

# Urban environmental ethics on the city edge:

## Negotiating coastal futures for Auckland's blue backyard

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"Koropupu te toto o te moana i ahau,  
koia ko toku orange, toku whare wananga, toku pouarahi,  
ko au ko te mauri o te moana,  
ko te mauri o te moana ko au"

"The blood of the ocean flows through me,  
my sustenance, my nest of higher learning, my navigator.

I am the living essence of the ocean,  
the living essence of the ocean is me"

*ASB Polyfest Festival 2019 theme in Auckland*



## Summary

Coastal transformations are taking place globally, including in Auckland, “water city of the South Pacific” and Aotearoa New Zealand’s largest metropolis. In recent years, growing attention has been directed toward coastal and marine changes, and various interventions have emerged to protect what is often referred to as “Auckland’s big blue backyard” – the Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi (the Gulf).

This thesis examines a crucial yet underexplored dimension of these interventions: the *ethical and normative vocabulary and reasoning* within which coastal transformations and futures are contested, negotiated, and shaped. Building on the research agenda of urban ethics developed by a multidisciplinary group funded by the German Research Foundation, it engages with literature from human geography, political ecology, and Indigenous studies to explore urban coastal ethics in Auckland. This approach brings into focus the multiple discourses and imaginaries of “ethical” urban coastal human-nonhuman relationships – highlighting their ontological pluralism, their entanglement with politics and governance, and their spatial and place-based dimensions.

The thesis integrates five articles and book chapters, each analysing ethical debates in three key fields: (1) marine spatial planning, (2) urban governance and decision-making, and (3) local community engagement. Applying a range of qualitative methods – including 39 qualitative interviews, ethnographic case studies, walks, and observations, photographic documentation, process tracing, and document analysis – the research provides a nuanced understanding of urban ethics in coastal transformations.

The findings reveal urban ethics as a field of contestation where economic rationalities are challenged, planning logics reinterpreted, urban human-nonhuman relationships reimagined, and normative colonialist frameworks renegotiated. Ethics function in diverse, often contradictory ways: as techniques of governing, tools for disciplining citizens, mechanisms for consensus-building, and bridges between worldviews. When connected to Indigenous ethical systems and principles like relationality and reciprocal care, they drive change, challenge established norms, and advocate for new resource and management regimes. Additionally, they influence dynamics of legitimation, inclusion, and exclusion by redefining participation rules and constituting appropriate subject positions.

While the study does not directly assess the ecological impact of urban ethics, it advances research in human geography, political ecology, and urban ethics by addressing key issues such as place and space, the nature and boundaries of the urban, ontological pluralism, agency, subjectivity, power, and the political. Viewing urban coastal change and interventions through an ethical lens reveals complexities that extend beyond economic, political, or ecological factors alone. By centring ethics in these discussions, the research highlights their crucial role in shaping more just and sustainable coastal futures.

## Zusammenfassung

Küstenveränderungen finden weltweit statt, auch in Auckland, der „Wasserstadt des Südpazifiks“ und größten Metropole Aotearoa Neuseelands. In den letzten Jahren ist das Bewusstsein für Küsten- und Meeresveränderungen gestiegen und verschiedene Initiativen zum Schutz des Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi – oft auch als „Aucklands großer blauer Hinterhof“ bezeichnet – sind entstanden.

Diese Dissertation untersucht die entscheidende, aber wenig erforschte *ethische und normative Dimension* solcher Maßnahmen, innerhalb derer Küstenveränderungen und Meereszukünfte angefochten, verhandelt und gestaltet werden. Aufbauend auf der Forschungsagenda zu urbanen Ethiken, die im Rahmen einer multidisziplinären DFG-Forschungsgruppe entwickelt wurde, greift die Dissertation auf Literatur aus der Human-geographie, politischen Ökologie und Indigenen Studien zurück, um urbane Ethiken rund um den Hauraki Gulf in Auckland zu untersuchen. Dieser Ansatz rückt die vielfältigen Diskurse und Vorstellungen von „ethischen“ menschlichen-nicht-menschlichen Beziehungen im städtischen Küstenraum in den Fokus – und betont deren ontologischen Pluralismus, ihre Verflechtung mit Politik und Governance sowie ihre räumlichen und orts-bezogenen Dimensionen.

Die Dissertation umfasst fünf Artikel und Buchkapitel, die unterschiedliche ethische Aushandlungsprozesse in drei Schlüsselbereichen analysieren: (1) marine Raumplanung, (2) urbane Governance und Entscheidungsfindung und (3) lokales Engagement von Stadt-bürger\*innen. Durch die Anwendung einer Reihe von qualitativen Methoden – darunter 39 qualitative Interviews, ethnographische Fallstudien, Spaziergänge und Beobachtungen, Fotodokumentation, Prozess- und Dokumentenanalysen – liefert die Untersuchung ein differenziertes Verständnis der urbanen Ethiken in küstennahen Transformationsprozessen.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen urbane Ethiken als ein Feld der Aushandlung, in dem ökonomische Rationalitäten in Frage gestellt, Planungslogiken neu interpretiert, städtische mens-chliche-nicht-menschliche Beziehungen neu imaginiert und normative kolonialistische Rah-menbedingungen neu verhandelt werden. Ethiken nehmen hierin eine vielfältige, oft wi-dersprüchliche Rolle ein: als Regierungstechnik, als Instrument zur Disziplinierung der Bürger\*innen, als Mittel zur Konsensbildung und als Brücke zwischen Weltanschauungen. In Verbindung mit Indigenen ethischen Systemen und Prinzipien wie Relationalität und

gegenseitiger Fürsorge leiten sie Wandel ein, stellen etablierte Normen in Frage und stoßen neue Ressourcen- und Management-Regelungen an. Darüber hinaus sind sie eng verknüpft mit Dynamiken von Legitimation, Inklusion und Exklusion, indem sie Beteiligungsregeln neu definieren und angemessene Subjektpositionen konstituieren.

Während die Dissertation keine Aussagen über die direkten ökologischen Auswirkungen urbaner Ethiken macht, bringt sie die Forschung in den Bereichen Humangeographie, politische Ökologie und urbane Ethiken voran, indem sie Schlüsselthemen wie Ort und Raum, das Wesen und die Grenzen des Urbanen, ontologischen Pluralismus, Agency, Subjektivität, Macht und das Politische behandelt. Die Betrachtung des städtischen Küstenwandels aus einer urban ethischen Perspektive offenbart Komplexitäten, die über ökonomische, politische oder ökologische Aspekte hinausgehen. Indem sie Ethiken in den Mittelpunkt rückt, unterstreicht diese Studie deren entscheidende Rolle bei der Gestaltung einer gerechteren und nachhaltigeren Zukunft städtischer Küstengebiete.

