



Role of University, Trans-Disciplinary Transformation, Pacific Context

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This paper is based on the proposition that academic institutions must make significant and critical trans-disciplinary contributions to the social, cultural and economic transformation of what has been described as the “Water City of the South Pacific”. Manukau City, located within the Greater Auckland urban region, is the fastest growing city in New Zealand. Population demographics and economic projections suggest that the future of New Zealand is inextricably linked to the future of Manukau. The city has more than 50 ethnic communities. Along with those of European descent, there are significant communities with a Maori (27%), Pacific (22%), Chinese, South East Asian, Middle Eastern and Indian heritage. 44% of the population is under 25 years of age. 29% are under the age of 15 and 37% under the age of 20. The paper will present a case study of the Futurespacific Project. Futurespacific is conceived as a ‘flagship’ or an ‘umbrella’ project under which to establish innovative reciprocal relationships between the Auckland University of Technology (AUT), its host community and the regional economy. It is designed to deliver the advanced, multi-level, multi-disciplinary creativity required to engage with the complex, inter-related problems and opportunities that come with the transition to a new globally-connected Pacific society. Established in 2009, this transdisciplinary project links all Faculties of AUT University (Design & Creative Technologies, Health & Environmental Sciences, Humanities, and Business & Law) as well as Te Ara Poutama, Pacific Media Centre, AUT Innovation Centre, the Institute of Public Policy and external communities of practice. It develops tangible, integrated and interactive models that imagine alternative futures for design, research, learning and civic engagement, using methodologies, agencies, partnerships and projects at micro-, medium and macro-scales. Thus, the project simultaneously draws upon and contributes to the growth of Manukau City as a physical, cultural and demographic resource. More significantly, through its collaborative ethos and creative outcomes, it will deliver an innovative model of how educational, professional, commercial and public agencies can work together to achieve shared academic, cultural, economic and social objectives. It will also create a generally applicable model for the innovative role that can be played by tertiary institutions in their respective locales, particularly for those with strengths in the design, planning and creative technology-based programmes that contribute directly to spatial and economic transformation.

KEY WORDS: Role of university, trans-disciplinary transformation, Pacific context.