

THE PLACE OF VALUES IN GAMBLING RESEARCH AND POLICY

Jennifer Borrell

Abstract

Within a politically-charged climate, suggestions of bias in gambling research abound. Yet the very impossibility that any research is value-free, untainted by the messy ‘stuff’ of human existence, has long been argued and demonstrated. In this presentation two fundamental and related values that dominate gambling research, specifically individualism and economic rationalism, are explored along with their implications for policy within the broader social, economic and political context. The paper finishes with some suggestions for future research and policy directions.

1 INTRODUCTION

It is often suggested or assumed that (social) research should be value-free. This is especially the case with research on gambling problems. It is probably not surprising that this should be the case, i.e. that the underpinnings of gambling research should be contentious on any level, given the many millions of dollars that are at stake through industry profits and through the dependence of many governments on its revenue (coupled with routinely high levels of public concern). This forms the fundamental context of discussions on gambling research epistemology.

In the following discussion I will argue that values are very much at the centre of all research on gambling problems. Furthermore, I will explore some of these values while making reference to the broader ideological context in which such value-embeddedness occurs and the ongoing implications for research and policy. I will finish with a broad thumbnail sketch of some of my own ideas for future research and policy.

2 INDIVIDUALISM AND ECONOMIC RATIONALISM IN GAMBLING RESEARCH AND -POLICY DEBATES

My central contention is that the prime value underpinning mainstream gambling research is individualism and, as part of this, ‘economic rationalism’ or faith that the market can – and should - manage our collective lives better than governments, bureaucracies and the law.

I will begin by speaking about two aspects of individualism; first, there is the conceptual idea of a human being as a free-standing unit, i.e. a fully autonomous being whose constitution is constant across history and culture. The inherent idea is that I would be who I am if I was placed at any point in time or space (if this was possible through some type of time machine). This is ‘individualism’ as a theoretical concept or construct of what it means to be human.

The second aspect of ‘individualism’, as I see it, follows from the first though not necessarily so. It points to the inherent value of each human being, in particular

toward fulfilment and ‘flourishing’, as proposed by Aristotle and expounded by many subsequent and modern day humanists. While arguably laudable, this has taken on a particular (and peculiar) hue within the contemporary dominant world view, i.e. the conception of an autonomous, freely choosing human being has become intricately bound up with the imperatives of commerce in the context of western, free market ideology. When expounded by gambling industry representatives (and sympathetic researchers), this humanism is degraded to the point whereby human rights and civil liberties translate into the right to freely consume and buy products. Consistent with this, democratic principles and ideas of citizenship – rather than being enshrined in the right to ‘vote’ – are seen to be realised through the spending of dollars on consumption articles or products; that is, I freely choose or ‘vote’ by buying goods and thereby fulfil and express my true humanity. At the same time, my consuming behaviour is also perceived and interpreted as agreement-in-action with the major tenets of consumer capitalism as well as with all other of its elements, processes, relationships and ideological underpinnings. (See Cox, 2005, for elaboration on this theme).

An example of this type of proposition can be found in a booklet by the Australian Gaming Machine Manufacturers’ Association, available on the Internet. It says in part:

Any basic economics text book will tell you that in a free market, that expenditure represents a vote by the consumers spending that money on whatever the entertainment is that they choose...(AGMMA, 2004:11).

A strange and recurrent echo of this reverberates through many contemporary research and policy documents on gambling. For example, a recent article which proposes ‘A Science-Based Framework for Responsible Gambling’ and is named as such, suggests that:

Any responsible gambling program rests upon two fundamental principles: (1) the ultimate decision to gamble resides with the individual and represents a choice, and (2) to properly make this decision, individuals must have the opportunity to be informed. Within the context of civil liberties, external organisations cannot remove an individual’s right to make decisions. This personal freedom balances against an institution’s duty of care... (Błaszczynski, Ladouceur and Shaffer, 2004:311).