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*The bird that eats the miro berries, theirs is the forest;  
the bird that consumes knowledge, the world is theirs.*

*Whakataukī (Māori proverb)*

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## Glossary

Ahu moana	ocean care; near-shore, nurture areas co-managed by local iwi/hapū and communities in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park – to differentiate between the two meanings, capital letters are used when referring to the latter meaning in this thesis.
Hapū	subtribes
He waka taurua	metaphorical framework of a temporary double canoe, formed by lashing two waka (canoes) together to achieve a common purpose
Hīkoi	march
Hui	meetings
Iwi	tribes
Kaitiaki	guardian, people, or agents who are given the role to exercise kaitiakitanga
Kaitiakitanga	a Māori non-anthropocentric socio-environmental ethic and contemporary interpretation of Māori environmental customs and practices
Kaupapa	topic, policy, matter for discussion, plan, purpose, scheme, proposal, agenda, subject, programme, theme, issue, initiative
Kaupapa Māori	literally “a Māori way” – also described as related to “being Maori”, Kaupapa Māori research and evaluation is done by Māori, with Māori and for Māori; it is informed by tikanga Māori, or Māori ways of doing things
Koha	gift, present, donation
Mahinga kai	food gathering place
Mana whenua	local tribal groups; territorial rights, power from the land, authority over land or territory, jurisdiction over land or territory – to differentiate between the two meanings, capital letters are used when referring to the first meaning in this thesis.

Māori	Indigenous New Zealander, Indigenous person of Aotearoa New Zealand – a new use of the word resulting from Pākehā contact in order to distinguish between people of Māori descent and the colonisers
Marae	courtyard – the open area in front of the <i>wharenuī</i> , where formal greetings and discussions take place; often also used to include the complex of buildings around the <i>marae</i>
Mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill
Mātāwaka	Māori whose ancestral connections lie outside of the region
Maunga	mountain, volcanic cone
Mauri	life principle, life force, vital essence, special nature, a material symbol of a life principle, source of emotions – the essential quality and vitality of a being or entity, also used for a physical object, individual, ecosystem, or social group in which this essence is located
Motu	island
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descendant – probably originally applied to English-speaking Europeans living in Aotearoa New Zealand. Despite the claims of some non-Māori speakers, the term does not normally have negative connotations.
Papa kāinga	original home, home base, village, communal Māori land
Papanoho	deck
Rangatira	chief
Tāmaki Makaurau	a place desired by many, one of the traditional Māori names for Auckland

Tangata whenua	local people, hosts, Indigenous people – people born of the whenua, i.e. of the placenta and of the land where the people's ancestors have lived and where their placenta are buried
Taonga	treasure(s), property, goods
Tauīwi	foreigner, European, non-Māori, colonist
Te Ao Māori	the Māori world (view)
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	the Treaty of Waitangi
Tika	true, good, correct
Tikanga	correct procedure, custom, habit, lore
Tikanga Māori	is a Māori concept incorporating practices and values from mātauranga Māori
Waka	canoe
Whānau	extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people – the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society
Wharenui	meeting house, large house – main building of a <i>marae</i>

Translations and notes are based on Moorfield, J. C. 2025. *Te Aka Māori Dictionary*. Available at: <https://www.maoridictionary.co.nz>. Accessed February 13, 2025. • Forster, M. 2016. Indigenous environmental autonomy in Aotearoa New Zealand. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 12 (3): 316-330. • Harmsworth, G. R., and Awatere, S. 2013. Indigenous Māori knowledge and perspectives of ecosystems. In *Ecosystem services in New Zealand: Conditions and trends*, ed., J. Dymond, 274-286. Manaaki Whenua Press.

## Abbreviations

ANZ	Aotearoa New Zealand
BE	Blue Economy
CCO	Council-controlled organisation
DOC	Department of Conservation
DFG	Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft / German Research Foundation
ENGOS	Environmental Nongovernmental Organisations
FS	Future Search
HGF	Hauraki Gulf Forum
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MPI	Ministry of Primary Industries
NGOs	Nongovernmental Organisations
POAL	Ports of Auckland Limited
RMA	Resource Management Act 1991
SCTTTP	Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari
SSNSC	Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge / Ko ngā moana whakauka
SWG	Stakeholder Working Group
The Gulf	Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana (also: Te Moananui-ā-Toi)



## Part I: Introducing the thesis and setting the scene



# 1 Introducing: Urban environmental ethics on the city edge

This thesis draws together diverse subjects that at first glance may seem paradoxical or at least rather far apart. It has its roots in social scientific work on ethics, political and urban political ecology, as well as critical research on marine spatial planning (MSP), blue economy (BE), and coastal transformations in general. It is not limited to a small niche, however, but brings into focus a highly topical and hitherto less researched phenomenon: the environmental ethics in and of urban coastal transformations.

Coastal transformations take place all over the world, driven by a multitude of factors, including climate change-induced sea level rises, land-originating pollution, overfishing, and the implementation of ‘development’ projects that alter economic-environmental relations and their material expressions. They threaten habitats, preserve or restore them, create new realities, and in some cases new value. Looking into these transformations is of particular importance and urgency in urban research. Their specific characteristics and socioecological dynamics mean that cities and their inhabitants are highly affected by and continue to cause and fuel coastal transformations. Coastal and marine environments appear to be on the city edge, liminal spaces where built environment meets ‘nature’. Like other spaces at the urban fringe, they have been used as waste dumps for city development projects and land reclamations, industrial (port) sites, as well as for recreational purposes. As trends and dynamics of neoliberal urbanisation manifest in projects like the redevelopment of urban waterfronts, their economic value increases – adding to the interests, values, and claims that already swirl around these places (Pawson 2002; Bunce & Desfor 2007; Murphy 2019; Roberts et al. 2021).

Questions and negotiations of urban coastal futures often follow “logics of socio-economic relations, law, or political conflict” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 1), and opposition may be expressed in terms of social and/or environmental justice. But what if they don’t? Or do not prevail? In a neoliberal urban environment that is characterised by consensus decision-making, soft spaces of governance, partnerships, and participation, contestation and the *political* are often obscured and found entangled in questions and claims of ethical or unethical, good, bad, right, or wrong conduct and expressed in a ‘vocabulary of ethics’. The use of a vocabulary of ethics is particularly common in urban environmental discourse and questions of ecological sustainability (Dürr et al. 2019). However, this dimension of ethics and

normativity is often overlooked and so far, little researched in human geography, and political and urban political ecology.

