

PROCEEDINGS
of the
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
on
CHANGING CITIES III
Spatial, Design, Landscape & Socio-economic Dimensions

Under the aegis of

The Department of Planning and Regional Development, University of Thessaly
The Greek Ministry of Tourism

Editor:
Professor Aspa Gospodini
University of Thessaly

Syros-Delos-Mykonos Islands, Greece • June 26-30, 2017

Title: Proceedings of the International Conference on Changing Cities III:
Spatial, Design, Landscape & Socio-Economic dimensions

ISBN: 978-618-5271-12-1

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Therapeutic Landscapes: the role of culture

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Abstract

In New Zealand; biculturalism has emerged as a viable organizing national ideology where the role of landscape is highly contested. However; the combination of a strongly dominant culture of New Zealanders of European descent; with a highly urbanized society (88% of the overall population) has resulted in the deterioration of the environment and a loss of minority cultural values with respect to landscape. As the population ages; the loss is of particular concern important for oral cultures; such as that of Maori. This paper focusses on the role of culture in the creation of a therapeutic landscape for this overlooked cultural group.

Traditional Māori tikanga (customs and traditions) impart an inherent connectedness to landscape; where self is a literal part of landscape and land comprises not only physical characteristics but social; ancestral and psychological attributes. For Maori; identity is rooted in location and ancestral connection and an interconnected cultural and ancestral history through the shared generational landscape determines an individual's place in the world.

Employing an expanded meaning of the concept of landscape taken from the new cultural geography; this paper explores why certain places or situations are perceived to be therapeutic for Maori and the manner in which they can elicit return visits. Themes from both traditional and recent work are illustrated with examples from the literature of health care. The themes include man/environment relationships; humanist concept such as sense of place; symbolic landscapes; structural concepts such as hegemony and territoriality and blends of humanist concerns.

The intention of this overview is to bring the role of culture to the attention of landscape architects interested in health and wellbeing as to direct the application of culture to therapeutic landscapes.

Keywords: indigenous knowledge; Maori; New Zealand; cultural landscape; therapeutic landscapes

1. INTRODUCTION

*Tuia te rangi e tu nei,
Tuia te papa e hora nei,
Tuia te hunga tangata ki tipu whenua,
Tuia te tangata te iwi,
Tihei Mauri Ora!*

*Unite with the skies,
Unite with the earth,
Unite people with their ancestral lands,
Unite individuals with their people,
Let life be lived!*

We are rapidly evolving into a complex, highly urbanized society which, with its forward focus often forgets the impact its culture has had on landscape and on people. The deterioration of once rich and abundant landscapes which sustained the health and well-being for early Maori have resulted in the decline of traditional knowledge and the disconnection

between man and nature. The shift comes as a result of colonisation where the loss of Maori ancestral lands, which were confiscated and privately sold, enabled Western cultures to thrive in landscapes sacred and precious to Maori. Over time, these changes to the environment deeply impacted traditional perceptions and eventually affected Maori values. With urbanisation also came dramatic changes in the location of population growth, which also affected the physical, social and economic environment. These twofold pressures, the loss of ancestral lands and the increased pressure on rural Maori from urbanisation, resulted in loss of culture, language and the traditional practices of knowledge transfer in an oral culture. With these losses came similar losses in Maori health, well-being and overall quality of life [1]. This paper seeks to explore the potential of landscape to rehabilitate the cultural impairment and to remediate the losses.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Maori culture grew from a history of seafaring voyagers where reliance on the natural and cosmological worlds guided early Polynesians across the Pacific. Maori founded the country now called New Zealand and began to mould their values and identity through the interpretation of the new landscape so as to save and pass on ancestral names, stories, legends and histories. For centuries, the indigenous people nurtured and cared for the landscape, living and settling in New Zealand's abundant ecologies. Maori communities relied completely on the landscape, the native flora and fauna sustaining of their health and well-being.

