

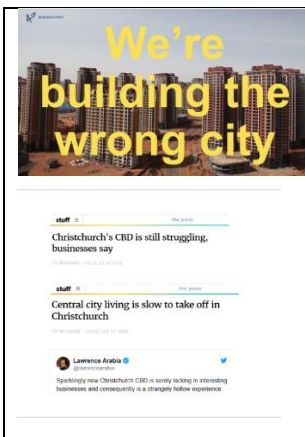


The Pulse of Christchurch 2020

Carl Davidson, Tuesday May 26th, 2020




1. Good evening.
2. Research First is an insights company that has been around in Christchurch since 2006. And this presentation – the Christchurch Pulse - shares its name with the regular omnibus survey we run with residents across Greater Christchurch.
3. Each time we run that omnibus we add in some questions about what residents are feeling, what’s important to them, and how their behaviour is changing. As researchers we are particularly interested in what keeps people up at night and what gets them up in the morning.
4. By combining the insights from those surveys and triangulating them with the research we do across the city for a range of clients, we have compiled a valuable and unique - insight into what is happening in the city. Think of it as an informal meta-analysis if you will.





5. And what that research is showing us is – as of late last year – there are lots of people in Christchurch who think we are building the wrong city.
6. That’s not an easy message idea to hear, and it’s not an easy one for us to talk about, and it remains to be seen how much this view might have changed after Covi-19, but we think there is a serious and inconvenient truth here.
7. But if this argument is right, then it helps explain why the CBD has struggled and why inner-city living has not taken off.



8. And I should say that while our meta-analysis might be informal, it is undoubtedly robust. We have run over 50 projects in the Greater Christchurch region in the last three years and have talked to at least 35,000 residents. So, when we say ‘no-one knows Christchurch better than Research First’, we are not joking.

	<p>9. When we talk to people about why they have chosen to live in Christchurch, or choose to keep living here, the things that keep bubbling to the top are (i) safety, (ii) the ease of living here, (iii) the ease of getting around, (iv) the peace and quiet, and (v) the (relative) affordability.</p> <p>10. And it's these core values that the city we're building seems to have got out of step with. In other words, the city we're building isn't a great fit with the needs of the people that already live here, nor reflect why they have chosen to live here.</p>
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	<p>11. In fact, have a look at this international research about why people live in inner cities.</p> <p>12. Now ask yourself how many of these hold for Christchurch?</p> <p>13. Add in the fact that residents say that they see the inner city as being unsafe, hard to access, hard to get around, and poor value for money (comparatively), their lack of willingness to move there makes more sense.</p>
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	<p>14. You might be tired of hearing about car parking in the city but the lack of on-street car parking, or car parks with city dwellings, compounds this problem. In some work we did about housing choice in the inner city, the availability of car parks was the single most important attribute driving decision-making. The number of car parks available with the inner-city dwelling was more important than the number of bedrooms.</p> <p>15. So, when you compare the motivations of Christchurch's residents with the settings in the CBD, the mismatch becomes obvious.</p> <p>16. Indeed, what our research tells us is that people see the CBD as a destination for visitors rather than locals.</p>
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17. As researchers we are suspicious of arguments about exceptionalism, but it really does seem that Christchurch is different. And not simply because we had a series of earthquakes that devastated our CBD while leaving most of the suburbs intact.
18. What our research shows is that Christchurch is fundamentally a suburban city. It's a place that people choose because it's one where they think they can still achieve the Kiwi Dream. And this holds for people who move here too – one of the main reasons for choosing Christchurch over other locations is that people can afford a house with a lawn.
19. This really matters. So much of the work we do with communities highlights the role that 'ontological security' plays in their sense of wellbeing. This 'security' is the sense of continuity you have in regard to the events in your life. In New Zealand it is the same idea captured in the Maori notion of **Tūrangawaewae**, which is all about having a place to stand and a story to tell.
20. In the work we did for the Red Cross in Christchurch after the earthquakes, it was this intangible benefit of restoring ontological security or restoring Tūrangawaewae that residents valued most about the Red Cross's efforts. Not the objective measures of wellbeing but the intangible notion of having continuity restored to their lives.
21. And part of the story that people tell about their lives in Christchurch is that this is a city that is easy to live in, one that's easy to get around. Which explains why roads are so important to residents. As uninspiring as it might sound, residents see repairing the roads (still) as a priority.




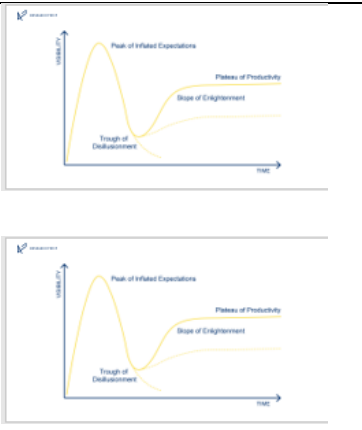
22. The residents we talk to are supportive of the anchor projects, really want a stadium, and are supportive of lights in Hagley Oval. They are hungry for things that will bring international events to the city. But they want them because those are the things that modern cities have. This distinction is important because it means these 'projects' are hygiene factors and not game changers. Yes Te Pae will be important but only because any self-respecting city has a conference centre that brings international conferences to town.

