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# Assessing the Māori Cultural Landscape

Dr Diane Menzies



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*Paper prepared by Te Tau a Nuku (Māori Landscape Architecture members of Ngā Aho) for NZILA*

*Māori Cultural Landscape Meeting, 10 November 2017*

### 1. What is the problem?

New Zealand Institute of landscape Architects plan to formulate a Landscape assessment method for adoption by members for utilising in the Environment Court. The Environment Court have signalled that they would welcome consistency among professional experts when they give evidence. Currently landscape experts use a number of landscape assessment approaches and this results in hundreds of pages of evidence for complex cases. In addition, judges have advised that the profession has yet to address the challenge raised a number of years ago. This was to ensure consistency with metrics when assessing matters such as view distances or images, and to consolidate and agree on sets of images and other aspects. A further issue raised by a Court commissioner and judge is the use of evaluatory terms that are not within the RMA, such as small, medium, large; as opposed to significance. Judges have also commented negatively that landscape architects have no agreed definition of the term 'landscape'. In addition it seems landscape architects do not explain clearly why a feature or view is outstanding or significant, and one judge said he would like landscape architects to explain why they feel the way they do about a view (for instance).

A 'best practice' guideline was produced by NZILA following the Court's challenge some years ago. However, the text was not received warmly by the Court and largely put to one side by them, and those producing evidence. It did not address the requested issues such as metrics either.

While NZILA has yet to put the latter issues on the table, it is organising workshops to develop an assessment method or methodology. An aspect which has yet to be addressed and resolved is the inclusion or otherwise of Māori cultural landscapes, and whether a different assessment method is required for assessing cultural landscapes.

### 2. The context

The Resource Management Act has key sections which are important for landscape architects presenting expert evidence, particularly Sections 5-8, as well as definitions, and assessment of environmental effects. Experts give their opinions on the basis of landscape theory and assessment is a commonly agreed method for reaching an opinion (although it is not prescribed by the RMA and there is no definition of landscape in the RMA. In addition experts may seek community and other opinion and evidence such as art, pepeha, whakatoki or proverbs and so on. The Environment Court make their decisions on the basis of the law, facts, opinions and case law.

From recent case law the following should be included in a landscape assessment:

- Biophysical landscape systems, features and processes
- Experiential and perceptual landscape values
- Associative landscape values, which include memories, history, events, and Māori values.

While this appears generally agreed, there is no firm opinion on how these factors should be integrated and to what extent Māori values are considered, although it is widely accepted that this could not occur without consultation with mana whenua.

While this reflects the RMA context, not every landscape assessment, or cultural assessment, is undertaken for the purpose of giving evidence. District plans would normally include a landscape assessment and proposals based on this in policies and plans, as would master planning and other planning evaluations. Iwi management plans also include cultural landscapes.

One judge recently advised that in his opinion landscape architects were not qualified to assess Māori cultural landscapes, whereas the Matakana Island recent decision, favoured those who had sought mana whenua opinion on landscapes.

While a high proportion of landscape architects' attention is on the physical and tangible aspects of landscapes, as well as views; research (Kawhara, Durie) and kaupapa Māori methodologies (G. Smith, J. Lee), and writings (TeHueHue) point to intangible landscapes as being the most significant or outstanding for many (if not most) iwi/hapū.

For Māori the key contextual aspect is likely to be the Treaty (mentioned as principles in S 8 of the RMA) rather than the RMA per se, so this also needs consideration.

### 3. What is landscape, cultural landscape?

#### Landscape:

Landscape has different meanings depending on culture and context.

Spirn (1998 p. 15) writes: 'The language of landscape is our native language' ..... 'The language of landscape is a habit of mind.' There are many different definitions and landscape is termed a 'slippery' concept. A definition was provided in the last NZILA 'Best Practice' document but has not been accepted by either practitioners it seems or the Court. The term 'landscape' was not within the Māori vocabulary (nor that of many other non-European cultures) so could be viewed as an imposition, along with European laws and customs. However, recognising this constraint it seems helpful if one definition which includes the way Māori conceive the world, is favoured and agreed.

- The European Landscape Convention definition of landscape, which is well tested in Europe is: an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. *European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, 2000.*
- Another slightly more recent definition is that of *Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2002:*
- **human perception of the land conditioned by knowledge and identity with place.** This seems to align with kaupapa Māori and might be a suitable definition on which to go forward.