Within Maori communities the gathering of food, cultivation of crops and immersion in the native landscape were also the primary means of social collaboration. Communities were developed through collections of family units into *hapu* (sub-tribes) which formed economic and political centres. These centres were led by a *rangatira* (chief) whose leadership and lineage could be traced back to the canoes that first arrived in New Zealand. Maori leadership and kinship principles have proved to be resilient, flexible and adaptable [2] and even today, most Maori can trace their *whakapapa* (lineage) back to their ancestral canoe.

Maori *hapu* established themselves throughout New Zealand, settling where the temperate but variable climate suited both community and livelihood. This led to diversified development in these different areas with micro economies heavily influenced by environmental factors such as climate, locality, and the availability of natural resources [2]. It was not until European settlement that these *hapu* were collected into larger groups and amalgamated into *iwi* (tribes). *Iwi* then became the principal community. In spite of this larger grouping of Maori peoples, the influences of western culture still unsettled the collective and established order, diminishing the identity of self and place with relation to the landscape.

When Captain James Cook first arrived in New Zealand (1769) he estimated the Maori population to be approximately 100,000 individuals [3]. Access to new weapons such as guns meant that intertribal warfare resulted in much higher levels of fatality. Access to trade meant engagement with a series of previously unknown illnesses and pests also took a heavy toll on the Maori communities. As a result, the Maori population declined to around 42,100 by the end of the 19th century [4]. While Maori numbers were in decline, the European population was rapidly increasing. During the same time frame European population surpassed that of Maori, to be 670,000 by the end of the 19th century.

By 1840 European settlement became a certainty and to secure the future a treaty was signed between the Crown and the Maori tribes which was meant to protect ancestral lands and their natural resources and also to formalise European sovereignty. The Treaty of Waitangi,

while theoretically an important foundation document, was fraught with confusion and eventually led to conflict. It soon became apparent that there were deep misunderstandings of its meaning which resulted in the actions led by the Europeans to the detriment of the Maori. Ongoing appropriation of ancestral lands and capitalist exploitation allowed Europeans to benefit from the lack of understanding of western economics by Maori. Large tracts of land changed hands to be developed by European communities into major centres for social and economic growth. The loss of land diminished Maori population and dislocation resulted in a serious blow to Maori economic prosperity, health, culture, historical knowledge and heritage.

At the beginning of the 20th century Maori lived predominantly in rural settings and only 15.6% of the population resided in urban areas [4]. In contrast, Europeans settled largely in towns and cities and only lightly populated the rural areas in sufficient numbers to maintain the dense agricultural cultivation and farming which supported trade. Rural landscapes, once abundant with low-lying forests, waterways and wetlands were transformed to facilitate economic gain for Europeans. The removal of natural resource materials such as flax and timber enabled trade across the world.

By the beginning of the 21st century there was a complete reversal of the situation at the beginning of the 20th century. Today, 85% of Maori are living in urban centres [4]. The combination of loss of land and its meanings with the migration from ancestral lands to urban areas have contributed to a widespread disconnection of Maori from their *turangawaewae* (domicile where one has the right to 'stand') or *whenua* (family). Urban living for Maori generally provided a better quality of life with regards to employment and housing [5]. However, urban centres did not provide places of refuge and identity as provided by the traditional ways Maori communities and family settled with the landscape. As Maori populations grew, they continued to be disadvantaged, over represented in negative statistics with regards to social issues, housing, economic issues, health and well-being.

The loss of Maori culture continues to concern communities, *hapu* and *iwi*, and increasingly the government. One aspect of the slow progress forward involves a halt to the loss of the Maori history and acknowledging the importance of the connection between land and people. Traditional Maori values are deeply rooted in the landscape. There everything is connected by *mauri* intertwining and establishing identity and place in the world. *Mauri* is the life-force of all things and a central concept to Maori. To regain language, values, traditions and beliefs, governments and universities are seeking to integrate Maori concepts and values culturally, economically, ecologically and socially into their own cultures in order to re-establish the *mana* (spiritual power) between people and place. This can be evidenced in items as wide ranging as strategic vision statements, requirements for funding applications, visual identities, regional and district planning strategies and commercial marketing communications.