Moreover, research on urban (environmental) ethics, predominantly situated within the domain of cultural anthropology, has rarely addressed coastal and city edge environments (Mostafavi 2017; Pavoni 2018; Chan 2019; Buyuksarac & Özkan 2020; Ege & Moser 2020b; Acosta et al. 2023a; for exceptions see e.g. the works of Løyen 2024 and Goula & Sturm 2019 on urban waterfront/port areas). The research and work on which this thesis is based took place in the context of a multidisciplinary research group on *Urban Ethics. Conflicts over good and proper urban living in the 20th and 21st centuries* funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG; DFG Research Group Urban Ethics 2022). Taking a specific approach to urban ethics, the numerous projects within this research association have explored the formation and negotiation of a plurality of urban ethics in cities around the world (Dürr et al. 2019; Ott 2019).

Urban ethics work as an analytical lens to investigate and understand the ways urban life is problematised and negotiated in *ethical terms* by people and institutions, not only but especially in times of capitalist and neoliberal urbanisation. Struggle, conflict, and power dynamics are central aspects addressed within this research agenda, as well as issues of (neoliberal) governmentality, subjectivation, and depoliticisation – interests that form a common denominator with political (Robbins 2012) and urban political ecology (Gandy 2021), as well as recent critical research on coastal transformations, especially that on MSP (Tafon 2018; Flannery & McAteer 2020) and the BE (Choi 2017; Winder & Le Heron 2017). By bringing these fields into dialogue with each other, this thesis seeks not only to explore the normative and more informal dimension of coastal transformations, but also to contribute to research and theory on urban environmental ethics – from the specific geographical perspective of a coastal and city edge environment.

The thesis thus pursues different aims: It aims to understand the ethical dimension of unfolding struggles and negotiations around urban – or urban-influenced – coastal and marine spaces and projects. It strives to better comprehend the (spatial) role of ethics and normativity in the neoliberal and post-colonial city. On a larger scale, this thesis also raises and discusses current challenges in human geography and political and urban political ecology, such as questions of place, imaginaries of the urban, of relational ontologies and ontological pluralism, agency, and subjectivity, and of power and the location of the *political* (Gandy 2021). In doing so, the thesis seeks to develop and make productive urban

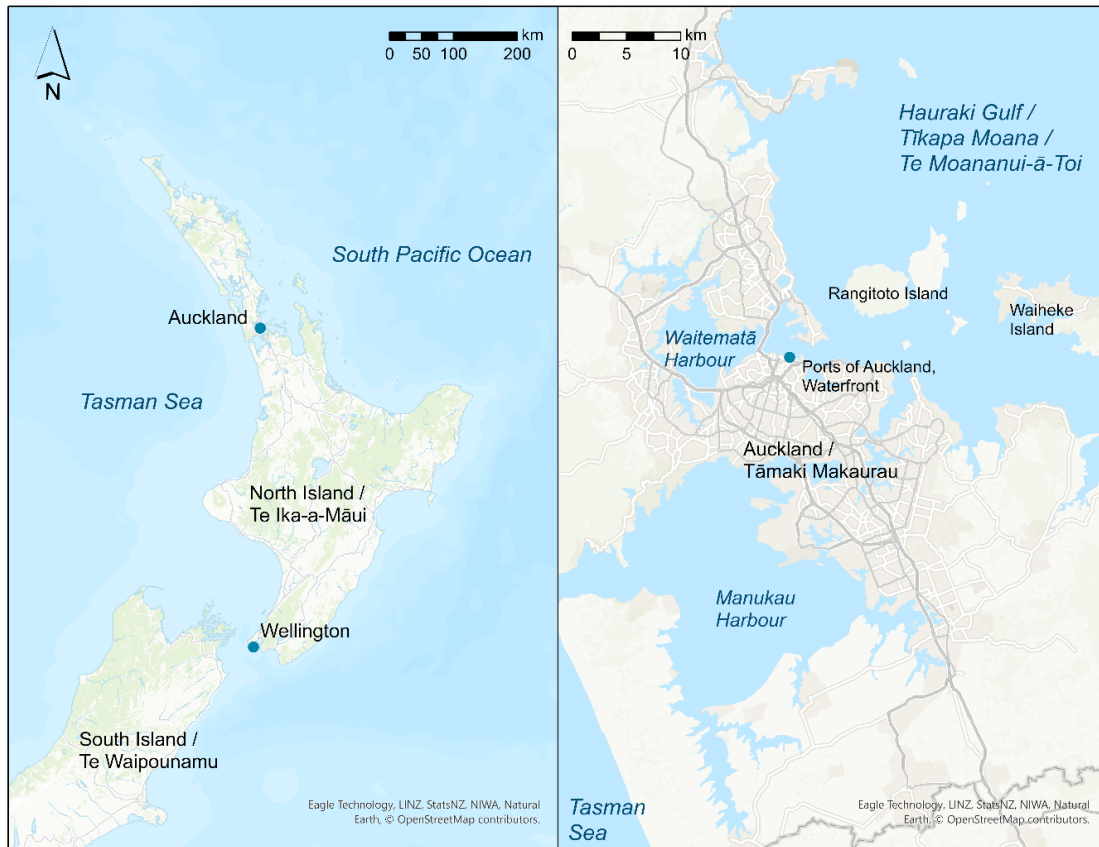
ethics as research agenda for human geography, while contributing to theory and research on urban ethics, and ethics in more general, by bringing previously mentioned matters into focus and discussing them from a human geography and political ecology perspective. To achieve these objectives, the following thesis brings together three published peer-reviewed articles, and two published book chapters and provides additional insight through the inclusion of further chapters and an overall synthesis.

## 1.1 Auckland – water city of the South Pacific

The sea is ever-present in Auckland / Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa New Zealand's (ANZ) most populous city<sup>1</sup>. The city is a port city (Winder 2006) and its region encompasses “over 3,200 km of coastline including three major harbours and a range of sandy beaches and dunes, rocky shores and cliffs, estuaries, and offshore islands” (Roberts et al. 2021, p. i). Built on a field of over 50 inactive volcanoes, there are many places in the city where one enjoys views of either the Waitematā Harbour, which stretches into the Hauraki Gulf Tīkapa Moana (the Gulf) and out to the Pacific Ocean to the east, or the Manukau Harbour, which opens to the Tasman Sea to the west (Fig. 1.1, 1.2). Where the ocean cannot be seen, several references in the city point to its existence and proximity (Fig. 1.3). Richard Toy (1977) referred to Auckland as the “water city of the South Pacific”, while its more popular nickname recognises Auckland as the ‘City of Sails’, referring to the city's high number of sailing yachts and marinas (Kidd 2012).

The ocean and coasts have played a crucial role in Auckland's urban and economic development and growth, particularly the Gulf and Waitematā Harbour where the city's main port and commercial centre / central business district are located. With the establishment and growth of the city, the adjacent coastline and waters (and the elements within them) have undergone major transformations<sup>2</sup>. Land reclamation projects and wharf construction have shifted the coastline of the Waitematā Harbour seawards, dramatically altering the original shoreline (Winder 2006; Auckland City 2018). Coastal hazards such as coastal erosion and inundation – exacerbated by the dynamics of climate change – are leading to coastal change, as are the infrastructural responses to them (Roberts et al. 2021). Sewage discharges and overflows, and the introduction of sediments, nutrients, and litter have led to sometimes severe contamination of the shores and waters of the Waitematā Harbour and the Gulf. The introduction of invasive species, ocean sprawl from mussel and oyster farming, overfishing, and impacts on the seabed from fishing, dredging, or sediment dumping have, not least, all had a profound impact on marine life and biodiversity (Fig.

