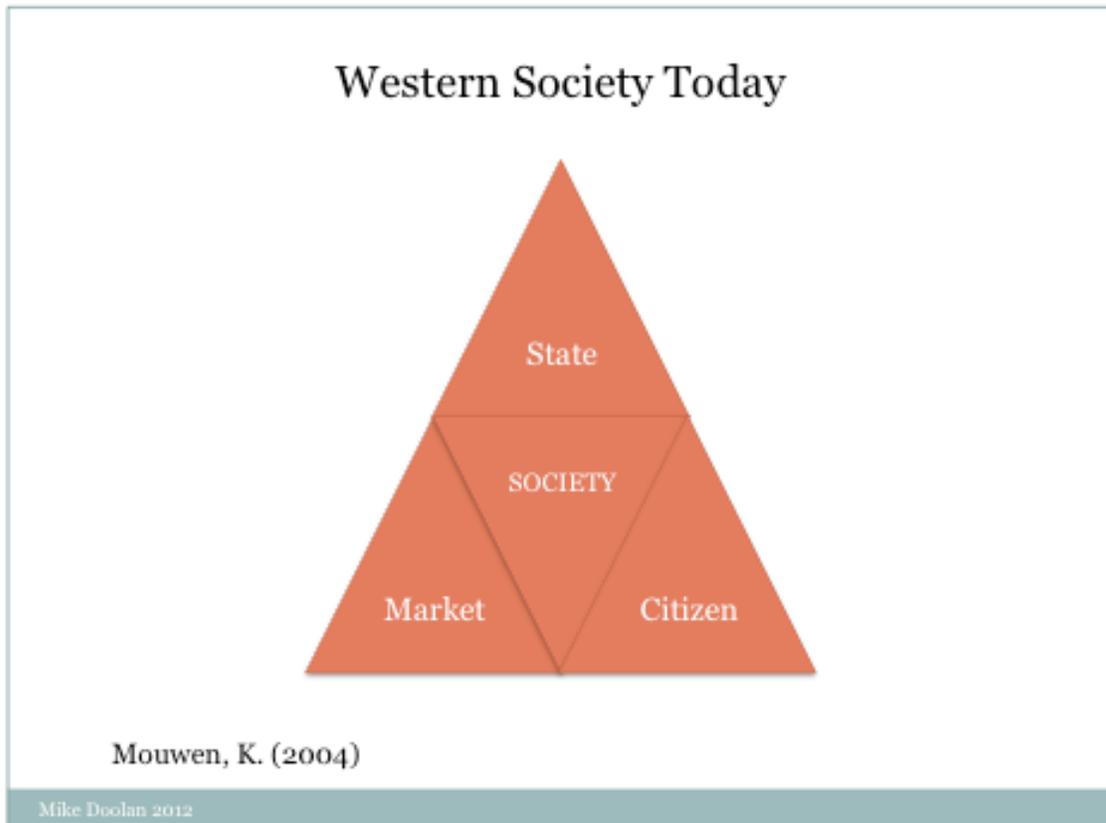
In the days of the tree seat in the middle of the village green, the relationship of the life-world, the market and the state can be portrayed as:



Clarijs describes citizen, state and market as the 3 mechanisms coordinating society, differing from each other in regards to essential functions, regulating principles and aims. The state is directed at public interest; citizens at private initiative and group interest; and the market at self-interest. It is interesting how the various political parties in Western Government today readily portray the interplay of these three mechanisms, with electoral change representing the ascendance of one or other in the coordination process.

The picture is dynamic rather than static. Migrations occur while the basic model stays intact. Think about how social services have migrated from local community to central government control once they needed resources to maintain operations. Hospitals have moved from life world control into the angles of both the State and the market. Even football teams, archetypically life-world in origin, have in these days of professional sport slipped into the purvey of the market. Think about how little migration occurs from the State and the market to the life world. It is claimed that most migration diminishes Citizen power.

