

OUR LAND  
AND WATER

Toitū te Whenua,  
Toiora te Wai



Insights to co-design place-based  
approaches to purposeful change  
and resilience

The 11 insights for successful placed-based initiatives

Produced by the Place-based Pilots Working Group and *Revitalise te Taiao: Purpose-led change*

## The 11 insights for successful place-based initiatives

In 2020, [a group of 25 individuals from agribusiness, community, government, and industry](#) came together to draw from te ao Māori and te ao Pākehā to investigate the question “What enables people to unite to explore opportunities to revitalise communities and environments in Aotearoa-New Zealand?” This was posed in response to urgent calls from industry, government, and research for land use, management, value chain, and market opportunities to meet legislation and sustain market access by tackling global and local environmental degradation from biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, and water pollution. There is an opportunity for a uniquely Aotearoa-New Zealand response to these challenges by meaningful inclusion of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and tangata whenua through protection, participation, and partnership in decision-making.

The group drew on their own experiences and 60 local and international examples of communities and agribusinesses working in place-based initiatives to revitalise their places. [Eleven insights emerged](#). Together these insights provide the ingredients necessary to bring communities and people together to strengthen their connection to each other and the place they live, work, and play, and discover land use, value chain, and market opportunities that revitalise that place. Below is a brief explanation of each of the 11 insights.

### 1. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is foundational to the design of place-based initiatives

Te Tiriti o Waitangi offers a framework for connecting systems and communities of knowledge in ways that are mutually beneficial and future focused. Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles have emerged and continue to develop from judicial decisions and Waitangi Tribunal Findings<sup>1</sup>. The principles can be considered the underlying mutual obligations and responsibilities which Te Tiriti places on the parties and will continue to evolve over time<sup>2</sup>.

Research by Manaaki Whenua-Landcare Research identified the following key principles as central to successful place-based initiatives:

1. Reciprocity (recognition of the essential bargain)
2. Rangatiratanga (authority, self-determination)
3. Shared decision-making
4. Partnership
5. Active protection
6. Ōritetanga (mutual benefit, the right of development, and redress).

These principles have been applied to give practical effect to Te Tiriti rights in land use and management decisions and to frame actions for the local environment through a te ao Māori lens.

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<sup>1</sup> A leading example is provided within The Waitangi Tribunal Wai 262 Report – Ko Aotearoa Tenei (2011)

<sup>2</sup> Carter Holt Harvey Ltd v Te Runanga o Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau [2003] 2 NZLR 349; (2003) 9 ELRNZ 182 (HC), citing NZ Māori Council v A-G [1994] 1 NZLR 513 (PC), 517, per Lord Woolf.

## 2. Te taiao as a basis for change

Te taiao is the environment that contains and surrounds us. This includes the entire natural flowing expanse of our existence; living cycles interconnected at a universal scale. It encompasses everything that is growing and flowing in our physical, metaphysical, temporal (a past-present-future continuum), and ethnographical spheres. Te tai ao is a universal ao.

The all-embracing nature of te taiao invites us to think about a future through interconnected relationships that interweave multiple stakeholders, viewpoints, perceptions, practices and interests across programmes, sectors, and national systems. In place-based initiatives, the inclusion of mātauranga Māori and other knowledges and perspectives is an opportunity to deepen collective understandings of connection and interdependency across generations.

Te taiao manifests itself through whakapapa; people, landscape, plants, or animals. In all place-based initiatives reviewed, te taiao was a primary concern for people, communities, and agencies wanting to make change. Te taiao, therefore, underpinned almost all other key insights. Rather than the narrower te ao Pākehā definitions of environment, broader outcomes for te taiao, need to be front of mind when designing place-based initiatives.

## 3. Respecting all knowledges

Respecting and drawing from all knowledge systems is key to the success of place-based initiatives. A knowledge system signifies the information, know-how, technologies, practices, experiences, and beliefs developed in a community. In addition, knowledge systems provide a way to make sense of, understand, and develop meaning from a particular situation or place.