1.4). The extent of environmental impacts has been systematically reported for the Gulf in recent years (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2011, 2014, 2017, 2020). Other transformations mirror in local conflicts, such as opposition to the expansion and reclamation of the Port of Auckland (POAL) or to the construction of new coastal infrastructure on the coastline.



**Fig. 1.1** Auckland's location between the Tasman Sea and the Pacific Ocean on the North Island / Te Ika-a-Māui. The map also shows a closer view of Auckland on the Tāmaki Isthmus, bordering both Waitematā Harbour with the Ports of Auckland and Auckland Waterfront, and Manukau Harbour (Map: M. Aschenbrenner).

“Kiwis [informal name for ANZ residents] are very attached to the water. They love to go fishing, they love sailing, they love just [...] going in, and looking for seafood to feed their families” (Personal conversation, 2019) – throughout the course of my research, interviewees and city dwellers described to me their relationship with the Gulf in a variety of ways, with the common thread being that this relationship is existential and shapes their lives. For Māori, the Indigenous inhabitants of Aotearoa, this relationship goes even deeper in the sense that for those with ancestral ties to the land (and sea), “Tīkapa Moana [the Gulf] is an ancestor. It defines [their] being, [their] existence, [they] identify very much with it, [and] are related to it” (Personal conversation, 2018). It is not surprising,

then, that Auckland is a place where diverse knowledges<sup>3</sup>, values, interests, and ideas about good and proper living in and with the Gulf come together. It is also not surprising that reports of coastal and marine change, or the announcement of initiatives that will have further impacts on the coastal and/or marine space attract attention and often strong public reactions (Peart 2017; Le Heron et al. 2019; Peart 2019).



**Fig. 1.2** View of Waitematā Harbour extending into the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana from the summit of Maungawhau / Mount Eden, one of Auckland's dormant volcanoes (Photo: M. Aschenbrenner, 2018).

The Gulf is thus more than a wild place on the city edge. It is at once kinship, a food source for families and iwi, a sanctuary for native birds and wildlife, an urban playground for yacht owners and recreational fishers, an extractive resource for commercial fishers, a production platform for fish farmers, a sink for urban and rural waste, and a threat to the city's built environment – to name but a few (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016). In each case, it is associated with specific human-nonhuman relationships, imaginaries, and ethics. Since 2014, newsletter articles have increasingly invoked the metaphor of the Gulf as Auckland's (big) blue backyard, most often when reporting on the extent of environmental degradation, and the measures needed and taken to contain it (Morton 2014, 2015; Neilson 2020; "Rid Gulf of nets, protesters plead" 2023; Morton 2023b, 2023a). One intervention

to “save Auckland’s blue backyard” (Morton 2018) was *Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari* (SCTTTP, 2013-2016), a participatory and consensus-oriented MSP process that aimed to bring together the many narratives and values in and around the Gulf to create a shared vision for its future. In contrast to other, more technocratic MSP processes observed in other parts of the world (Douvere 2010; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019), a significant number of problematisations, claims, and responses within and surrounding SCTTTP employed an ethical vocabulary. This is a distinctive feature that can also be observed in other settings in Auckland, where coastal and marine change is being addressed and negotiated, many of which have some connection to SCTTTP.

SCTTTP was the starting point for the research behind this thesis. The thesis therefore focuses on SCTTTP, and from there moves on to other sites of coastal change such as Auckland Council’s water management, struggles over the future of POAL, and a group of marine caregivers on Waiheke Island. It addresses a professional and planning level as well as the private sector and civil society initiatives, united in their unique use of an ethical vocabulary in claiming and negotiating urban life and futures in and around the Gulf. The thesis asks about the role of urban environmental ethics in these processes and settings, and in the negotiation of coastal transformations and conflicts. From a human geography and (urban) political ecology perspective, it is interested in how ethics serve to legitimise a particular (geographical) vision of the Gulf, and the human-nonhuman relationships and activities associated with it, while excluding and marginalising others. Each chapter adopts its own, more specified set of research questions and thematic and theoretical angle to consider these issues, as is outlined in section 1.4.

Finally, it is important to note that the research agenda of urban ethics is guided by what the social scientist Michael Burawoy (2009) has called the *extended case method*<sup>4</sup>. As a research group, we have considered urban ethics as a phenomenon that can be found in cities around the world, and a joint discussion of cases is helpful for understanding the workings of urban ethics, as can be seen in Chapter 5 of this thesis, which includes the evaluation of Auckland Council’s water management along with water management in Mexico City. However, this single research project on Auckland’s ‘blue backyard’ was not concerned with a comparative approach, but the research and its approach to understanding and exploring urban ethics research stands on its own.





**Fig. 1.3** a The ocean in the City of Auckland at Victoria Park, b, c and Westhaven Marina (Photos: M. Aschenbrenner, 2018, 2019).



**Fig. 1.4** A sign on a bench at Waitematā Harbour warns of potential health risks from poor water quality (Photo: M. Aschenbrenner, 2018).

## 1.2 Literature review: Facilitating a dialogue between theoretical fields

Questions of normativity, morality, and ethics have been asked, researched, and discussed in many ways in the humanities and social sciences. The urban ethics research agenda, originally based on much cultural anthropological work on ethics, has been complemented in the research by work on ethics from the fields of human geography, (urban) political ecology, and Indigenous studies and research to make it more appropriate for researching urban ‘environmental’ ethics in the specific context of Auckland, ANZ, – and to focus on aspects of space, ontological politics, and environmental conflict, aspects that have been underrepresented in the urban ethics agenda. This chapter provides an overview of approaches to ethics and morality in the aforementioned fields, a task that is important to add to the analytical perspective of urban ethics, but also valuable in its own right as an overview discussing the literature of these fields together has rarely been provided in this form to date (for articles reviewing human geographic work on ethics in more general see e.g. Barnett, 2010, 2011, 2013; Olson, 2015, 2016, 2018; Popke, 2006, 2007, 2009; Schmidt, 2022, 2023, 2023).