Today, the picture looks more like this



The State has taken to itself major decision-making powers that once belonged to us in our life world. The market, whose self-interest keeps it firmly fixed on profit with no moral obligations to the citizenry at large, does not rescue us, says Clarijs.

How has this come to be?

The System World Developed

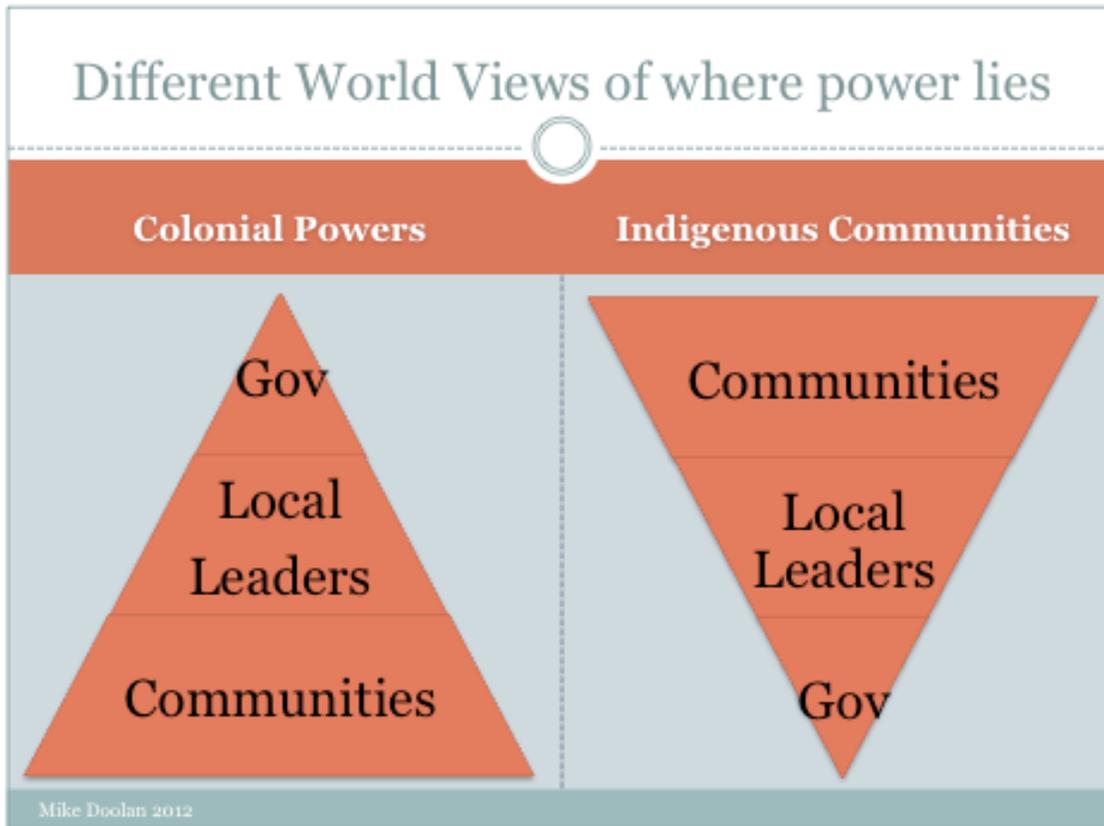


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- The Industrial Revolution
- Colonization
- Urbanization
- Traditional methods overwhelmed
- Institutions
- The Welfare State
- New Public Management

As the life world lost its geographical binding, traditional methods of helping and decision-making were overwhelmed. With the Welfare State emerged the system world to take the place of local control and citizens became subject to extraneous decision-making that had more and more impact on their lives. New Public Management, says Clarijs, emerging in the 1990's served to strengthen the impact of the Welfare State. *This influential model creates dependent citizens seen as clients of professional systems.* As citizens define themselves as clients, they become passive and inactive witnesses to decision-making on their behalf. They develop high expectations of service, more demand for support and are rarely, if ever, satisfied.