In citing this, I would like to highlight the sentence: ‘*Within the context of civil liberties, external organisations cannot remove an individual’s right to make decisions.*’ Note that ‘an individual’s right to make decisions’ is about buying products in contemporary consumer society. In reality, it denotes a mere pin point of human existence as cast across history, culture and even potential; however, this interest forms the central ideological backdrop and interest of the article. When the authors say that ‘*This personal freedom balances against an institution’s duty of care...*’ we know that ‘personal freedom’ denotes the personal freedom to buy and consume gambling products. The circle is completed as informed choice, specifically in relation to buying gambling products, is presented as a central plank of ‘human rights’ with the following assertion:

In addition to viewing gambling as a choice, responsible gambling also rests upon the principle of informed choice. This concept is a fundamental principle of human rights policies (Blaszczynski et al, 2004:312).

Naturally, with the free market assumed as the central principle organising human relationships, policy solutions to even tinker with this are not proposed to address gambling problems in the community. The market and the individual autonomous 'behaviour' that is represented within its domain is very much the unspoken status quo to which human beings should be free to respond and with which they should identify in choosing, buying and consuming. Incidentally, and as illustrated by the above quote by three eminent gambling researchers, a market enterprise/consumer choice ideology also forms the evident backdrop for the generation of science-based frameworks for responsible gambling!

While I have singled out this report to illustrate my point, such ideological renditions of individualism are particularly apparent in discussions and statements of gambling policy – by industry representatives, by researchers (notably those paid by industry) and by government representatives in jurisdictions where gambling taxation or direct revenue is high. Gambling and other addiction researchers habitually 'buy into this' in three ways:

- i) *In the specific research projects and agendas they pursue;*
- ii) *In the conclusions and recommendations that researchers draw from their own studies; and*
- iii) *In the concepts and values that inform their research designs.*

I will address each of these points in turn.

(i) Research Projects and Agendas

Who sets the agenda for research? – The very topics for inquiry and the best means for increasing our understanding of these is arguably the most pivotal point in determining the research process. All else follows from this. So a key question is: 'Who is the research agenda set by?' and more generally: 'Who is funding our learning and research institutions to be independent and to serve the community?' In relation to the second question, the sad answer is that universities are currently being squeezed for funds and have been for some time. They are increasingly forced to charge students for their education and, of particular pertinence here, to pursue lucrative research contracts with private industry - at least this is the case in Australia. Hence, research agendas are more and more being formed by commercial imperatives.

This funding squeeze may be viewed as a continuation of the politically regressive and economic 'supply side' agenda inaugurated by the Reagan administration in the US and the Thatcher administration in the UK, which has spread throughout the world since the 1980s. A radical and rather strident form of free market individualism has been a central plank of this agenda, to the point where Margaret Thatcher famously said something to the effect that there is no society, there are just individuals – a statement which was 'seconded' by our previous local Premier, Jeff Kennett, who

presided over the introduction of 30,000 gaming machines across the State of Victoria. Importantly for this discussion, this form of individualism invoked ideas of individual responsibility through ‘user pays’ fiscal strategies and cuts in welfare programs and other social and educational services (rather than an ideology based on the principle of our ‘common wealth’ or – more strategically - through progressive taxation regimes). This describes, in part, the trajectory through which many of our public institutions have been downgraded, including welfare organisations and, of particular relevance for this discussion, our educational institutions.

Importantly, many of the ‘harm minimisation’ programs and research projects are very clearly styled within the ‘individual responsibility’ mould, whilst equally – albeit implicitly – recognising the quasi-impossibility of legislating or even regulating the supply of ‘addictive’ substances or instances.

(ii) Conclusions Drawn From Research Studies

In many studies ‘raw’ research data or analyses that would seem to cast the current gambling regime in a negative light do not make their way to the formal conclusions or even to the executive summary of the main report. I will give a couple of examples here to illustrate my point, though a great many more could be cited.