### 1.2.1 Ethics and morality in human geography

Several general progress reports on geography and ethics point to the difficulty of subsuming and categorising the literature and research on ethics in human geography (Barnett, 2010, 2011, 2013; Olson, 2015, 2016, 2018; Popke, 2006, 2007, 2009). While an *ethical turn* (*moral turn*) has been noted in human geography over the past 25 years (Popke 2010; Olson 2018), Jeff Popke noted that “among geographers, concepts such as morality, ethics, and justice are open to a significant degree of interpretation, and there is a good deal of overlap in their definitions and usage” (p. 195). One way to make a distinction is between publications that approach ethics as a “field of inquiry” (Popke 2010, p. 196), where relationships and interactions are problematised, reflected upon, and (re)claimed as “a site of ethics and responsibility” (Popke 2006, p. 505), and more descriptive or explanatory approaches (Jacobs 2010; Barnett 2013).

In particular, early approaches to radical geography understood ethics as “a project [or part of a project] to be realised” (Popke 2010, p. 197). They saw ethics as the commitments and obligations a researcher has in relation to societal injustices such as racism or existing inequalities. Drawing on feminist conceptualisations of an *ethics of care*, ethics became part of – and the basis for – attempts to create a better social order (Fisher & Tronto 1990;

Tronto 1999; Sevenhuijsen 2000; Amin 2006; Gibson-Graham 2006; Popke 2006; St Martin 2007; Gibson-Graham 2008; Popke 2010). By theorising and (re)inscribing the social as an ethical site of collective responsibility, interdependence, affect, and care relations, authors have proposed alternatives to neoliberal discourses of autonomous, individual subjectivity (Popke 2006, 2010). J. K. Gibson-Graham (2008) also see ethics as a ground for transforming one's own identity (and work) as an academic subject. According to the authors, academic subjects need to employ "techniques of ethical thinking" (Gibson-Graham 2008, p. 628) in order to think about and sustain alternative or diverse economies in addition to market, wage, and capitalism.

The idea of research as generative and performative, and ethically informed, practice is also reflected in work and research on the *blue economy*, particularly in the ANZ context (Winder & Le Heron 2017; Lewis 2019; SSNSC 2020). For example, Nicolas Lewis' (2019) work on a moral BE aims to intervene in and reinterpret an emerging BE discourse on the economisation of marine resources. The author re-categorises actualised BEs in ANZ, and distinguishes them, among other things, by their ethical co-ordinates and commitments (e.g. Indigenous stewardship, community conservation, capitalist accumulation). Lewis sees altered ethical co-ordinates such as a multi-generation ethics of care for community and environment as one key aspect for an enhanced resourcefulness and intervention into the economisation of marine resources.

Of course, there are many more approaches that use ethics in similar ways, and the field of research is much wider and more diverse than can be presented here. Most writers in a similar line of thought share a theoretical base of Marxist and/or post-structuralist tenets which allow to critically reflect on predominant (capitalist, patriarchal, or post-colonial) paradigms and norms and to "pose [...] challenges [to] traditional ethical thinking" (Popke 2003, p. 298). As Gibson-Graham (2008) puts it: "Our goal as academics was [...] to understand the world in order to change it, but with a post-structuralist twist – to change our understanding is to change the world" (Gibson-Graham 2008, p. 615).

Other work by human geographers and social scientists on morality and ethics can be seen as more descriptive or explanatory, and less performative – although many authors still have (or had) the aim of changing socio-economic and environmental conditions. Much of this work is inspired by post-structuralist thinking. Morality, or a moral order, in a particular urban geographic context was described as early as the 1960s by the Chicago School. In its early definition, *moral geography* referred to the idea of localised cultural,

and moral, differences (Popke 2010). The “spatial pattern [was regarded to be] a reflection of the moral order” (Wreford Watson 1951, p. 475). Influenced by post-structuralism, authors researching *moral geographies* have increasingly addressed the discursive constitution of *moral space* and (urban) communities, focusing on the constitution of issues such as sexualised or racialised *others*, and the marginalisation and exclusion of people and groups. Rather than taking a relativist approach to morality, their interest remains in understanding the relationship between geographical manifestations or orders, and particular moral or normative ideas about what is good, right, or true (Cresswell 1996; Jacobs 2010; Popke 2010; Gandy 2014; Olson 2018).

Another focus of moral geographies is on the institutionalisation or legal enforcement of moral and normative judgements, and their connection to the legitimisation of certain urban policies and the shaping of arrangements of people, places, and things, thus aspects of governmentality. Recent examples include the work of van Liempt and Chimienti (2017), who analyse the role of moral judgement and reasoning in legitimising urban, spatial policies that lead to the displacement of sex workers from city centres. Ali E. Erol (2017) explores the contestation of institutionalised moral neoliberal and heteronormative geographies by queer notions of space in the context of the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul. Elizabeth Olson (2018) confirms that recent work on moral geographies is “frequently both explanatory and normative and thus [addresses] how certain configurations contribute to justice, hinder care, or secure flourishing” (Olson 2018, p. 938).

Other work in the social sciences and geography uses *moral economy* as an analytical tool and perspective on ethics and morality (McCormack 2008; Boucquey 2017; Sayer 2020). Some of this work is closer to the work of E. P. Thompson (1971, 1991), who analysed the late eighteenth-century food riots in England by adopting an anti-capitalist use of moral economy. Fiona McCormack (2008), for example, sees “the ‘Moral Economy’ [as referring] to a type of economy where the relations of production are based on kinship and in which the mechanisms of redistribution tend to play a levelling role amongst the members of a given community” (p. 46) and links it to the case of Māori customary fishing. Noëlle Boucquey (2017), on the contrary, applies a view of moral economies as a “field of communication in conflict” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 8) in her paper on the *conflicting* moral economies of commercial and recreational fishing in North Carolina, USA. The author analyses how actors engaged in fishing activities connect to larger moral economy discourses in their contestation of, and claims to, resource access. Using a “comparative moral economy

framework” (Wolford 2005, as cited in Boucquey 2017, p. 147), the author shows how this applies to all groups, both commercial and recreational fishing actors. Boucquey's work is informed by a *political ecology lens* that considers different meanings of appropriate resource use and the influence and impact of power in resource conflicts.

### 1.2.2 Environmental ethics in political ecology research

Ethics and morality are a part of, and interwoven with, society-nature relations – as Noel Castree (2001) terms one of the central points of interest and exploration in political ecology research. As a field, environmental ethics are preoccupied, from a philosophical academic approach, “with normative and evaluative propositions about the world of nature and, perhaps more generally, the moral fabric of relations between human beings and the world we occupy” (Gardiner & Thompson 2017, p. 1). For Proctor (2001) environmental ethics rather implies some analytical interest or attempt. In the social constructivist manner of the volume on *Social nature* by editors Castree and Braun (2001), James D. Proctor is interested in the “prevailing moral bases upon which people care about nonhuman nature” (Proctor 2001, p. 227) rather than finding normative propositions of how one *should* care about and relate to nonhuman nature. According to the author

“any human pronouncement on nature entails social as well as biophysical considerations, that there are, so to speak, important truths about the truth we invoke in our defence of certain normative positions [...] What is critical in [...] realist moral justification of environmental concern is its decided tone of universalism: that these concerns are based on facts and values that hold true universally [...] Social constructivism's most serious charge [...] is to question – and perhaps legitimately so – the universalism underlying the ways conventional environmental ethics invokes facts and values in its defence” (Proctor 2001, pp. 229-233).

