



How Localism And Community Spirit Can See Us Through The Corona Crisis

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Rather than more centralisation of powers with the government and bureaucrats in Canberra, a better approach to managing coronavirus would be through localism underpinned by a shared set of values.

Coronavirus has demonstrated that totalitarian regimes fear the free dissemination of information more than perhaps anything else. Coronavirus spread in part because the medicos and ordinary people of Wuhan were not allowed by Chinese authorities to warn their countrymen or citizens of other countries. The world watched as the doctor that tried to sound the alarm about the virus died at the same time as journalists were expelled from the province.

Even when not accompanied by brute force, centralism creates information gluts and disempowers citizens to act.

The impulse to centralise information to prevent 'misinformation' is counterproductive. Take the social media outlets, for example. On March 17, Facebook decided to stop the spread of "fake



news” by flagging all commentary on the virus as against “community standards.” This included not just commentary on the health implications of the virus, but also commentary and analysis on potential social implications, and, the fiscal and monetary response of governments. Similarly, Twitter users searching for articles on the virus were redirected to the World Health Organisation’s guidelines. In effect, these social media networks are censoring discussions about the flow-on issues and government responses to coronavirus.

Localism, by contrast, enables individuals as part of broader communities to spread information and act on it quickly. This is the complete opposite to a centralised technocracy that dispenses information from the top down and quickly hides discrepancies if new information does not fit the narrative they want to tell.

Localism, however, is dependent on social cohesion, culture, and above all, values.

Localism requires social cohesion. Unfortunately, society is fraying as high levels of migration combine with increasing social atomisation. Australians have moved from towns to cities, from houses to apartments, and from owned to rented properties. Fewer Australians now know their neighbours or have a stake in their community, in large part because their neighbours and community changes so often.

The lack of physical bonds has been replaced with large global networks. And as nice as friends in other countries are, we can’t ask them for a cup of sugar (or a toilet paper roll). No wonder people feel they need to stockpile. The scenes of people fighting in supermarkets, which the Prime Minister rightly said was “un-Australian” in a press conference Wednesday last week, suddenly make sense if people think it is one against the world.

Hopefully tough times will also bring people together. By helping the neighbour across the corridor with some extra supplies (particularly if they are in self-isolation) maybe we can find our sense of community again.

Localism is based on a shared culture. Everyone can be an Australian. It is an identity based not on ethnicity but attitude.

Our culture is to overlay the best British manners, like queuing patiently, with larrikinism. An anecdote that history podcaster Dan Carlin tells in his WWI series is the time he asked an old US military man who the toughest soldiers were, the reply was the ANZACs because they were always laughing.

Australia has survived much worse hardships through humour, grit and good sense.

The glue that holds a community together, whether that be as small as a household or as big as a nation, is values.

However easy-going we might be, we should encourage the people who live here uphold Australian values which are immortalised at the Isurava battle site on the Kokoda Track where the words “courage, endurance, mateship and sacrifice.”



These values are as true today as when they were first etched.

Post coronavirus Australia has a great opportunity to flourish, but first we must cut away the twin problems of centralisation and division which have been allowed to fester.

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