

## Valuing Human Capital

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Address to the Engineers for Social Responsibility Conference, Auckland  
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### **I was asked by the organisers to address the following questions:**

- | How can work be humanised to strengthen communities?
  - | Why do so many people work excessive hours?
  - | What is this doing to our communities and society?

In my precirculated paper ([Sustainable Work - a New Way of Addressing the Employment Issue](#), which is a WEA Policy Paper, and was a background paper to the recent WEA conference on Reshaping Work) I propose a new approach to what we call Work, making the point that we need to distinguish between Work and Employment, and that we also need to encourage citizens to work together on their hopes and aspirations. In this approach, we would aim to consider community need first, rather than concentrate purely on individual benefit.

I also have a concern about the term "human capital", because the term Capital is normally understood within a Market framework. The implication is that society is made up of either labour or capital. That, to me, is far too limiting a description of the human dimension.

Suppose I change the title of your conference to "Valuing the Commons"? After all, we all know that the physical infrastructure of water supply, drains, electricity, roads etc. was built to be available to us all; it is what we know as the Built Commons. Once we make this change of perspective, of course, we then find we can no longer neatly separate off the social from the environmental and the market. We see them as completely intertwined.

The Institution of Professional Engineers New Zealand Code of Ethics, which formally underlies professional engineering practice in this country, has requirements that also paint a picture bigger than that of the Market. One cannot privatise the items in the Code! The challenge facing the profession is, therefore, how to promote - and indeed to monitor - adherence to the Code. It cannot be done through a Market approach alone.

The point I want to emphasise is that humanising work requires us to see a bigger picture than the one obtainable through a Market lens. Beginning at a simple, practical level, we need to consider not only the returns to Labour and to Capital but also to both parts of the Commons; the natural and the built.

The Time Use Study helps illuminate another part of the bigger picture - the Social Commons. This study arose from a pilot study by the Department of Statistics, which required participants to keep a record of time spent on a range of activities. The categories under which the responses were initially recorded are as follows:

- | Personal Care
- | Labour force activity
- | Education and training
  - | Household work
- | Caregiving for household members
- | Purchasing goods and services for own household
  - | Religious, cultural and civic participation
  - | Social entertainment



2. monitor their contact with the world of paid employment, acknowledging the contributions of employers, managers and employees to the Commons.
3. advocate that any moves to flexible employment require flexisecurity. Centuries ago, just about everyone had access to a piece of land as a basic share of the Commons. Now, income has become essential for most people. Security and the notions of "enough for all" are part of this focus on the Commons.
4. advocate that Common Core Government Services in health, education and justice be available to all
5. support local currencies, green dollars, and other means of localising economies so people can build up their contributions to society's Commons to complement the contributions made through paid employment.

Building up the big picture of what makes up the hopes and dreams of people in our communities - both local and communities of interest - is essential if we are to move beyond homo oeconomicus to being fully human.

Replenishing the Commons is vital if we are to be able to move towards what has been called a Politics of Generosity. And, of course, taxation methods are the tool we have to deal with the common pool of money, which is an essential part of the building up of the Commons. Changes in what we tax may be the best signal we can give for this new approach. Suppose we stopped taxing income and started taxing the use of the Commons; taxing bads and disservices rather than goods and services?

A practical beginning on humanising work and valuing the Commons could be a submission to the upcoming Review of Taxation!?

#### Canterbury Volunteer Centre papers

- | [The Value of Volunteering](#) for SROW Symposium by Ruth Gardner, September 2000
  - | [Gifting - and the Consequences of its Absence](#) by Katherine Peet, May 1999
- | [Goodwork - A New Way of Addressing the Employment Issue](#) by Katherine Peet, 1996
  - | [Volunteering and Local Government](#) by David Gregory, 2001
  - | [Valuing Human Capital](#) by Katherine Peet, March 2001
  - | [Sustainable Work](#) by Katherine Peet, April 2000

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