In 2000, KPMG Consulting conducted a study for the (then) Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority on the community impact of gaming in Victoria, Australia. Despite gambling legislation that enshrined the well-being of local communities as a central priority, KPMG chose to portray detrimental local impacts it found in a positive light, casting its interpretation within the logic of a global free market economy:

In KPMG’s view, the impact of expansion in gaming venues on other (local) businesses should not of itself be necessarily an issue of concern for government ... change is an integral feature of any dynamic economy and generally governments leave businesses to respond to the changing expenditure patterns of consumers, rather than intervening to protect individual businesses from these effects (2000:2).

Comments such as these go to the heart of debates around the interests of local communities in defending themselves and their ongoing economic and social well-being against the intrusions of globally operating industries. Here, we see KPMG, itself a multi-national corporation, invoking ‘globalisation’ as the quintessential free market ‘solution’ for all possible issues of our times, without comment or discussion – as an item of faith, one might say.

A more recent study, this time by the Australian National University’s Centre for Gambling Research (2004), looked at the effect of Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) in gaming venues in the Australian Capital Territory. From the information pulled together, there appeared to be a strong association between ATM use and problem gambling - for example: more self-identified problem gamblers (60 %) than other groups usually accessed ATMs at clubs with 25 % of regular gamblers doing so. Only 12.7 % of ‘recreational gamblers’ and 5.2 % of non-gamblers accessed an ATM at a club (2004:11). So, regular and problem gamblers accessed ATMs at gaming clubs much more frequently than did recreational and non-gamblers. Consistent with

this, problem gamblers withdrew larger amounts of money from ATMs at gaming venues. While 60 % of self-identified problem gamblers had withdrawn more than one hundred dollars on the last occasion, ATM withdrawals of *less* than one hundred dollars were common for all other gambler groups (2004:11). It was also stated that:

The most compelling evidence in support of removal of ATMs was found in the qualitative interviews with problem gamblers and their families, and from submissions by gambling and financial counsellors. They reported that convenient access to ATMs in gaming venues was a significant factor in the development and persistence of gambling problems (2004:14).

Despite these findings and other information indicating that restrictions of ATMs in venues might assist problem gamblers, it was concluded that:

The study found limited evidence to support the removal of ATMs from gaming venues. Although the convenience of ATMs in gaming venues appears to be related to higher gambling expenditure, on balance the study found that removal of ATMs from gaming venues would inconvenience a proportion of recreational gamblers and non-gambling patrons of gaming venues (2004:10).

Thus the ubiquitous ‘consumer choice’ argument is uncritically slipped in (despite the authorial ‘on balance’) to justify a recommendation that ATMs in venues not be removed, i.e. to ensure minimum interference with the free consumption of goods in general. Putting the obvious factor of demand inducement aside, in truth, this conclusion could have been arrived at without conducting the study. If we were going to use the relatively small *proportion* of problem or pathological gamblers in the whole population as a reason not to impose restrictions, this could have been surmised a priori, that is, without conducting the study. Nevertheless, this type of reasoning has become quite common in the interpretations of gambling research in recent years (often bolstered by superficial and questionable statistical and probability deductions), broadly framed through the argument that we should not hamper the enjoyment of the majority to mitigate harm for a few.¹

In addition, the cost, expressed as ‘practicality’, of rolling back segments or products of the gambling industry is frequently a consideration in forming research recommendations, in apparent pre-emption of what might be received favourably. This is especially so with the trend to consult more and work in partnership with industries - and perhaps deliver ‘solutions’ that are most politically palatable (whether this be done consciously or unconsciously). For example, it was concluded in the ATM study already discussed:

On balance, the research has found that removal of note acceptors is no longer a practical reality in the ACT. Rather, a limit on the size of notes that can be used

¹ Of course – associated cost-benefit sums, while appearing scientific through the translation of social information into numbers, inevitably require the interception of interpretation based on values. No one would venture to compose a cost-benefit calculation for the recent tsunami off the coast of Indonesia, though there would be economic benefits in the most narrow sense – initially to media services, but also to production involved in re-building efforts on an ongoing basis. Such a ‘sum’ would be deemed distasteful – given the hardship and devastation that has ensued. Thus, judgements of value are pivotal even before decisions about the ‘scientific’ translation of costs and benefits into numbers.

for note-acceptors on gaming machines could be an effective harm-minimisation strategy (Centre for Gambling Research, 2004:16).