Different knowledge systems exist. Additionally, different philosophies, cultural contexts, and values underpin knowledge systems and the ways that knowledge is shared, and new knowledge created. For example, scientific knowledge (e.g., derived from the scientific method) may describe reality from precise relationships and quantifiable data. Experiential and traditional knowledge (e.g., mātauranga Māori, intergenerational, and practical know-how) may describe local and cultural realities from practice, observation, discussion, and experience. While an other's knowledge system may be different, difference is not inherently wrong.

Respecting and integrating different knowledge systems and different ways of thinking and understanding are key to collaborative, place-based initiatives. There is, however, an historic power and resourcing imbalance in the acknowledgement and development of indigenous knowledge systems internationally. In Aotearoa-New Zealand, concerns remain that western science continues to inform and influence policy change, without acknowledging the role of mātauranga – and te ao Māori more broadly – as well as other experiential and traditional knowledge in influencing that same policy.

## 4. Tikanga and values

Tikanga is the customary system of values and practices that has developed over time and is deeply embedded in the social context. These values sit atop deeply-held principles that guide decisions about what is right or wrong and how to act in various situations. Shared values and tikanga, or the 'way we do things here,' underpin decision making and the behavioural code of individuals, whānau, groups and communities. While tikanga within a community is always present and understood, it is not always obvious to those outside that community. In place-



based initiatives, shared values help groups work together more effectively, agree on actions, and articulate the outcomes they all desire.

Working together begins when group members discuss and develop a shared code of behaviour and values, when they establish their tikanga. This process enables the group's members to articulate the values they each bring, to recognise those values shared with others, and to define how the group should operate to ensure individual behaviour is in concert with the collective values. For a group to be successful, those involved must acknowledge and respect their different individual starting points and build a collective community. Establishing group tikanga and values underpins and enables other key insights to arise, including respecting all knowledges, collaboration and participation, and developing interconnected solutions.

## 5. People and community-led change

Successful long-term and enduring implementation of place-based initiatives are led by people and communities. Change led by people and communities ('ground up') differs from approaches administered by regulation, policy, or organisation-based engagement ('top down'). People and community-led change can ensure the implementation of land use and management change is appropriate and relevant to the place, the availability of resources, and the needs and values of its people.

Communities and people are often consulted as stakeholders in projects. This form of engagement is often seen as a one-off event and can fail to connect with Māori, Pasifika, young people, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A people- and community-centric approach is believed to be more effective in engaging people and communities for change.

To ensure the drivers of change are relevant to the place and aligned with the community's values, community-led change requires empowering local leadership. It is important to acknowledge the complexity and diversity of people and communities, and their various needs for change. Bringing people together around a shared kaupapa will foster collaboration and will enable people to embrace the challenges and opportunities that change can bring.

## 6. People and Place – a sense of place, belonging, and wellbeing

Successful place-based initiatives start with people and their connections to place. A 'sense of place' describes how places carry personal meaning and significance underpinned by a deeper emotional and physical connection. Individuals with a strong emotional attachment to a place are more likely to respect, protect, care for, and improve their place.

Māori have longstanding connections and whakapapa to the natural environment (e.g., forests, wetlands, rivers, oceans, mountains), and these connections are interlinked with their identity, health, and wellbeing. A Māori sense of place not only looks back by including historical connections, but also looks forward by maintaining connections for generations to come. Environmental and cultural connections to land enable the development of place-specific and culturally-driven principles that promote the health and wellbeing of Māori populations.

Place-centred approaches develop a more holistic view of a place in terms of people, their experiences, and their relationships, and therefore start from a more inclusive common-ground or perspective. Place also accommodates the breadth of tangible measures and intangible perspectives on health and wellbeing across individuals and communities, and so enables communities to consider people's emotional and physical connections with a specific location.

