

# Understanding the connection between **Māori** & te **taiao**, and how this relates to the urban environment

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# Introduction

**Ko wai au?**

**Undergraduate:** BSPH (Tulane University, 2020)

**This year:** Masters of Social Sciences in Pop. Health & Demography (Waikato University)

- Taught papers (Year 1) + Dissertation (Year 2)
- Self-directed study – Associate Professor Polly Atatoa-Carr & Dr Jesse Whitehead

**He wānanga tēnei.** This is a sharing of ideas & exploration for a dissertation topic.





# Research Topic

## Main Idea:

Show the connection between **Māori** & **te taiao**, and how this connection increases Māori sensitivity to the **urban environment**

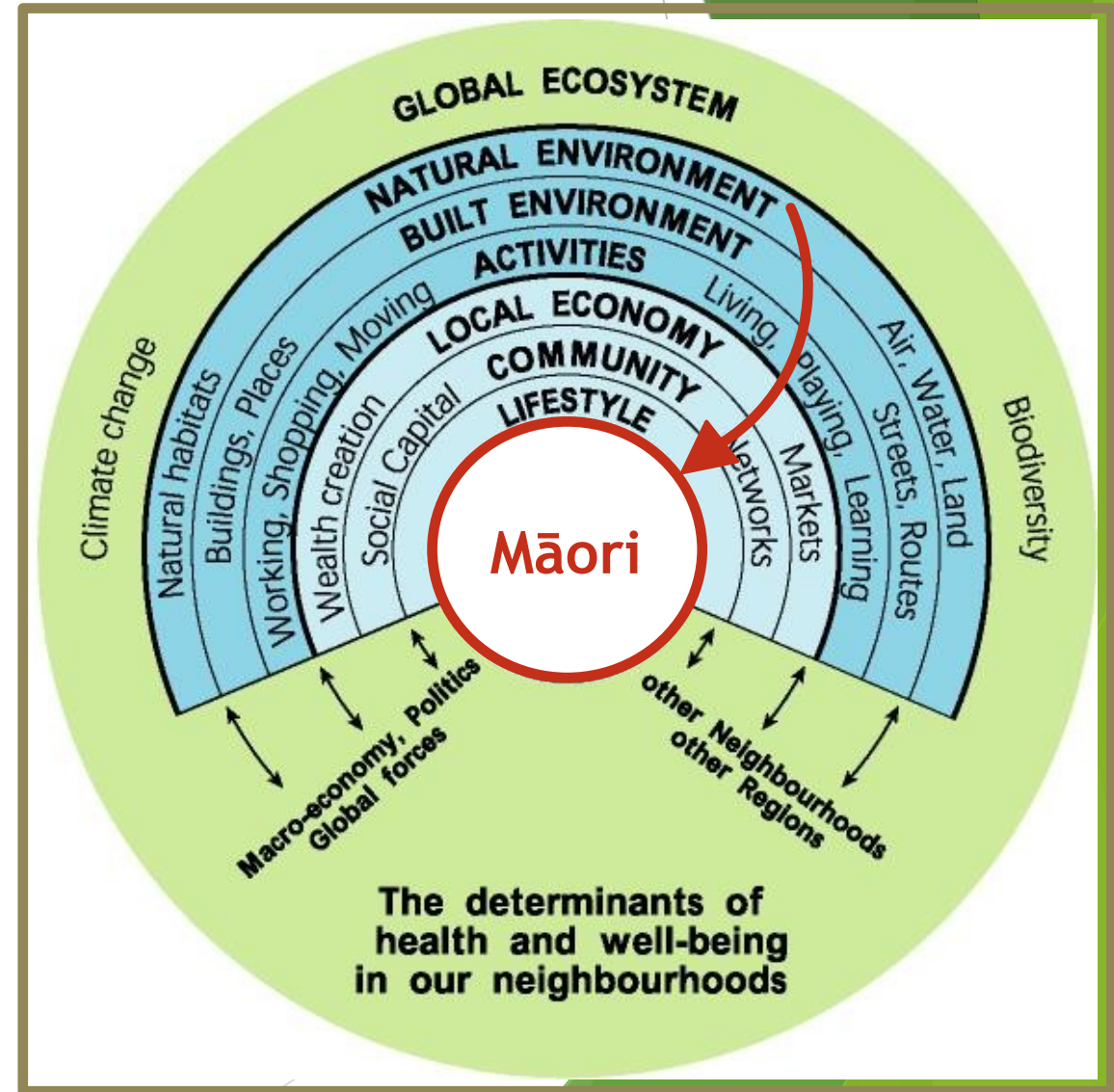
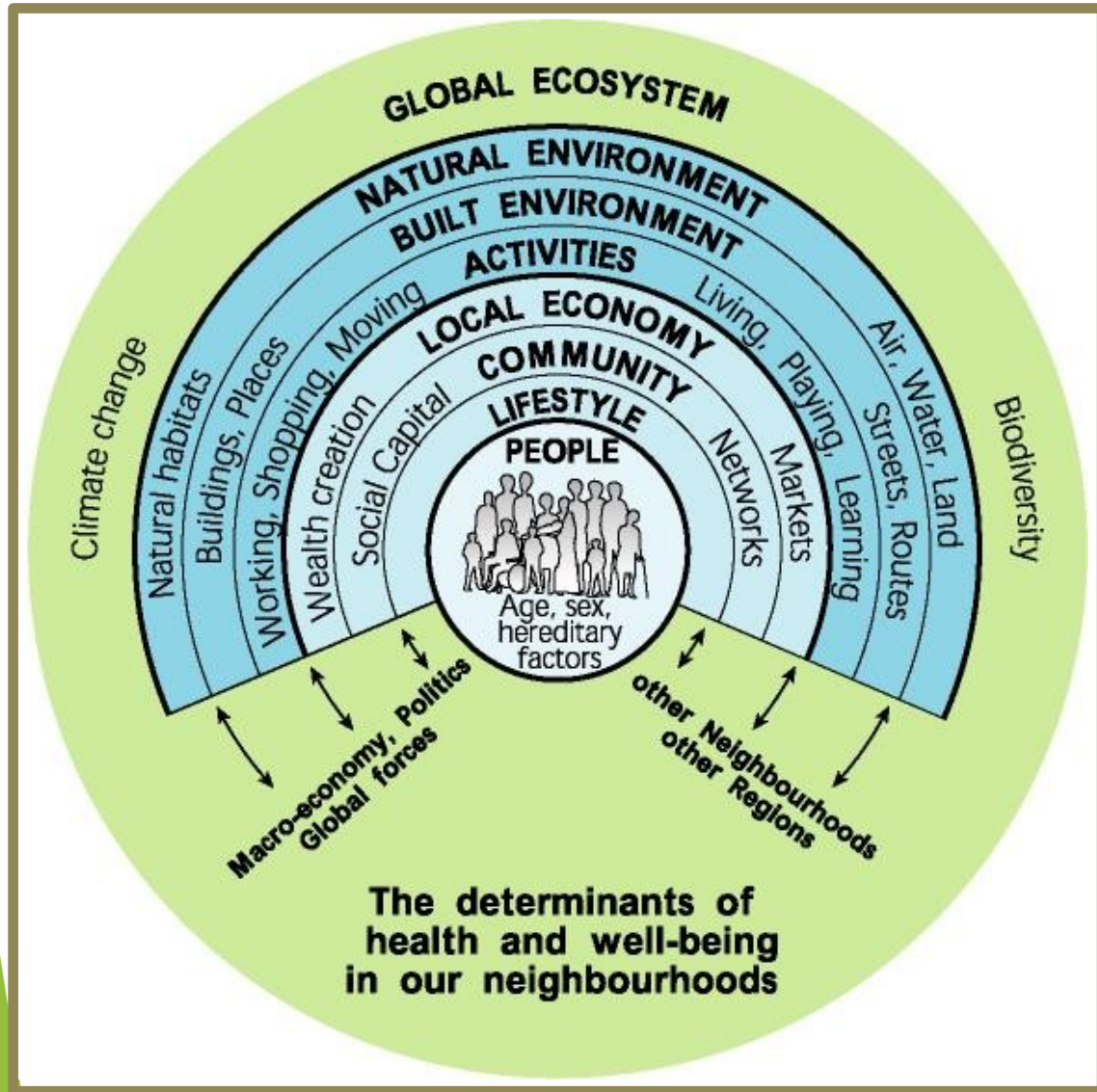
## Origin of this idea:

- ▶ Te Reo Māori (Te Tohu Paetahi, Waikato University)
- ▶ Poorly kept urban environment
- ▶ Broken Window Theory (Psychology Today, 2022)

*“visible signs of disorder and misbehaviour in an environment encourage further disorder and misbehaviour” (Psychology Today, 2022).*