	<p>23. The only 'project' that seems different is the Cathedral. The Cathedral was the metonym for Christchurch, used as shorthand for the city in the same way the Eiffel Tower is used as a symbol of Paris.</p> <p>24. For instance, it still sits at the heart of CCC's logo. The real question is – without it, what represents us? Remember that a culture can be no stronger than its strongest myths. And whatever stories we tell about ourselves must resonate with what people already believe about this place.</p>
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	<p>25. Interestingly, the sentiment of youth is no different. Research First has partnered with Youth Voice Canterbury to better understand the needs and aspirations of this part of the community,</p> <p>26. And that research starts with the realisation that we need to make sure we understand youth in their terms. We might associate youth with teenagers or students, but youth don't age out until they're 25. To that end, they're looking for a place to not simply to be 'a student in' or a teenager in' but a place where they can transition seamlessly from adolescent to teenager to young adult to adulthood on all fronts.</p> <p>27. Our work with youth clearly highlights that Christchurch is not meeting this brief. Yes there are some cool things but it's a city that's disconnected, lacking in energy and a vibe that is integral to being young. It's neither cosmopolitan nor metropolitan - it's just Christchurch</p> <p>28. We know from the work we do with students, about where they choose to study and why, that Wellington is seen as having a cool relaxed vibe and is a cultural and artistic place. Auckland has all of the associations of a big city – lots going on, but it comes at a price – high rents, travel costs etc. And Dunedin is famous for its campus life and "fun" culture (even while this 'party town' emphasis is off-putting for many. In contrast, Christchurch is known for its courses – science & engineering - not a lot else.</p> <p>29. 'The good news is that our data say youth are no more disengaged than any other cohort of the local population. The bad news is that everyone's level of engagement is so low that this should offer no solace.</p>
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	<p>30. In the latest pre-Covid Pulse we asked residents if they think that Christchurch today is a better place than it was before the earthquakes. Do you want to guess what percentage said it was?</p> <p>31. Only 29% agreed that it was (with 47% saying they didn't think it was).</p> <p>32. In the same Pulse we asked locals "given your experience of living in Christchurch, how likely are you to recommend to others – friends, family, or peers living elsewhere – that they should move here and make it their home?". We asked this question using the Net Promoter , where you get an overall score by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters.</p> <p>33. Does anyone want to hazard a guess at the score?</p>
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	<p>34. It was -14. That's not great given the progress in the rebuild thus far. It shows that few residents are feeling 'delighted' at living here.</p> <p>35. Interestingly, there is very little variation in score by age or location</p> <p>36. Neither of those results (the 29% who think the city is better than before the Earthquakes and the NPS of -14) are what we were expecting and now we have had time to think about them, we think there are two overlapping explanations:</p>
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	<p>37. The first one is the classic Hype Cycle model. We've been through so much as a city, and there has been so much happening, that it's easy to assume we're out of the trough of disillusionment and on the slope of enlightenment. But what if we were not?</p> <p>38. Or, what seems more likely, what if the sense of recovery is not happening at the same rate for the same people? There is some evidence in our data that this experience of recovery has bifurcated, with one group of residents much more pessimistic than the rest.</p>
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Now is the crystallisation of our discontent

39. The second, overlapping, explanation works with both of these scenarios. This is the psychological phenomenon known as ‘the crystallisation of discontent’. It most commonly occurs in relationships where one partner realises the other is never going to change their behaviour. It’s that moment when an array of isolated misgivings and complaints become linked in a global pattern. We wonder if this has what happened to many residents in the city in 2019?

10+ more years to endure

40. Supporting the idea that this might be the case is the fact that – when we ask people “how long do you think the rebuilding / regeneration of Christchurch is realistically going to take from this point?” - the most common answer we get is 10 years.

41. So there is no doubt these data reflect the fatigue and anguish we see coming from the realisation that the rebuild has a long way to run yet.

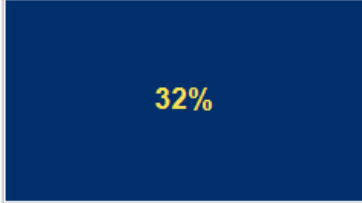
42. To be clear, we are not saying that the city hasn’t done a remarkable job of recovering. Indeed, some of the new parts of town – this market, Turanga, The Terraces – are streets ahead of anything we had pre-earthquake.




43. But we’re not competing against the old Christchurch. When people talk to us about where they want to live, study, or work, the choice is between Christchurch and Wellington or Central Otago or Tauranga, Auckland or Dunedin. These are very real alternatives.



44. Which is why it’s worrisome that our research also shows that most residents are not clear who’s leading the city, who is responsible for what, or where the city is headed.

	<p>45. Indeed, only 32% of people say they know what the vision for the city even is. So forget conversations about the relevancy of any particular vision, for now the challenge is building awareness about who we are and where we're going.</p> <p>46. In sum, it's clear to us that there is a need seriously engage with local communities to understand how we can make what we've built relevant, and ensure what we've yet to build relevant, while keeping what we hold dear sacrosanct.</p>
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	<p>47. And this isn't just an academic exercise for Research First either – as a company with its roots here, its head office here, and its future here, it's patently clear that we're all in this together. So let's make sure we get it right. After all, how many cities get two chances to reinvent themselves?</p>
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