Sadly, Indigenous peoples under Western Government's colonization suffered double jeopardy. Their primary colonization occurred at the hands of peoples with a completely different worldview of power and decision-making:



And they suffered still further in the general diminishing of citizen power to which I have alluded.

In the light of all this, the word “restorative” takes on a compelling meaning and importance. This is no longer simply removing the middle player in a dialogue between citizens, but rather a challenge by citizens to the power of the State and its agencies in their governance of our lives – what Clarijs and Malmberg refer to as “The Quiet Revolution”

The all-encompassing Welfare State that often suffocates citizens is having its final drink at the Last Chance Saloon. The introduction of the open market as an alternative has not been very successful. People are suppressed by the expanding ‘system world’ damaging their ‘life world’. For that reason, how the welfare state conceptualizes its welfare role has to change. The welfare state as we know it does not need to be reformed, rather it needs to be replaced. The ‘participation state’ is the natural successor(back cover).

The life world wants its own back!

Last year, a German Professor, Frank Fruchtel, brought home to me just how prescient were that group of senior Maori people, working with a number of departmental heads, in their conclusions in the Report Puaote-ata-tu. They said



PUAO-TE-ATA-TU
(DAY BREAK)

Ministerial Advisory Committee
on a Maori Perspective
for the Department of Social Welfare

Society is not aware of the extent to which
The law has defeated The Maori way of
life

Our institutions simply ignore and
freeze out other cultures

Social work is often a removal of
responsibility and power from people
to look after themselves

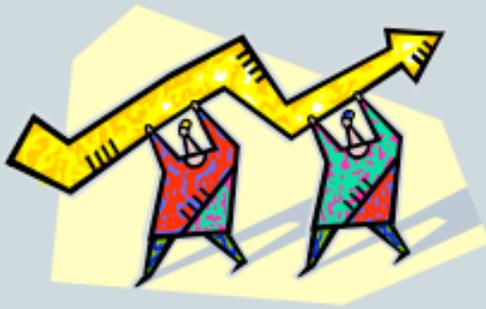
Colonization of the Life-world: Frank Fruchtel, Potsdam University, 2011

Puaote-ata-tu called for participation by Maori (and by inference all citizens) in decisions about matters that concern them, and the New Zealand Government of the day agreed to restore to them and all citizens this right in respect of child welfare, child protection and youth justice services – a Trojan horse, perhaps, for a Participation Society to come.

Do you appreciate what happened here – a colonized people embarked on a “quiet revolution” and ended up themselves colonizing those very system-led fields imposed upon them by colonial powers some 150 years earlier!

From these writings a number of value orientations can be observed:

Participation Societies Value....



- Equality
- Collectivity
- Diversity
- Participation
- Ownership
- Responsibility

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These value orientations confront modern “wisdoms” of: getting ahead of others; individualism; uniformity; system-led decision-making; client-ism; and passivity.

Participation, ownership and responsibility are linked and co-dependant. Participation is the key to people developing ownership of proposals and solutions, and accepting personal responsibility emerges from the experience of ownership.

Participation societies can expect some refreshing outcomes:

Outcomes



- ◆ Self determination
- ◆ Independence
- ◆ Social Inclusion
- ◆ Social Capital
- ◆ Service Effectiveness

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Self-determination: Ownership and commitment, right to self-agency;

Supporting independence: having experiences of problem solving that equip people for future events;

Social Inclusion: Valuing diversity, eliminating institutional and personal prejudice and promoting equity of access to services and support;

Social Capital – Competency building – self-actualization – Accepting agency to care and protect family members – bonding, and building bridges to others;

Service effectiveness: Responses using both System and Life-world resources maximize the resource pool around difficult situations.

There seem to me to be three core requirements to begin to move towards a Participation Society:

Three Core Requirements



- Mandate
- Institutions adopt new ways
- New professional roles

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Mandate emerges from legislative, political, managerial and practice environments as people confront in a responsible and rights-based way, the value systems of the State and the Market, as Maori did in New Zealand during the 1980's.