## 7. Collaboration and participation

Coming together, working together, and participating in direction setting were observed as common strengths of many successful place-based initiatives. This engagement includes design and development of a project (collaboration), ongoing involvement in the project activities (participation), and integrating and sharing resources and capabilities to ideate, create, and act. Through collaboration and participation (kotahitanga), people can:

1. Develop a shared understanding of issues
2. Understand the importance of working together to identify and implement solutions
3. Encounter difference and diversity as an opportunity to learn
4. Appreciate different knowledge systems (e.g., mātauranga Māori, experiential and scientific) and broaden their own view of the world
5. Share ideas and create new understandings
6. Meet their individual needs and of those of the group and community
7. Sustain community connections beyond the life of the project

For Māori, engagement is often centred on kanohi kitea, tatai tangata, and whakatakoto kaupapa via formal or informal processes (or both). An initial engagement begins with connection (ideally face-to-face) or a desire to understand who you are and what you represent. When first meeting, Māori want to know where you are from rather than what your name is, to start forming connections through place and people (both past and present). This is the beginning of the journey. New faces and new ideas need to undergo a series of visits to be considered and examined physically, mentally, and spiritually. Over this journey— the so-called ‘thousand cups of tea’— people start to connect, find commonalities, flesh out challenges and opportunities, and hopefully, but not always, reach an end goal.

## 8. Leadership and management (mana rangatira/mana whakahaere)

Leadership and management are complex and emerge from a specific contextual and cultural place. The key aspects of leadership and management observed in successful place-based initiatives were:

1. Crystallise: Coalesce various concepts and perceptions to build a unifying overarching vision that resonated with the partners in the initiative
2. Galvanise: Build a strong, united, committed project and support group
3. Organise: Understand the steps required for coherent and effective action and bring in others with needed skills
4. Realise: Provide the necessary time, energy, resource, passion, and skills to rally and sustain the group’s activities to progress, focus, and complete tasks

The collaborative and participatory processes that brought people together to develop shared understandings underpinned these leadership aspects, including leadership that respected different values and knowledge systems.

Similar qualities in Māori leadership have been identified:

1. Human oriented: Encouraging and rewarding individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring and kind to others
2. Protective: Avoiding negatives and maintaining the status of everyone

3. Charismatic and values based: Inspiring, motivating, and expecting high performance outcomes from others based on firmly held core values
4. Team orientated: Communicative, consultative, informative, coordinated, aware of group dynamics, collaborative, diplomatic, worldly, and administratively competent

These qualities emphasise bringing together individuals with diverse perspectives, skills, and experiences to work toward a shared goal while enabling everyone to make a unique contribution to the group goal.

## 9. Broader measures of success

Successful place-based initiatives were found to explicitly consider and prioritise multiple values when describing success, including defining product value not only in economic terms but also according to environmental, social, and cultural values. Commercial and financial viability was recognised as a crucial element of success only as a means to realise other more enduring values. Broader measures of success are increasingly reflected by producers who make business decisions that equally prioritise environmental and social outcomes, and represents a wider shift in society with new business models emerging that recognise the bounds of environmental, social, and cultural health.

These emerging models are consistent with the long-standing Māori economy. Māori commerce is a dynamic, deep-rooted, complex, and ever-evolving space, incorporating inter-generational wealth, maintenance of cultural identity, and the well-being of iwi, hapū, and whānau. Māori commercial success is often determined by multiple cultural bottom lines. Commerce and culture intermix; the commercialisation of culture instead becomes the culturalisation of commerce.

The shift from exclusively prioritising economic value to including social and environmental values is observed in changing market and value chain opportunities. Value chain initiatives are responding to new market preferences for direct-to-consumers sales, more information on food origin and product attributes, health, and wellbeing products (e.g., nutraceuticals), and complementary product/purchaser experiences (e.g., virtual, and augmented reality experiences in conjunction with products). These market changes recognise the complex interweaving of the health and wellbeing of the natural world (including people) and the long-term viability of businesses in the modern marketplace.