Maori principles have been introduced into New Zealand governance and processes for urban management. These embrace *rangatiratanga* (chieftainship), *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship), *manaakitanga* (hospitality and kindness), *wairuatanga* (spirituality), *kotahitanga* (unity), *whanaungatanga* (kinship) and importantly, *mātauranga* (knowledge), reconnecting ideologies of the Maori worldview. These principles have begun to reconnect Maori to the land and community through concepts of *papakāinga* (original home, communal land-use, shared housing) [6]. To address national goals of biculturalism, Maori culture must be not only recognised and re-established, but fully integrated into all aspects of New Zealand society in a manner that is respectful and meaningful for both cultures. This paper seeks to address the role of landscape as a therapeutic medium for the increased health and well-being for all New Zealanders.

The natural ecological environments; forests, waterways and wetlands, are the therapeutic landscapes Maori look to as a medium for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health and

well-being. Landscapes can aid in the reestablishment of life, reviving traditions and inter-generational collaboration. Maori strategies involve an inclusive “whole of landscape” approach known as “*ki uta ki tai*” (from the mountains to the sea). It is a philosophy that reflects on a system of environmental and resource management which celebrates guardianship and reflects the relationship of environmental heritage. As such, it encapsulates the needs to recognise and manage the interconnectedness of the whole environment and to celebrate culture and identity. Considering the intertwined relationship of man and environment, the idea of a therapeutic landscape is expanded to consider issues of history, culture, memory and identity in light of their symbolic and applied roles in holistic health and well-being.

3. CONNECTING WITH THE LAND

With the separation from the land came a separation of the elders from the youth, which has prevented the transfer of traditional oral knowledge. This loss of the traditions of storytelling, ‘*korero*’, increased the reliance of the young on technology as a means of learning. The traditional Maori idea that people are born from the earth sets a foundation for the kinship between man and nature. From this understanding practices evolved that established a tangible connection to the land, and allowed people to reflect on their own identity and belonging in the world. For example, many Maori still practice ancient birthing rituals such as *tohi* which is similar to a baptism. This involves sprinkling water from a sacred stream onto a new born child and dedicating the child to an *atua* (god). This is followed by the burial of the placenta in the ancestral lands of the *iwi*, often at the base of a marker tree, thereby linking the child to the tribal lands. Another example is that for Maori a sense of identity is not established by what a person does for a living, where they work or where they live. Identity is established through *whakapapa* (lineage) which is connected by *mauri* (life force) to the mountains, bodies of water and ancestral lands, and is conveyed regularly at community gatherings. By embracing these traditional values, these indigenous cultural ideas, we can re-establish *mana* (prestige/power) and *whenua* (land) of people and places. The Maori separate the environment into four related, yet unique, key concepts. These are the *whenua* (the land), the *te wao nui a tane* (the forest), *nga wai ora* (the water) and *te rohe koreporepo* (the wetlands). An understanding of these elements can aid in re-establishing environmental, social and cultural sustainability.

3.1 Whenua – The Land

The concept of *whenua* has many different meanings including land, country, ground, territory and placenta. A Maori perspective of landscape has a deeper meaning where land must be nurtured. The traditional way of thinking for many indigenous cultures means that everything in the world is connected like one vast family and nature is the ultimate teacher of life [7]. Landscape is imbued with metaphysical values [8] and is associated with communities through communal ancestry. Ancestral connection to landscape is ultimately valued through interpretation, heritage, identity and status providing people linkage to their past and for their future [8]. The therapeutic qualities of landscape are centralised around the cycle of life. If people and all things are related, then the requirements to consider care and emotions mark the notion of *mauri*, the essence of matter. If the landscape is sick then the inner well-being of all things become affected even that in people.

