

REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF SIZE: PART 1 SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

By Linda Blincko, Creative Director, Depot Artspace



Why is small beautiful when everything promoted as powerful, spectacular and worthy of respect in society – motor vehicles, buildings, personal appendages, bank balances - seems to mock the statement? Super yachts, super powers and, more lately, super cities all proclaim the glory of size.

Well, large has never actually benefited the general populous, especially in relation to the examples above. Super City Auckland is a case in point, where all the assets and attributes our smaller communities cherished are being incrementally dismantled by this greedy juggernaut.

When structures get big the things within them are, of course, smaller and can often get overlooked. This can be exacerbated for that which is already small or overlooked – minority groups, social problems, certain interest groups and sectors of the population, and certain localities – is often rendered invisible.

And then, when bureaucracies are formed in response to the complexity and size of services required for large populations, another significant set of problems arises; in the quest for efficiency the system often overlooks or sidelines those it is set up to serve. Hospitals, government departments, banks and other corporate entities such as telephone and internet service providers - the list is endless – are all client centred services, and yet clients often feel

superfluous, like they're languishing somewhere at the bottom of the bureaucratic structure. So it is with the Super City.

Why small is beautiful socially is that the people are unlikely to get lost. Small groups delivering services, such as Borough Councils, as opposed to vast Local Body bureaucracies, always come face to face with the people they serve. They develop relationships with one another which are affinitive as well as functional, and which are more likely to entail mutual accountability.

The Depot Artspace operates in such a way; as a small grassroots community it experiences and subsequently celebrates small as beautiful, working to satisfy individual needs and interests – the creative employment seeker, the exhibitor, the musician rehearsing or recording here, the young person on work experience, the volunteers – through its inclusive pro-community philosophy. Inclusiveness is a considered practice; whoever comes is acknowledged and encouraged to find their place. The Depot offers a lot of opportunity for involvement, in the services, programmes and spaces available. The arts are distinctly about acknowledging and supporting difference as it is reflected and embodied in the work of the artist, and the inclusiveness which is experienced here is the antidote to isolation, a common malaise among many creative practitioners.

The other excellent thing about small is that it is infinitely versatile; it can remain small and independent but it can also organise itself into a collective and gain strength in its new form. Individuals united by a common vision or concern have a greater capacity to effect change. The whole is certainly greater than the sum of its parts as movements such as those inspired by Martin Luther King and Gandhi attest. In New Zealand the anti-apartheid movement of 1981 succeeded in bringing disparate groups and individuals together, all to effect historically significant change for justice and equality.

Small can do great things when at its core, which is more easily discernible, are the principles that guide its action. Small is easily exposed and therefore more readily accountable, more easily accessible and in its smallness more versatile in its response to issues and opportunities. Such is the nature of smallness as embodied by the Depot Artspace, the reason why it remains practically responsive to its community.

In his book *The Breakdown of Nations* Austrian economist and self-described philosophical [anarchist](#) Leopold Kohr (1909 -1994) known for his opposition to the "cult of bigness" made the following statement which runs counter to current societal trends but which is true in the effects:

[...] there seems to be only one cause behind all forms of social misery: bigness. Oversimplified as this may seem, we shall find the idea more easily acceptable if we consider that bigness, or oversize, is really much more than just a social problem. It appears to be the one and only problem



permeating all creation. Whenever something is wrong, something is too big. [...] And if the body of a people becomes diseased with the fever of aggression, brutality, collectivism, or massive idiocy, it is not because it has fallen victim to bad leadership or mental derangement. It is because human beings, so charming as individuals or in small aggregations, have been welded into over concentrated social units.