In these examples, I have attempted to demonstrate how the ‘free choice, free market’ ideology has permeated the ways in which researchers interpret the findings from their own research (even while the language of dispassionate neutrality is utilised). Next, I will discuss briefly how the very concepts and values of researchers, working within their own cultural milieu, underpin their own research designs and methodologies.

(iii) Concepts and Values Informing Research Designs

A focus on individual pathology, which still dominates much of problem gambling research, is often combined with a kind of biological reductionism, whereby neural activity is conceived as the fundamental or primary cause of all behaviour. (Though this is not to suggest that all neurologists are biological reductionists or even genetic determinists – just that this sort of orientation is dominant in gambling research). There are many philosophical problems with such a reduction of the human realm to chemical/electrical activity – too many to address here in any depth – except to highlight an observation made by Inglis (1993) that even if we could slice open a person’s head and observe the biological activity therein first hand, we would still need to invoke interpretation to ‘understand’ what was going on. That is – we would need to draw meaning from the social, cultural realm.

Importantly, as I have elaborated on in more depth elsewhere (Borrell, 2003), a central focus on gambling pathologies as residing in individuals tends to place prime agency and responsibility with those suffering from excessive gambling problems. In one extreme scenario, researchers are seen to pursue the holy grail of an inner syndrome or even *force*, which underpins all pathological gambling, the latter taking on a bizarre essentialist hue which is probably unintended (Alm, 2004; National Council for Responsible Gambling, 2004).

Importantly, problem or pathological gamblers tend to be marginalised in the putatively objective process of determining the locus of agency and the (one) site of the problem. At the same time, there is an associated diversion of attention from aetiology or causation embedded in the broader social, cultural, economic and political context, which conveniently lets governments and gambling corporations ‘off the hook’, while focussing resources and energy on the sick or morally aberrant. This concentration of focus is particularly problematic in relation to regular EGM (Electronic Gaming Machines) gambling, which a substantial body of research demonstrates as being generally risky, even for those who have had no prior or concomitant pathology or addiction.

Having touched on the ways that values influence research agendas and outcomes, I will now discuss some of the implications and ramifications of the ‘individual as consumer’ ideology for research and policy.

3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE ‘INDIVIDUAL AS CONSUMER’ IDEOLOGY FOR GAMBLING RESEARCH AND POLICY

Industries Set the Pace While Communities Bear the Burden of Proof: Policy Proposals in New South Wales, Australia

The 'let's preserve the status quo' imperative is evident in a report produced by a department of the New South Wales government in Australia in its review of gambling harm minimisation measures. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) recommended 'responsible gambling' practice by all key players - by government, industry, gamblers, counsellors and the general community. The proposed policy approach was: 'informed choice' for the general population, protection for all gamblers and counselling for problem gamblers (IPART, 2004:28).

Whilst this sounds eminently reasonable on the surface, what is the 'status quo' that is being sustained within such a policy framework? and, importantly, *Who has the running?* i.e. 'Who is setting the directions that we are taking as a community and as a society in relation to gambling activity and commerce?' The truth is that the gambling industry has the running in most jurisdictions where gaming machines are commonplace – in terms of product design and, broadly speaking, in terms of product placement.

In general, the policy makers and regulators are running behind the truck, making decisions about community protection 'after the fact', i.e. after products of unknown characteristics and ever-emerging negative effects have infiltrated and permeated the market. However, when product safety measures are proposed, there are demands for proof or evidence of – both – the harm done by the machines and the anticipated effectiveness of the proposed measures, i.e. that measures will work with a 'reasonable' degree of probability. Otherwise, it is argued, industry profits may be harmed *for no good reason*. Many times a demand is made for evidence that the measure will assist problem gamblers while not affecting the fun and enjoyment of the freely-consuming recreational gamblers, which incidentally coincides with their spending behaviour. This is despite our knowledge that gambling problems operate on a continuum and do not really manifest into two groups of gambler, i.e. recreational and problematic, and there is certainly no science being implemented by industry to distinguish between who will acquire problems and who will not, in moves to part people from their money. Despite the overwhelming evidence that EGM gambling is intrinsically harmful for a great many people, the industry is not required to produce proof of product safety before flooding the market with their goods. And what is the driver of product design, marketing and placement? One need look no further than industry Annual Reports (see Borrell, 2004); the driver is optimum returns to shareholders, irrespective of whether revenues come from gamblers or problem gamblers or even from personal, family or community hardship.