Values and associated principles and practices around *whenua* can be referred to as *tapu* or *noa*. *Tapu* refers to the sacredness of all living things while *noa* is the opposite, permitting

unrestricted activities. These deep meanings have long sustained the balance of traditional practices of Maori. Land provides the basic needs of living and therapy which sustains life enabling people to explore, exploit and manage the natural resources [8]. Landscape is identified by the physical makeup of the land and the establishment of settlement. By grounding personal identity people's health mentally, physically, spiritually and collectively are rooted as an extension of the environment.

The close engagement between people and environment is inseparable as there is no separation between the material and non-material, the tangible and intangible [8]. The coupling of traditional knowledge and landscapes engages people and places nourishing the health and well-being of both, taking therapy collectively to develop and maintain therapeutic relationships with *tangata whenua* (local people), *whanau* (family) and *mana whenua* (people of the land). Cultural identity of people and landscape is prerequisite for the good health of indigenous and non-indigenous people linked by the ancestral knowledge of landscape through *whakapapa* (genealogy). The review of the natural ecologies of forests, waterways and wetlands all find the aspects of Maori traditions and values immersed in the health and well-being of therapeutic measures.

3.2 *Te Wao Nui a Tane-The Great Forest of Tane*

"Maori and plants have a common origin. Maori saw plants as having senior status. They are the link between man and sacred ancestors" [9]. Before human settlement, the original indigenous forests made up around 81% of the natural landscape and nurtured significant bio-diversities and cultural values [10]. Traditionally forests were highly valued and were traditionally sought out places that were spiritual domains, supermarkets, schoolhouses, hospitals (chemist/medicine), and fostered *mana*/power, responsibility, spiritual relationship, *rangatiratanga*/chieftainship, well-being and survival.

Forests enabled Maori to experience and make sense of the world. Forests enabled a comprehensive understanding of traditional knowledge of everything visible and invisible, of observing, studying and engaging in the wisdom of the natural environment (Manaaki Whenua). The therapeutic qualities allowed Maori to live as part of the natural environment through *whakapapa*, through containment of rare significant *taonga* (treasures) and through repositories of culture.

When Europeans established themselves in New Zealand their practices meant the eradication of this rich forest ecosystem and agricultural farming and urbanization became dominant. Approximately 60% of native forest was destroyed following colonisation and by 1840 only 50% of the indigenous forest remained. Currently only 23% of the original native forests remain [10]. Introduced human activities and exotic species have forced the remaining indigenous forests into steep, less productive and mountainous terrain unsuited for economic gain [11]. Overtime, the connection of people to the forest has waned and the oral traditions have faded and only a small portion of the traditional forest knowledge has remained.

However, the revival of traditional knowledge is beginning to occur. In traditional understanding, forests were sources of *mauri* (life force), *mana* (power) and *wairua* (spirit). They were also sources of food through the customary harvesting of native birds, fish and plants and for materials for construction of carvings, buildings and *whakairo*. This links to ancestral beliefs in which the earthly and heavenly gods would provide and protect the natural environment through the notion of *mauri*. In these ways, therapeutic landscapes have always been considered by Maori as a means of lineage connecting all sources of life, reliant on the health and well-being of living things.

3.3 *Nga Wai Ora* – Living Waters

Waterways provided an abundance of life with food and purification both contributing to the well-being of people. In oral traditions water is seen by some groups as the source and foundation of life, rather than the land [7]. For Maori this is reflected through *wairua* which refers to the spiritual plane or may refer to the fundamental dimensions to all life in the form of water. The elements are air, earth, fire and water. Fire represents the underworld, air the heavenly skies or the afterlife, and water and earth the physical world. Water and earth form an inseparable bond vital to sustain and balance the natural environment.