# A Universal Framework



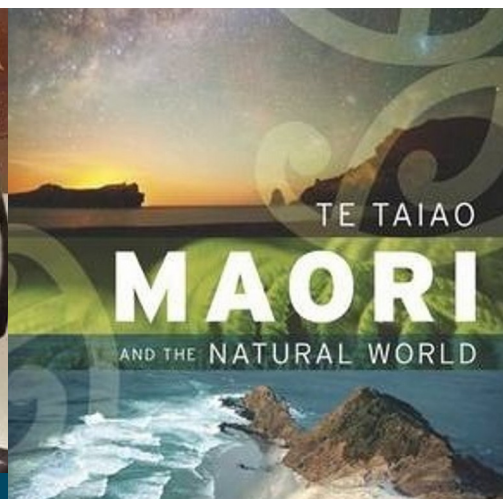
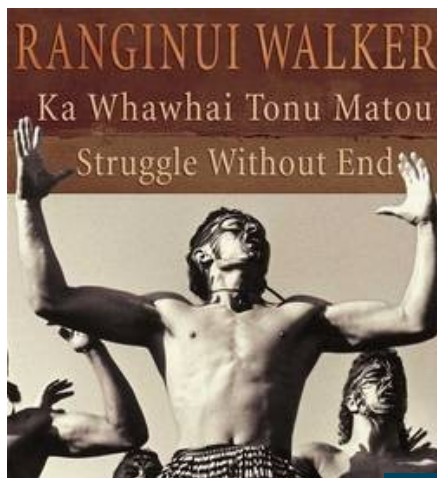
# Objective

**Explore the relationship between Māori & te taiao,  
as shown through:**

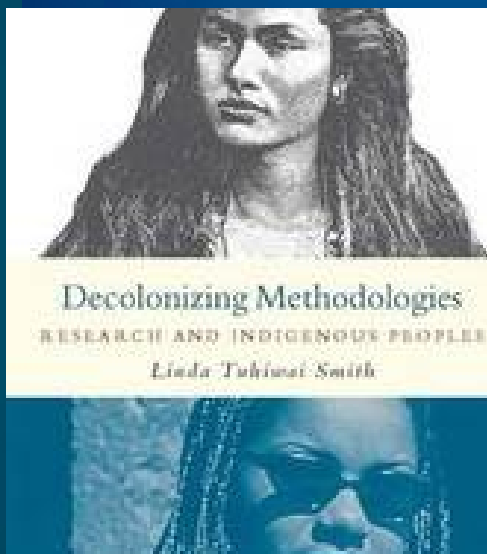
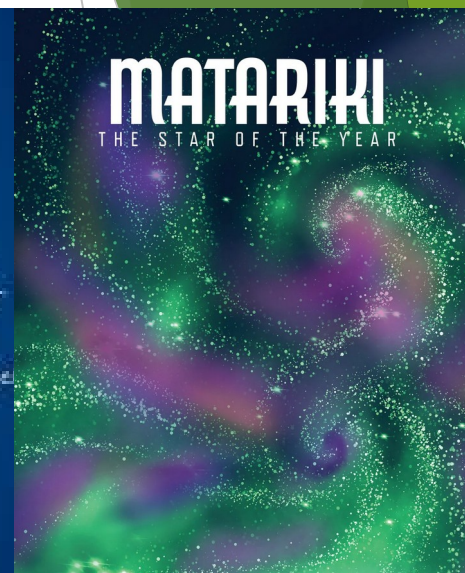
1. Pre-colonial living
2. Whakapapa
3. Te reo Māori



# Background Literature



## Te Pae Mahutonga



# Māori environment relationship shown in pre-colonial living

- The environment influenced the way Māori lived  
For Māori living in pre-colonial times, the environment guided the way of life to ensure the health and well-being of whānau, hapū and iwi (Opai, 2021)
- Māori used the stars, moon and the sky to guide:
  - planting and harvesting kai (e.g., **Tupuānuku**)
  - fishing practices
  - predicting the weather
  - traditional uses for forest plants (rongoā)
- **Whakaaro**: find ways to incorporate traditional Māori knowledge into mainstream society today
  - **Example: Matariki** – template for operationalising Māori knowledge (celebrating Matariki as a public holiday)



# Māori environment relationship shown in whakapapa

- Whakapapa ties Māori to whenua.  
“Pepeha is a way of introducing ourselves, and it is how we make connections to others and to land” (Opai, 2021)
- Māori identify as tangata whenua.  
“People born of the whenua, of the placenta, and of the land, where the people’s ancestors have lived and where their placenta are buried” (Te Aka, 2023)
- Basic building blocks of te Ao Māori (Walker, 1990):
  - **Whānau**: “basic social unit in Māori society”
  - **Hapū**: whānau groups; “land holding political entity”
  - **Iwi**: “the largest effective political grouping”
- **Whakaaro**: Importance of whakapapa recitation

**Pepeha**

Tēnā koutou katoa.