If I were to propose a research design to an ethics committee to test the safety of a device that we had good reason to believe was harmful, it would probably not be approved. (For example, in terms of respect, beneficence and justice see National Health and Medical Research Council, 1999:4). Yet, we are conducting such an experiment in the general population – right now and on a massive scale. In fact, we are in the midst of an 'in vivo' experiment on the population at large. So far, the overwhelming evidence is that EGM gambling is often deleterious to individual, family and community health. So, can we stop the experiment? Apparently not – we

must first produce sub-experiments to prove that modifications to machines (for example) will, in fact, stop the harm. Otherwise, the en masse in vivo experiment must go on. (And, of course, these 'sub experiments' *would* require ethics approval).

Discussion of the Precautionary Principle

IPART did consider the Precautionary Approach to gambling policy, in the report on harm minimisation that I have already discussed - specifically that governments might err on the side of caution in the community's interest by limiting exposure to harmful products and requiring that the onus of proof be placed on industries to demonstrate product safety. It concluded that the required scientific evidence of product safety was not achievable and that reversing the current onus of proof might stifle innovation and development of the gambling industry, hence giving profit-generating innovation the running (in contrast to the preventive kind) (2004:32). One reason IPART gave for the difficulty of achieving scientific proof of product safety is interesting and particularly pertinent to discussions of research epistemology, that is - what constitutes 'real' or valid knowledge or information. Astonishingly, IPART concluded that it is *too hard* to obtain evidence of gambling product safety as the subject for study is the human realm! (2004:32). Within the context of Victoria, Australia, at least, this is a rather tragic irony, as local governments *opposing* gaming machine applications are routinely required to show proof or evidence of likely harm, (even while the wording of the legislation implies a precautionary approach to gaming expansion). So while it is apparently *too hard* for industries to demonstrate product safety in New South Wales, community advocates are routinely required to provide evidence of likely social harm from gaming applications in nearby Victoria (with the consequence that when it is *too hard* to do so gaming applications tend to be approved, at least with the current Board).

Unfortunately the type of research that attempts to tap into community culture in a true and representative sense is often dismissed as anecdotal or as 'just perceptions'. IPART's type of reasoning thus leads to a bind that is probably quite common: (1) the only legitimate research is that adapted from natural science approaches which tend to be atomistic, reductionist and quantitative; (2) this type of research is not appropriate for providing evidence about the human realm; (3) the type of research that might be appropriate for social inquiry is not 'scientific' enough and, following this, legitimate; so, (4) let's stay with the status quo and see what will happen... probably with a safety net *on* the floor, so that we're seen to do something for those who can't control themselves.

What is apparent in IPART's report and in most contemporary government sponsored reports on gambling policy is that the industry is uncritically seen as an appropriate *partner* in regulation. In fact, possible implications of this are not even discussed. This is certainly the case in Victoria, Australia. With the recent demise of our own Gambling Research Panel, industry representatives are now equal stakeholders on the new Ministerial Advisory Committee, which will, in part, advise on directions for the State's gambling research program alongside representatives of local governments and welfare organisations. In such ways, profit-driven corporations are very much placed on an equal footing with community advocacy groups in steering our future. In fact, the Victorian Minister for Gambling has explicitly stated that the gambling industry must feel *ownership* over the directions and implementation of our publicly-