#### Cultural landscape:

A cultural landscape has been defined as:

- a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.

Preservation Brief 36: Protecting Cultural Landscapes ...[www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/36-cultural-landscapes.htm](http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/36-cultural-landscapes.htm)

- Or: The World Heritage Committee of UNESCO defines cultural landscape as the cultural properties that represent: “the combined works of nature and man.”
- Cultural landscapes are those where human interaction with natural systems has, over a long period, formed a distinctive landscape. These interactions arise from, and cause, cultural values to develop. UNESCO Series No 26, 2010.

Kawharau describes the three categories into which Cultural landscapes have been placed:

- a) landscapes designed and created intentionally by man. Maungawhau, and other maunga with sculptured terraces, or rock art might fit into this category.
- b) organically evolved landscapes (both relict and continuing)
- c) associative, having powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations rather than material cultural evidence. This is the area where Māori cultural landscapes, particularly those linked to ancestors, best fit.

The definitions above have been framed in the context of the UNESCO World Heritage work and this is not the focus of the RMA, or Māori culture, but the explanations assist.

There have been arguments that all landscapes are cultural landscapes. This would include all the description provided of cultural landscape. However, Māori landscapes, or those Māori think most important, are particularly intangible landscapes.

It would be helpful if an inclusive definition for Maori cultural landscapes could be agreed.

#### **4. Māori cultural landscape assessment**

##### **What is important:**

- The landscapes relating to stories associated with an ancestor are important. This is reflected in names of places which have travelled and been adopted across the Pacific: Mauao, Hikurangi, Maui, Kupe.. there are many such names. Their explanations if of an event of legend assume more importance than the landscape feature itself. The stories include fish, animals as well as landforms and integrate landscape processes and te ao: such as Rangi and Papa and the creation stories. In addition such associations often tell a story which needs to be observed such as about sustainability.
- Also of importance might be those landscapes which identify an iwi/hapū, which occurs through pepeha. These are living landscapes and are tangible, physical entities although they are associated with whakapapa which is intangible
- Associations for whānau are important
- Other key landscapes are associated with events, such as battles, or with instrumental features such as ana used for burial, and urupa are important, because people are buried there.
- Views are also important if for instance of a landscape feature which is named in pepeha and whakapapa, such as many of the maunga of Tāmaki makauarau
- Other associations include rohe boundaries and other important markers

Knowledge of these landscapes is held by the mana whenua and so consulting their knowledge holders/kaumatua, must be the start point. This might be carried out by hikoi, by listening and dialogue.

##### **What should we be doing/contributing**

Landscape architects contribution might be in linking with planning policy, mapping, making connections and describing how such intangible aspects might be expressed, protected and enhanced, as well as including in assessment.

### **How should we be doing this?**

Listening, locating, explaining, incorporating. Landscape architects might be those who carry the stories (with mana whenua consent) to planning records and documents?

#### **5. Can this be linked or incorporated into a singular assessment method?**

This seems to be entirely separate knowledge and assessment aspects than would be considered in the EC approach above. If merged into such an assesment there is a danger that the intangible aspects which are key to Māori landscapes will be given less recognition. I think therefore, since they deal with different cultural values, such assessments should be undertaken separately.

Maori cultural landscape assessments must be undertaken with the consent of, and with mana whenua, and in urban areas in particular, mataawaka have a contribution to make.

Landscape features and significant sites have been recorded in region and district plans, along with relevant stories, so there is a way, but this should ensure that intangible landscapes are the focus and include the stories, whakapapa, events, and other aspects on which their importance is credited.

#### **6. Conclusions**

- a) Not all Māori cultural landscapes studies and information are relevant to the RMA assessment process.
- b) If landscape architects think they can be equipped to liaise with mana whenua and respectfully provide for their landscapes, then we have a communication issue as some judges do not agree (and iwi/hapū may also not agree).
- c) However, some landscape architects, even those less experienced, have demonstrated they can do this work very well, even though non-Māori may not see value in what Māori indicate as tikanga and significant.
- d) We need to upskill ourselves and our profession if we are to move forward. This is prescribed in the NZILA Education policy, but has a long way to go.
- e) Method or methods for undertaking kaupapa Māori assessment should be formulated so that we have better tools.
- f) Te Aranga Principles, and next generation place based principles are useful tools, along with commuication and hikoi, for this.
- g) This discussion is ongoing