

# Chapter 5

## Indigenous Cultural Knowledge for Therapeutic Landscape Design

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### ABSTRACT

*The meanings of place and the relationship between place and health have culturally specific dimensions. This is of particular importance for indigenous people and communities as often regarding landscape as part of a circle of life, establishing a holistic perspective about health and wellbeing. The indigenous Māori of Aotearoa/New Zealand contend that their relationship with the land shapes how the cultural, spiritual, emotional, physical, and social wellbeing of people and communities are expressed. Few studies have explored the influence of the cultural beliefs and values on health, in particular the intricate link between land and health. This chapter broadens the understanding of therapeutic landscapes through the exploration of specific cultural dimensions. It contributes to the expanding body of research focusing on the role of therapeutic landscapes and their role in shaping health, through the development of new research methods.*

### INTRODUCTION

Increased globalization has contributed to a rapid increase in the impact of human activity. To date, the best endeavors of conservation of natural resources have failed, extinction rates are escalating, and pressures on biodiversity are also increasing (Mace, 2014). As the costs of environmental mismanagement continue to accumulate, awareness of the consequences of habitat destruction, overharvesting and

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invasive species become overwhelmingly evident (Mace, 2014; Ruddick, 2015). The realization that nature provides crucial and irreplaceable goods and services has been consistently ignored by Western civilization.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, where biculturalism has emerged as a viable organizing national ideology, the role of the landscape is highly contested. The indigenous Māori of New Zealand contend their relationship with the land in shaping how the cultural, spiritual, emotional, physical and social well-being of people and communities are expressed. The combination of a dominant culture of non-indigenous people of European descent with a highly urbanized society has resulted in the deterioration of the environment and with it a loss of the minority Māori cultural values concerning the landscape.

For Māori, identity is rooted in landscape. An interconnected cultural and ancestral history shared through the landscape (*whenua*) determines an individual's place in the world. Traditional Māori *tikanga* (customs and traditions) imparts an inherent connectedness to landscape, where self is literally a part of landscape and land comprises not only the physical realm but also social, ancestral and psychological attributes (Mark & Lyons, 2010). The landscape is part of a circle of life, establishing a holistic perspective concerning the relationship between health and well-being, and celebrating the spiritual and natural history gained over centuries. If the landscape is healthy, the people are healthy and healing the individual means healing the earth.

This chapter focusses on the *Mātauranga* Māori process (Māori knowledge) of investigating landscape relying on the past, present and future to better understand the importance of landscape and the therapeutic values imparted through the four pillars of Māori health and well-being, generally known as *Te Whare Tapa Whā* (Ministry of Health Manatū Hauora, 2017). The research methodology is transformative in its acknowledgment of the potential of indigenous knowledge and culture in healing the environment. It contributes to the expanding role of therapeutic landscapes in shaping physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health. It also highlights the potential to revolutionize aged-care as it challenges the ways aging is managed through individual and social empowerment.

## **BACKGROUND**

To understand the relationship between nature and health in a bicultural country, first, it is important to understand the significant differences between Western and Māori philosophies concerning health and well-being. Western medicine views the mind and body as separated into two different entities (Baker & Morris, 1996; Descartes, 1984; Zaner, 1988). When the body becomes sick such as through a broken limb or a disease, the body must be repaired. However, if the condition relates to something derived from the 'head,' then the problem is more likely to be viewed as a flaw in the individual's character. For Māori, conditions such as anxiety and broken bones are both equally real and occur in the same unified body and mind. Māori traditions view the mind and body as one life force, and when one gets sick, the whole being feels it (Crengle, 2000; Henry & Pene, 2001; Panelli & Tipa, 2007). These differences have directed the evolution of both Western and Māori health constructs and impact directly on how patients are perceived and treated. Western medicine treats the physical body seeking to fix the precise problem presented. If the body is missing a substance, the western approach is to supply it. As a result, medical science has evolved through refining and fixing with better drugs and more advanced surgical technologies. In the landscape architecture literature, current theories and conventional practice

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