funded research program (In the National Interest, 2004) and last year, the newly appointed Chair of our gambling regulation commission introduced the word ‘*co-regulation*’ in describing a suitable role for industry. Specifically, he was quoted as saying that ‘*the gaming industry should be given greater opportunity for co-regulation*’ (Dowling, 2004). I personally find this term quite alarming. When did it become OK for an openly profit-driven and non-elected entity to regulate on my behalf, with the government? And when did the political climate reach this point where it could be acceptable to even suggest such a thing? Surely the role of government is to represent the interests and wishes of the people as mandated through the voting process and to implement regulation on our behalf. None of us voted for the gambling industry or any other industry to take on this function. I would argue that such delegation of government’s normal regulatory role - to the bodies that are to be regulated - no less, is an abrogation of their political, if not moral, responsibility. It might also be considered a usurpation of power by entities in the economic realm and by those dominating that realm, over all other citizens and communities and, hence, an abrogation of the latter’s human rights. This is provided that human rights are not understood as just ‘individual’ rights in the manner suggested by the gambling researchers and industry representatives already referred to. Indeed, ‘human rights’ as a notion as well as the practices based on and justified by them are much more complex than the rather simplistic ways in which those authors would make us believe they are, by their mere invocation (Boulet, 2003).

4 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Organising Ourselves Differently

I would like to finish by proposing that now is not the time for timidity. Whatever directions we are taking now, we are moving at an accelerated pace, largely determined by the requirements of contemporary industries to grow or perish or to be consumed by bigger fish. In addition, momentum is being generated by our rapidly developing technologies, within gambling industries and otherwise, that are being utilised by corporations to enhance profit and competitive edge. All the signs are that blind faith in the progressiveness of the free market – with its constant and ongoing demands for ever-increasing consumption and competition and also for planned obsolescence and wastage – will not save us. (In fact, Australian social researcher, Hugh McKay, has referred to the uncritical faith in the redemptive power of free market forces as a type of fundamentalism on a par with religious fundamentalism, wrought by the anxieties and insecurities of our age (Griffith Talkback Essay, 2005). More than ever, we need our governments to invoke and uphold their rightful role of public representation and to properly regulate industries as a central part of this.

In forming pro-active solutions in the face of industry-generated harm, we need to be clever, flexible and willing to organise our lives together differently – even while a combination of stress, fear and inertia might impel us to do ‘more of the same’. Otherwise, the fate of Easter Island may be the signature metaphor of our times: in doing ‘more of the same’ they cut down every single tree on their island, thus devastating their own ecology and the material basis of their communal well-being.

Most certainly we need to reinstate public standards and interests at the *forefront* of gambling regulation and activity, thereby, to extend my earlier metaphor, placing community interests in the truck's cabin rather than have them running to catch up with the juggernaut. As Aristotle proposed almost 2,400 years ago, the point is for the economy to serve and support human life and fulfilment, rather than our labours and life only serving the economy and those who control it. This holds true more than ever, even given Aristotle's narrow band of criteria for what constitutes a human being and the exclusion of non-human life from his ethical system.

Here are a few additional ideas of my own, largely poached from and inspired by others:

(i) **The Precautionary Principle**

We need to base all gambling policy and regulation on the Precautionary Principle. In effect, this would mean erring on the side of caution on behalf of community interests – or, more dramatically, on behalf of human survival, even when the evidence is uncertain. We already have much more evidence than should be reasonably required to indicate that regular EGM gambling, in general, is an inherently dangerous activity – therefore necessitating an immediate moratorium on current EGMs while product testing takes place. Only when we have evidence of safety should they be allowed to operate in the market place. At the least we could prohibit gaming machine promotions, incentives and other forms of demand inducement and, indeed, such measures are already being implemented in various jurisdictions. While a range of other preventive measures might be considered, such as gambling pre-commitment strategies and bans and counselling for frequent gamblers (as implemented by Holland Casino), all such measures need to be assessed as part of a comprehensive approach to prevention at a primary level and based on the spirit and requirements of the Precautionary Principle. Such an approach would stand in stark contrast to the 'trickiness' of many contemporary policies that place the preservation of industry profit first, while at the same time attempting to both address and marginalise gambling problems in the community. Of course, such invocation of the Precautionary Principle would require a fundamental change in culture, particularly within governments and bureaucracies, but also amongst researchers and sections of the community. While the challenge is, no doubt, great there are many indications that such cultural shifts are already occurring.