Ko _____	tōku waka.
canoe	
Ko _____	tōku maunga.
mountain	
Ko _____	tōku moana.
body of water	
Ko _____	tōku marae
gathering place	
Ko _____	tōku iwi.
tribe	
Ko _____	tōku hapū.
subtribe	
Ko _____	tōku ingoa.
name	

Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou katoa.

Moshi Moshi Classroom 20  
Thumbnail image reference or copy available via downloadable li



# Māori environment relationship shown in te reo Māori

- The central importance of te taiao in te reo Māori
  - Using kupu whakarite (metaphors, similes)
  - Comparisons drawn from the environment through trees, the forest, the ocean & birds
- Māori were incredibly observant of te taiao
  - 63 kupu whakarite of just birds (Black, 2021)



He tou firairaka – The tail of a fantail.



He tōtara haemata – A lofty tōtara.



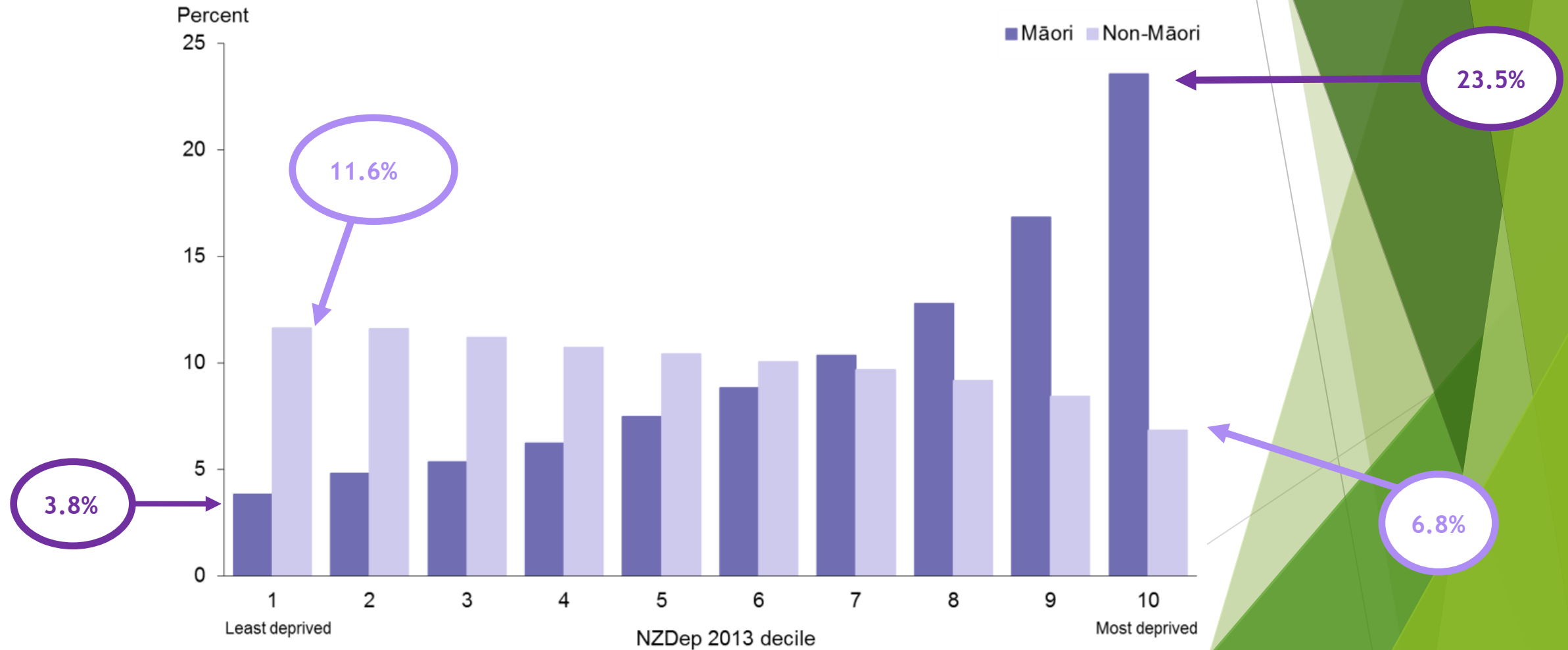
# The colonial world is cut in two (Fanon, 1963)



82%

Aotearoa was colonised roughly 200 years ago. This hasn't given Māori much time to adapt to this new urban environment. The urban environment is foreign.