An example of Institutions adopting new ways was the response of bureaucrats to education reforms in New Zealand, also in the 1980's, which returned the control of schools to local communities (and thus to the angle of the life world). Deposited staff of regional Educations Boards, once with control functions in relation to schools, swiftly reorganised themselves into service companies and sought to provide services to the very schools they once controlled.

New professional roles would see professionals adapting: from knowledge owners to knowledge sharers; from teacher to learner; from expert leader to accountable partner; from problem identifier to competence builder; and from followers of procedure to communicators with citizens in their life world settings.

An Example of Citizen Participation

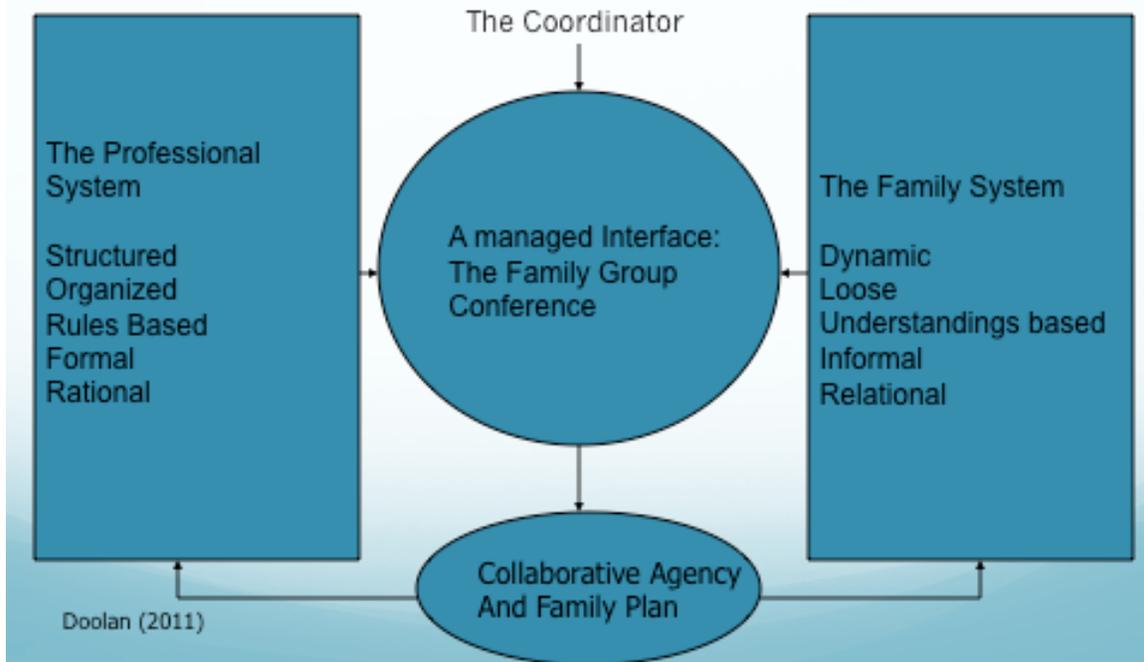


- The Family Group Conference
- Recognizes the Family Group as Life World
- Positions Family Groups to take charge
- Goal is Family Group Agency

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The NZ Government decided that change was so urgent that they took the “Blue Water” approach described by Clarijs – simply ignore what is there and build something new.

Bridging the Professional and Family Systems



As we work for the adoption of restorative practices as the glue that will bind our societies in a new way, we can envisage a somewhat different future:

The Future?



- Ownership and responsibility in the Life-World
- Citizenship building through participation and trust
- Communities identifying needs and solutions
- Institutions providing knowledge and services

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It is apparent that the Restorative Cities of Hull and Leeds are well on the path to achieving these aims and are leading the way in important societal change at the macro community level. So, here's to blue water change! Here's to the Quiet Revolution!

And remember

Together we can change our world...

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The nine most
frightening words
in the English
language are, "I'm
from the
government and I'm
here to help." –
Ronald Reagan

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