Traditionally, water has been classified in a number of ways: *waikino*, dangerous waters; *waitapu*, sacred waters; *waimaori*, pure water; *waitai*, seawater; *waimanawa-whenua*, water from beneath the land (springs); *waikarakia*, water for ritual purposes and *waiwhakaika* or *waikotikoti*, water to assist cutting of the hair (Scott, 2011). Water is a precious source of life for all people. Maori lived and thrived near water as it sustained life. Some Maori, for example, those in geothermal areas around the central North Island, used the heated water, and hot-springs or geysers became places to bathe, cook and heal. The environment offered *hapu* (sub-tribes) and *iwi* (tribes) a close and distinctive knowledge of their surroundings. Water meets therapeutic needs in providing cleansing, purification and sustaining life. Sadly the influx of urban settlement has led to negative effects on natural waterways. Many indigenous waterways are culverted, piped or redirected, destabilizing natural water catchments and flows. The scarcity of water and pollution of these systems are becoming more evident specifically with the depletion of lakes, springs, rivers, streams and oceans.

For Maori each body of water was considered to have its own life-force. If waterbodies contacted one another both were at risk of having their ecosystem equilibrium disturbed [12]. The mixing of water or the division of waterbodies decreased the *mauri* in many places). These holistic views meant that for Maori a water environment needing restoration or rehabilitation needed its *mauri* enhanced [13]. There is discussion today on water treatment with the preference for impure water (mixed, polluted, land effluent or sewage) to be treated on land first rather than direct distribution into natural water ecosystems. By tackling these problems at the source, the betterment of people's well-being and health will enable both land and people to be sustained and the integrity of the *mauri* in each water body maintained [12].

3.4 *Te Rohe Koreporepo*: Wetlands

Wetlands derive from spiritual beings like all natural environments. The wetland systems play a key role in maintaining the integrity of the *mauri* of water bodies. They are highly valued by Maori and regarded as a *taonga* (treasure) as they were sources of food, traditional knowledge and materials. For over 800 years human interaction with the wetlands created an active relationship with historical and cultural importance and values.

In areas of urban intensification like Wellington, wetlands were drained in the creation of the urban infrastructure. Natural wetland systems lie beneath ever-growing cities, meaning that society forgets the important role of the natural landscape. The area now occupied by Wellington, the capital city was once a flourishing wetland ecosystem surrounded by local *pa* settlements for whom the wetlands were a source of therapeutic health and well-being. The landscape enabled the collaboration of people and place. Wetlands are often the interface between terrestrial ecosystems and freshwater ecosystems. Wetlands therefore have a valuable role as part of the whole catchment ecosystem enhancing stream and river health and improving the *mauri* of waterways. By enhancing these water ecosystems, we can help to re-establish traditional therapeutic values, enhancing the deeper connection to our landscapes, crucial to Maori culture. The idea of connectedness is an important underlying value that relates people to

the environment, therefore increasing the health of the waterways through wetlands and increasing the health of the people through increasing the health of the wetlands. If the landscape is healthy, the people are healthy, an important key value in this study.

4. INTEGRATING THERAPEUTIC AND CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Through understanding Maori cultural and therapeutic landscapes their key concepts can be integrated into, and produce, meaningful and reflective landscapes. Integration of therapy into the landscape is evident in sensory gardens, healing gardens and food gardens. For Maori, the ideals inherent in these therapeutic landscapes were not separate entities, but part of a wider holistic system that catered for people's senses, emotions, values and enabled links to the landscape.

The cultural worldviews of Maori are formed on their understanding of their identity, their customs and traditions, *wairuatanga* and *whakawhanaungatanga*, and relationship/kinship [14]. Through the reviewing of traditional cultural and therapeutic landscapes, adaptation of cognitive behaviour of therapy for Maori can be applicable for indigenous cultures through multi-systematic therapy, family therapy, motivational interviewing and narrative therapy [14]. These all connect to the oral traditions laid down over generations.

