

Indigenous knowledge and sustainable urban development

Questions for a research agenda

Traditional indigenous knowledge



A “knowledge tradition or system that has arisen specific to a particular ecology, environment or place ... [that] has grown upon a lengthy tenure a particular people have enjoyed with that place.”

Dr Charles Royal

Findings from Tāone Tupu Ora

- Indigenous worldviews have a strong fit with ‘sustainable development’
- Māori values about land and community are useful planning frameworks in contemporary urban settings
- Traditional Māori design models can inform planning for 21st century cities (from whare to neighbourhood to region)
- Current planning models have not facilitated Māori urban development initiatives
- Urban Māori are key stakeholders in developing sustainable cities – Māori land is an unrecognised resource

Possible research themes

- Using the stories the whenua has to tell us as a resource
- Breaking down nature/culture barriers – regaining connection with the urban whenua
- Kaitiakitanga, responsibility to the future
- Partnership
- Kāinga/pā as models for neighbourhood development

Some research questions

- How can Māori values and traditional knowledge be included in planning frameworks and development measures?
- Can iwi/hapū/land trusts and urban authorities develop plans in partnership?
- How could sustainable Māori land developments be facilitated?
- Are suburbs/neighbourhoods informed by Polynesian design models possible?

More reading

- Stuart K, Thompson-Fawcett M, editors. Tāone Tupu Ora: Indigenous knowledge and sustainable urban design. Wellington: Steele Roberts Aotearoa for the New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Cities; 2010.
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Maungakiekie (One Tree Hill)



‘[Maungakiekie] is a monument, it’s a testament to all the efforts and the skills of our ancestors who could build a mini city there, 5000-7000 people living there, sculpted into that landscape.’ (Ngarimu Blair, Ngāti Whātua)

‘Kūmara gardens, terraced house sites and food storage pits are living histories; ... they physically *embody* Māori indigenous knowledge as well as being ‘historic’ and linking us to the lives of tupuna.’ (Keriata Stuart)

‘Landscapes and the visible environments are also the text of these knowledge systems ...’ (Dr Takirangi Smith)