The author shows in the case of a conservationist news article on freshwater species how, “often implicit moral justifications [are] invoked in contemporary environmental concern” (Proctor 2001, p. 227). Proctor is further concerned with the paradox of an environmentalist concern for *nature* and social constructivists' critique of universalism, and how a framing of *paradoxical tension* helps to move and accept both terrains. Proctor (2001) touches on the social construction of facts, values, and knowledges, and in this way also on the kinds of *social natures* implied in texts. The connection between the social construction of *nature* and environmental ethics is made more explicit by Braun and Wainwright (2001) in the same volume. The authors draw the relationship as follows, they see environmental ethics as the

“wrong place to begin [as they are concerned with] how to act *toward* nature [...] Discussions over ethics assume nature to be a pre-given category, they fail to recognise the ways in which relations of power are already present. Or, to say this differently, environmental ethics, by framing the matter in terms of human relations *to* nature, often fail to take into account the cultural politics *of* nature” (Braun & Wainwright 2001, p. 42, emphases in original).

In doing so, Braun and Wainwright (2001) highlight an aspect of environmental ethics that has dominated much research on human-nature relations in human geography, political ecology, and political economy in recent decades, and which is crucial in a colonised context such as ANZ, and therefore in this thesis: the social construction and cultural politics of *nature* and a divide between humans or *culture* and *nature* (Willems-Braun 1997; Swyngedouw 2006; Bakker 2010; Kaika & Swyngedouw 2012). Bruce Willems-Braun (1997), for example, has shown how practices and rhetoric related to (neo-)colonial realities in the case of the Canadian rainforest have worked to construct *nature* as a realm separate from *culture* still persistent today and with consequences for, in this case, First Nations. Braun and Wainwright (2001) fittingly ask:

“In answer to the question – what is this conflict about? – conventional analysts may very well answer: it is about the fate of the rainforest and who benefits from its use. But to this, we must immediately ask, *what* rainforest? What are we referring to when we speak of the ‘rainforest’? How is it that we are able to speak of something called a ‘rainforest’? What is included in this thing, and what is excluded from it? Ultimately, what are the political consequences of framing the forest in these terms?” (Braun & Wainwright 2001, p. 45, emphasis in original)

The analytical approaches by Proctor (2001) and Braun and Wainwright (2001) concern a *conventional* environmental ethics that is invoked by certain environmentalist concerns (but also by many philosophical academic approaches) of how to act (or care or relate) toward *nature*, and point towards the need to deconstruct the context, politics, and truths of the assumptions and normative propositions induced by them. For Julia Affolderbach et al. (2012), in their study of the struggles around British Columbia’s Great Bear Rainforest, questions of ethics and morality are closely related to *environmental bargaining*. Environmental bargaining broadly describes the strategic interactions and power struggles in which environmental nongovernmental organisations (ENGOS) as key actors aim at enhancing environmental values, and in which they oppose “vested economic and political interests engaged in large-scale resource commodification” (Affolderbach et al. 2012, p. 1391). In their focus on non-industrial, ecological resource values, ENGOS assemble “a particular moral vision on behalf of nature” (Affolderbach 2011, p. 185) and environmental



imperatives, that, if we follow Braun and Wainwright (2001) and the general line of thought of the volume edited by Castree and Braun (2001), are based on a particular understanding and social construction of *nature* (or *environment*) and its values.

Affolderbach et al. (2012) contribute a *spatial dimension* to environmental ethics through their account of how processes of environmental bargaining and the assembly and establishment of new norms (such as new scientific information or new names) imply a remapping of land use designations, zoning regulations, and property rights. This, in turn, implies a remapping of assumptions about the values of nature, the purpose of resources, moral judgements, and societal (and economic) attitudes and behaviours. Moreover, environmental ethics in the form of normative propositions about ‘good’ relationships between humans and non-humans (‘nature’) exhibits a dimension of social and moral power, as it provides legitimacy to ENGOs, who advocate for changes in societal attitudes towards a greater emphasis on nonindustrial values of resources (Affolderbach et al. 2012). A complex picture emerges of the interrelationships between environmental ethics, the understanding and construction of *nature*, the values of ENGOs and society, and the spatial and other biophysical or material and cultural changes in landscapes and to the properties of resources. Finally, when understanding *environmental ethics* not solely in the conventional sense of environmentalist claims and practices towards specific human-nature relations, but as general, or rather multiple and diverse, imaginations, claims, and practices of ‘good’, ‘right’, or ‘proper’ human-nonhuman relations, a multiplicity of moral imperatives and principles and their negotiations and (spatial) workings become apparent (Gibson-Graham 2008; Dürr et al. 2019; Lewis 2019; Fischer 2020).

Recent approaches such as natureculture thinking and relational ontologies have further deconstructed normative and hegemonic ideas of a nature/culture divide and environmental ethics (Haraway 1997; Barad 2007; Puig de la Bellacasa 2010; Blaser 2013; Gesing 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Gesing 2019). In chapter four of her book, *Matters of care*, María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) examines the ethical implications of permaculture practices. The author argues that these practices challenge traditional notions of human agency and ethical subjectivity by centring the concept of care. This is exemplified by the fact that humans are not regarded as “masters or even as protectors” in permaculture, but rather as “participants in the web of Earth’s living beings” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 129). To make ethical doings in permaculture practice visible, Puig de la Bellacasa adopts a *naturalcultural* way of thinking, in her terms an own “form of ethical commitment at-

tuned to [the] decentring of human agency” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 143). Natural-cultural thinking has its roots in “relational ontologies that engage with the material world [...] as composed of knots of relations involving humans, nonhumans, and physical entanglements of matter and meaning” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 141; Barad 2007). It brings to the fore the “concrete practices of world-making in which agency is distributed between actors that are not only human” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 141).

Puig de la Bellacasa regards ethics as complex and emergent, becoming visible (and co-constituted) in practices, and in entanglements of relationality, attachments, and detachments (Latimer & Bellacasa 2013; Palli Monguillod 2004, as cited in Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). “Ethics are born out of material constraints and situated relationalities in the making with other people, living beings, and earth’s ‘resources’” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 145). At the same time, they are based on a corresponding relational perception of the world in permaculture ecosmology. In this context, environmental ethics are not so much connected to and part of a social construction and framing of *nature* (or the *rainforest*, etc.), but rather emerge ontologically from the connectedness between multiple agencies and entities, especially non-human ways of life. To capture the diversity and differences in ethical ontologies, Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) uses the term *ethicalities* (see chapter 3).