(ii) **Focus on Individual and Community Strengths and Aspirations and a Wholistic, Collaborative Approach to Research**

It is most constructive to have research programs and initiatives focus on a positive and hopeful future, based on our strengths and aspirations rather than on deficits, weaknesses and needs. To quote the late futurist, Robert Theobald: '*We need to look at opportunities instead of problems, potentials instead of deficits, to live with hope rather than fear*' (2005). With specific reference to gambling research, we need to cast our gaze much more broadly than on the individually ill or 'aberrant', toward an wholistic or integrative approach to information and data collection. Most importantly, we need to have ongoing formal conversations in the settings where life is taking place on a daily basis. This is not merely to collect

‘anecdotes’, which is, arguably, often used as a deliberately dismissive term, but to find out what we really need to know – in the daily places, practices and relationships where life is happening and where change will inevitably happen with or without our strategic intervention and collaboration. This is the research we need to do and this is where policy will be manifested – on the ground – if it is to be effective.

From my own research experience, whenever such conversations are organised and documented, what seems to emerge is a high level of congruence between what people and groups are saying, experiencing and aspiring to – rather than the fragmentation into plurality and relativism, which some of a post modernist bent might forecast. Moreover, planning for the future – and that does include people’s use of recreational opportunities and ‘products’! - will be based on both the universal and the locally different if it is to succeed.

In this context I would like to invoke a fuller and more relevant and meaningful rendition of human rights than that offered by Blaszczynski et al (2004). To paraphrase Boulet (2003) ‘human rights’ might best be encapsulated in universal descriptions which serve as benchmarks for minimum conditions and claims across the spectrum of cultures and situations, complemented by negotiated understandings of what they mean for the locally concrete situations within which they are to be implemented – with the aim of improving people’s lives and of responding to their fundamental-yet-specific needs. While we may, therefore, search to establish generally acceptable benchmarks around safety, against the danger of becoming addicted to gambling, for example, we will need much more specific investigations and participatory consultations around what that means for, say, indigenous communities on reservations and their exposure to an explosion of gambling opportunities, working-class or disadvantaged urban communities (where – notoriously – the gambling industry has installed the highest densities of EGM’s in Victoria), for newly arrived migrants, elderly lone women and so on.

Of central importance, we need to talk and have negotiated understandings about the kind of world we want for ourselves and for the people of the future for any type of policy creation to be meaningful. This is what needs to guide and be at the forefront of our plans. Without a collective vision and associated commitment we may be just running after the metaphorical truck of world-wide mega-corporations in setting our collective future, to invoke this metaphor once more.

(iii) Courage in Making Creative Proposals and Generating Change

We need to have courage in putting forward policies that may seem to go against the trend. While Theobald spoke of the enormous inertia of the current system and that ‘*there is a tendency to do what seems to be necessary without looking for the alternatives which do exist...*’ (2005), he also put forward a rather exciting proposition:

Small shifts can create massive changes if systems are unstable... our culture is radically out of balance. This means that the choices each of us make, individually and collectively, can have more effect than we would normally think would be possible (2005).

At the very least, it is important to question and dispute the complacency about the world we live in, in the face of widespread harm being inflicted on people and populations (to paraphrase Sen, 2001; as cited by Boulet [2003], in referring to globalisation protest movements).

CONCLUSION: THE ‘GOOD LIFE’

Finally, in putting my own values forward, I propose that we work together, not only in ‘rightful conduct’, but in supporting each other to survive and flourish, now and into the future as a priority. The truly ‘good life’ (in contrast to the ephemeral consumer product-driven version) would seem to require both. And if some forms of gambling seem to fit into that prospect, let us pursue it for that reason, rather than because some are hell-bent at making a ‘buck’ out of it.

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