# Māori make up the largest proportion of people living in high deprivation neighbourhoods.

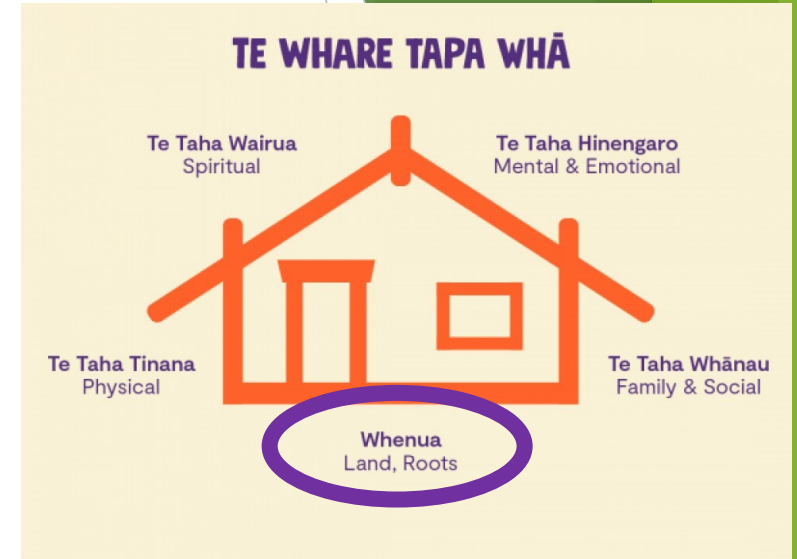




# Frameworks for Māori Health

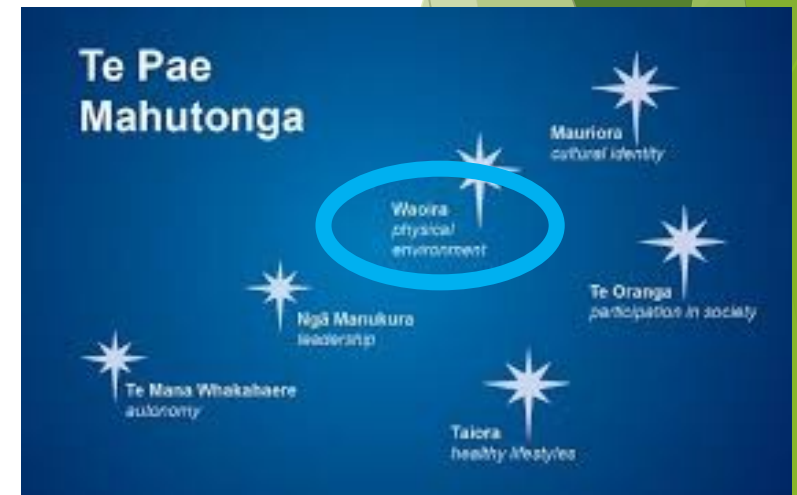
## ■ Te Whare Tapa Whā

- **Whenua** – what about Māori living in urban environments who aren't connected to tribal land?



## ■ Te Pae Mahutonga

- **Waiora** – environmental protection & the opportunity to experience the natural environment
- This model declares **cultural identity** as a prerequisite for health & wellbeing, and gives context to how we might **re-indigenise** the urban environment



# Key Learnings

## ➤ **Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua**

- I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on the past
- the value of indigenous knowledge (e.g., operationalising Matariki)

## ➤ Gap: Māori urban design literature (oral tradition vs Western Research)

## ➤ Te Reo Māori – a social determinant of health?

*Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history (Thiong'o, 1986)*

## ➤ Find ways to re-indigenise the built environment

*Re-indigenizing spaces, by giving the places their indigenous names (Smith, 1999)*

## ➤ For us living in colonial times, mātauranga and retelling the stories of the land can guide us as we walk into a non-colonising future (Jackson et al., 2020).



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# Q & A



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