The natural environment offered Maori free access to abundant resources via forest, waterways and wetland. However, through adapting to another culture and the influences of multicultural collaborations, Maori are in danger of losing traditional means of therapy and increasingly are turning to western methods of therapy, which are independent of landscape. Western cultures could learn from the deep ideological connection between landscape and health, by adopting the principles and knowledge of indigenous peoples [14]. Possessing strong cultural identity goes beyond knowing ones ancestral heritage; it takes into account the ecological, economic and social contexts; which provide a holistic understanding that underpins the positive health of people [15]. The ensuing bond that is formed from the landscape/health cycle of healing, explains why certain places or situations are perceived to be therapeutic for Maori and explains why they can elicit return visits.

Like many indigenous cultures, Maori therapy seeks resources from the landscape in *rongoa* (herbal remedies), *mirimiri* (therapeutic massage) and *honohono* (spiritual massage, similar to reiki, traditional Japanese massage). These concepts are referred to as talking therapies and they encompass the spiritual and psychological dimensions of health [16]. The core concepts of *rongoa* embrace spiritual healing and the use of traditional practices to support the four pillars of Maori health values: *taha hinengaro* (psychological health), *taha tinana* (physical health), *taha wairua* (spiritual health) and *taha whanau* (family health). *Mirimiri* intends to link body, mind and soul with the environment and *rongoa* is often involved as a way to connect to the elements. Like other holistic cultures, Maori believe in many spiritual alignments. *Honohono* represents the healing of a person's inner spiritual connection to themselves and the universe. It reflects on the change in a person's persona and environment, clearing and assisting in the transition of a person's mind, body and soul with placement in the world (notion of place) [14].

Cultural and therapeutic landscapes should be seen as a part of modern ways of living rather than a feature that seamlessly develops with time [17]. Incorporating beliefs of stewardship and kinship with the land, both people and place will better identify in unison, offering new insights into living with nature in urban and rural cities. Creating places where we can identify as Maori is crucial for the development of health and well-being.

5. CONCLUSION

The creation of a therapeutic landscape in a bicultural or multicultural country, inevitability will result in a highly contested role for landscape. A dominant culture can suppress alternative ways of knowing and healing; a dominant form of inhabitation can similarly suppress other ways of living. The danger is that only remaining artefacts are situated outside their greater context. Therapeutic practices such as yoga, tai-chi, or even *mirimiri* (therapeutic massage) or *honohono* (spiritual massage), may continue but often without the underlying values that facilitate sustainable practice. Arguably sustainability recognises the importance of the interconnectedness.

Traditional Maori *tikanga* (customs and traditions) imparts an inherent connectedness to landscape, where self is literally a part of landscape and land comprises not only physical characteristics, but social, ancestral and psychological attributes. Currently, urban centres lack the facilities for traditional cultural methods of healing to be undertaken, and many cultural beliefs and oral traditions remain in isolation and out of reach. Incorporating therapeutic values from Maori in the wider community allows a revision of current practices and the development of stronger (re)connections to the landscape.

This paper has contributed to the body of knowledge surrounding therapeutic landscapes and the examination of the connections between landscape and treatment and healing and health. It also contributes to our socially constructed understanding of wellness and illness. Through an exploration of Maori culture and practice, the meaning of landscape can be expanded beyond traditional therapeutic landscape ideas through new concepts incorporating culture to a symbiotic model where caring landscapes are placed within the framework of landscape authenticity and caring people heal the landscape that nurtures them.

*Unuhia te rito o te harakeke, kei hea te komako e ko?
Ui mai ki ahau, 'He aha te mea nui o te Ao?'
Maku e ki atu,
'He tangata, he tangata, he tangata'.*

*If you remove the central shoot of the flax-bush, where will the bellbird find rest?
If you were to ask me, 'What is the most important thing in this world?'
I would reply,
'It is people, it is people, it is people'.*

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