In her research on Coast Care practices in ANZ from a political ecology perspective, Friederike Gesing (2016, 2019) also understands “Coast Care [...] as an ensemble of natural-cultural practices” (Gesing 2016, p. 223). The care and maintenance work done by Coast Care volunteers coproduces, according to Gesing, a specific assemblage of animals and plants as ‘native nature’. The author presents a critique of the concept of a singular, universal nature, which is frequently invoked in environmentalist claims and sciences. The nature coproduced in Coast Care practices is not static and determinable from *culture*, according to Gesing, but an assemblage in which categories and things like native plants appear as relational achievements. “Coast Care practices enact a specific understanding of what nature *is*” (Gesing 2016, p. 223, emphasis in original). Certain forms of coastal natureculture are being defined and assembled as desirable, while care for the coast is being assembled as and rendered a project to assist *nature*.

Gesing (2019) regards Coast Care thus as a “strategic naturalisation of coastal nature [and] a form of ontological politics” (Gesing 2019, p. 223). *Ontological politics* is a composite term by Annemarie Mol (1999) that links “the real, the conditions of possibility we live with” (p. 75), and politics. It suggests “that reality does not precede the mundane practices



in which we interact with it but is rather shaped within these practices” (ibid.). Overall, Gesing identifies behind Coast Care practices a larger normative question “addressed throughout the field by a variety of actors with possibly conflicting agendas – what is good, desirable, sustainable coastal protection?” (Gesing 2016, p. 17). This question, and the answers given by people connected to the Gulf, is the focus of the research on *urban ethics on the city edge* (referred to hereafter as ‘this research’).

### 1.2.3 Ethics and Indigenous studies and research

Ethics is a term also frequently used by Indigenous authors and scholars in the field of Indigenous studies (Hoskins 2012; Coulthard 2014; Forster 2016; Ingersoll 2016; Tuck & McKenzie 2016; Larsen & Johnson 2017; Makey & Awatere 2018; George & Wiebe 2020; Makey 2021). Contrary to Western anthropocentric understandings of and approaches to ethics, ethics are, in this case, fundamentally linked to place or land, relationality and reciprocity, and obligations towards nonhuman others (Daigle 2024). While inherently concerned with human-nonhuman relationships, Indigenous ethical systems challenge Western ontological systems and conceptualisations, particularly the dichotomy between culture, or humans, and the environment. As a result, it is necessary to distinguish Indigenous ethics from the aforementioned conventional ‘environmental’ ethics. Deborah Bird Rose (2000) sees powerful convergences between Indigenous systems and feminist, ecofeminist, and deep-ecology approaches to naturalcultural thinking, but emphasises that “the points of difference [...] matter” (p. 182). Problems of “invasive appropriation” do not only arise when translating Indigenous ethical systems “to societies of strangers” (both D. B. Rose 2000, p. 182), but also as Western academics employ ideas of care and more-than-human agency while remaining silent on Indigenous ontologies (Todd 2016). Given the postcolonial context in which this research is situated, it is necessary to give due consideration to Indigenous ethical systems and scholarly work in the approach taken.

When speaking of ethics, Indigenous (studies) scholars most often refer to Indigenous “engagement with the world and [...] relationships with human and nonhuman others” (Coulthard 2014, p. 13). Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) refers to this as *ethical engagement*. Land is, according to Coulthard, *a system of reciprocal relations and obligations* in which “human beings are not the only constituent believed to embody spirit or agency” (Coulthard 2014, p. 61). For Coulthard this means in ethical terms, that “humans [hold] certain obligations to the land, animals, plants, and lakes [and I would add here: the sea] in much the same way that [they] hold obligations to other people” (Coulthard 2014, p.

61). Ethics is thus understood in a normative way, rather than in analytical or descriptive terms.

In contrast to Western societies who “have a time-oriented understanding of the world”, *land* is of “central importance [...] to Indigenous modes of being, thought, and ethics” (both Deloria 1972, as cited in Coulthard 2014, p. 60). “Land-based practices and associated forms of knowledge” (Coulthard 2014, p. 13) provide an *ethical framework*. Accordingly, land teaches Indigenous peoples “about living [their] lives in relation to one another and [their] surroundings in a respectful, nondominating, and nonexploitative way” (Coulthard 2014, p. 60). This place-based ethics is deeply intertwined with Indigenous decolonial thought and practice, and struggles for justice, autonomy, and self-determination (Coulthard 2014; Forster 2016; Larsen & Johnson 2017). For Coulthard, it is the foundation upon which Indigenous peoples have resisted and critiqued colonial capitalist development and dispossession since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, Forster (2016) observes for ANZ that *kaitiakitanga*, a Māori non-anthropocentric socio-environmental ethic and “contemporary interpretation of Māori environmental customs and practices” (p. 327), has facilitated the resistance to ongoing colonisation, the safeguarding of Māori rights, and the advancement of Māori autonomy and authority (see chapter 3).

Relating Indigenous ethics to the approaches discussed earlier, the multiplicity of ontological styles is once again evident – in ethics thinking and theorising, but also in the ways in which people relate to and claim relationships with the world around them (Blaser 2013; Larsen & Johnson 2017). While “the epistemic norms of settler colonialism [have] prescribe[d] ontological boundaries that negate Indigenous knowledge systems, translating them into local knowledge, myth, or superstition” (Raffles 2002, as cited in Larsen & Johnson 2017, p. 106), the “importance of theory developed from Indigenous-Māori ways of thinking and acting” (Hoskins 2012, p. 85) has been fought for and increasingly recognised since the 1960s and 70s in ANZ (Smith 2012; Hikuroa 2017; this also applies to most other settler-colonial contexts).

Current marine and coastal research in ANZ recognises the potential and part of *mātauranga Māori* (Māori knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill) for and in sustainable ocean and coastal management and blue economic practices (Le Heron et al. 2019; Lewis 2019), and searches to elevate *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori world, worldview) values and perspectives (Harmsworth & Awatere 2013; Makey & Awatere 2018; SSNSC 2020). While Lewis (2019) distinguishes actualised Māori economies and their related ethical co-ordinates (*tikanga*

and kaupapa Māori) from others, other authors investigate methods of integrating worldviews and knowledge systems. This includes the integration of ecosystem-based management with mātauranga Māori to develop a co-governance framework for an ANZ marine management system. *He waka taurua* is a metaphorical framework that refers to “a temporary double canoe, formed by lashing two waka (canoes) together to achieve a common purpose” (Maxwell et al. 2020b, p. 2). It is a concept that is frequently applied in this context. The canoe represents the two worldviews and values, Māori and Tauīwi (foreigner, European, non-Māori, colonist), that need to be brought together in order to achieve a sustainable ocean and coastal management (Maxwell et al. 2020a; Maxwell et al. 2020b).