## 10. Interconnected solutions

Reflecting the interweaving of the health and wellbeing of the natural world and people, place-based initiatives start with a holistic view of how people connect with their place. These initiatives work to identify, bring together, co-design, and implement interconnected solutions that are aligned or integrated, rather than starting with a single technical fix and applying it to a place.

Interconnected solutions are more likely to be successful in addressing complex challenges compared with a single solution designed in isolation of others. For example, solutions that encourage a land-use change to enhance the environment that also capture additional financial returns can, in turn, support further investment in the capability and capacity of the people on the land. Increasing the capacity and capability of individuals and their families, enables flow-on socio-economic, cultural, and environmental benefits to local communities, regions and to Aotearoa-New Zealand.

Collaborative and participatory processes that respect all knowledge systems and perspectives are essential to co-developing interconnected solutions. These processes enable people to come together to develop a shared understanding of te taiao in place, to respect values, and to weave together different knowledge systems and capacities.

## 11. Access to resources

Place-based initiatives require access to sufficient resources and information. Resources like funding are critical to allow risk-taking in land-use or management changes. Funding to support change needs to provide flexibility around predetermined outputs and outcomes.

In science, funding is typically based on a project proposal that provides certainty the resources will be used to achieve agreed outputs and outcomes. However, the successful place-based initiatives reviewed did not have predetermined outputs and outcomes. Rather, they were co-designed with multiple partners to realise diverse aspirations, with outputs and outcomes emerging over time. The approach of funding predetermined outputs and outcomes, particularly in the complex interconnected system of te taiao, can be stifling and can result in unsuccessful initiatives.

Other necessary resources include skills and access to technology. Data, tools, and models were critical to providing new understanding and new knowledge. Quantification, mapping, and modelling of land uses, practices, environments, and ecosystems requires a lot of data (observations, statistical, geospatial) for models that range from simple to complex. Data can support understanding of local to global changes and disruptions. The data and skills needed to run socio-ecological models depend on the modelling approach and the related complexity.

## Taiao Manawa Ora

These 11 insights cannot be isolated from one another and as such are woven together in the image of [Taiao Manawa Ora - Purpose-led Change](#). Taiao Manawa Ora illustrates the interrelationship among the insights and shows the similarities between the insights in te ao Māori and te ao Pākehā. Bringing people together to strengthen their connection to each other and their place can play-out in a similar (though not the same) way in these two worlds. Though the insights are not explicitly referenced in the model, they explain how you might operationalise Taiao Manawa Ora.

The central diamond (pātiki) represents the core concepts without which a place-based initiative will struggle to stay together. The four outer triangles (niho-taniwha) might work well on their own but in combination can provide a fuller project experience.

The horizontal halves of the diagram are mirrored reflecting te ao Māori and te ao Pākehā. They are not exact reflections or direct cultural equivalents. Each half can operate successfully (although somewhat mono-culturally) on its own. But, again, combining halves provide opportunities for greater, more culturally diverse, and richer outcomes.

In Aotearoa, Te Tiriti o Waitangi represents the meeting point between tangata whenua and tangata tiriti. Placing Te Tiriti at the core of the model purposefully demonstrates that meaningful tangata whenua and tangata tiriti relationships must be central to any initiative to revitalise communities and environments.

## Putting the insights into practice

What the insights look like in practice will be shaped by the specific characteristics of the community and place you live. We will each understand the insights in different ways based on our past experiences. Discussing the insights as a group – what each insight means to you individually and collectively – will forge a deeper understanding of what the insights look like in practice in your place.

To learn more about what the insights look like in other communities check out how [Te Kahui Rau](#), [Knowledge into Action for te Taiao](#), and [Rere ki Uta Rere ki Tai](#) are putting the 11 insights and Taiao Manawa Ora into practice in their respective Taranaki, Wānaka and Waikato-Bay of Plenty communities.