Nevertheless, Larsen and Johnson (2017), authors in the field of Indigenous studies, warn us of the danger “that multiple ontologies can become a meta-ontology all its own, a transcendental signifier that allows us to somehow *think* we are seeing the whole and from this position make judgements about difference” (p. 5; emphasis in original). Issues of identifying and differentiating distinct *cultures* have been debated in literature and society in the past when it comes to essentialism and biculturalism (Rata 2005; Dürr 2011; Hoskins 2012; Coulthard 2014). Anti-colonial struggles and Indigenous peoples’ rights movements fostered forms of cultural essentialism, that promoted Indigenous “ethnic/cultural identity as authentic, homogenous, and stable” (Hoskins 2012, p. 85; Coulthard 2014). “Foregrounding the divide between colonised and coloniser [made] space for internal processes of decolonisation and cultural reclamation” (Hoskins 2012, p. 86), and helped to achieve political and social goals.

In ANZ, *biculturalism* emerged as a “vision for New Zealand’s society” (Dürr 2011, p. 506) after 1980<sup>5</sup>. According to Elizabeth Rata (2005), it first “intended that Māori culture be recognised as a valued part of [ANZ] society and that Māori be full participants in an inclusive national culture” (p. 267). “The nation was imagined as a two-culture entity, implicitly constructing Pākehā [New Zealander of European descendant] and Māori cultures as homogenous, fixed, and bounded” (Dürr 2011, p. 507). The concept of biculturalism is a multifaceted and dynamic one and has changed over time. Discussions have shifted towards overcoming strict dichotomies, and to the recognition of difference and of “the special status of Māori as the Indigenous people of New Zealand and their rights which are enshrined in the Treaty of Waitangi [...] by all New Zealand citizens” (Dürr 2011, p. 507)<sup>6</sup>. However, there are also neo-traditional approaches, including dynamics of more separatist

ethnic identification (Rata 2005; Dürr 2011). In the case of *He waka taurua*, Maxwell et al. (2020b) recognise the inherent differences of *two* worldviews and knowledge systems (Māori and Tauīwi) for ANZ, with fundamental, non-negotiable values, and distinctive tools, actions, and approaches derived from them. These come together in a negotiated space (contextual intercultural space), the *papanoho/deck*, which connects the two canoes and where collaborative initiatives and joint management approaches such as co-management and co-governance develop. Behind the framework is the ideal of equitable marine management systems that do not attempt to integrate but recognise *kaitiakitanga* as equivalent with ecosystem-based management<sup>7</sup>.

Overall, this suggests the political tensions and power dynamics at play in settler-state societies when it comes to asserting Indigenous or multiple ontologies. Additionally, it highlights the ontological politics and epistemic violence inherent in *environmental* ethics and modernist claims of singular and objective knowledge (Blaser 2013; Choi 2020)<sup>8</sup>. As Arturo Escobar (2011) stated: “there are indeed relational worldviews or ontologies for which the world is always multiple – a pluriverse” (p. 139). While settler-state recognition requires conformity of Indigenous claims with Western, liberal, and nation-state logics (resulting, according to Te Kawehau Hoskins (2012), in oppositional claims of autonomy and cultural difference), Indigenous relational accounts of the world do not build on “common ground [or] a flattening out of difference” (Larsen & Johnson 2017, p. 9).

Larsen and Johnson (2017), who explore negotiations, struggles, and works of coexistence from an Indigenous relational and geographic perspective accordingly acknowledge the “cacophony of human and nonhuman ontological styles” (p. 9) present in place. This does not mean “to claim some ultimate reality or transcendental signifier [but] a way of understanding edges and boundaries, of looking into the eyes of others” (p. 5-6). They regard the negotiations of ontological disagreement between “partially connected heterogeneous socionatural worlds” (de la Cadena 2010, as cited in Larsen & Johnson 2017, p. 6) as a contemporary phenomenon, one of a pluriversal and therefore decolonial localism (Mignolo 2011). Place has an active role and agency in here, guiding, calling, and educating communities into dialogue, relationships, and action with human and nonhuman others (Larsen & Johnson 2017). Larsen and Johnson (2017) as well as Hoskins (2012), who supports a politics open to plurality and contestation, are critical of *foundational* social consensus, seeing plurality and *productively agonistic* dialogue, struggle, and relationships as inherent to an Indigenous relational perspective of coexistence, and an Indigenous ethics

of responsibility and obligation – a critique shared in many ways with scholars writing in the field of (non-Indigenous) political ecology and coastal and marine studies (Mouffe 2005; Swyngedouw 2010; Tafon 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019).

To conclude, Indigenous authors and authors writing in the field of Indigenous studies have developed concepts and ways of thinking grounded in place and land, guided by, and providing or looking for an alternative Indigenous ethics, also in an ocean context. Karin Amimoto Ingersoll (2016) developed the concept of a *seascape epistemology* which articulates “an Indigenous Hawaiian way of knowing founded on a sensorial, intellectual, and embodied literacy of the ocean”. This seascape epistemology provides, according to Ingersoll, the tools for generating an alternative Indigenous politics and ethics in today’s neocolonial context. George and Wiebe (2020) employ Ingersoll’s seascape epistemology for their research on archipelagos in Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) and Coast Salish (Canadian) territories, where they observe how seascape epistemologies “challenge the foundational underpinnings of extractivist settler-colonial governmentality” (p. 498). Finally, Leane Makey (2021) and the author’s co-researchers have developed the methodological strategy *Thinking with Kaipara*<sup>9</sup> as an attempt to “pursue embodied ways of producing knowledge [and] to work with situated knowledges, place, and social difference to address the crisis of representation of such in ecosystem-based management, the problematising of ecosystem degradation, and restoration practices” (p. 1).

#### 1.2.4 Excursus: Sustainable Seas, ethics, and values in Aotearoa New Zealand

The previous sections have already referred to work that has been done and written from an ethics and morality perspective on coastal and marine issues. Some of this work has been done in the context of the *Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge - Ko ngā moana whakauka* (SSNSC), a major ANZ science and research programme that has awarded more than NZ\$70 million to 75 projects between 2014 and 2024 to address the question “How can we best develop our marine economy, while protecting the taonga [treasure, property, goods] of our marine environment” (SSNSC 2021). The research undertaken as part of the SSNSC has taken a largely transitional perspective seeking to achieve ecosystem-based marine and coastal management and a sustainable BE, and to elevate Te Ao Māori values and perspectives (SSNSC 2020). Particularly the work and publications related to Te Ao Māori perspectives and epistemology have taken a performative and transformative approach (Fisher et al. 2022), but also, for example, the work of Lewis (2019) on a moral BE (see chapter 1.2.1).

The work of the SSNSC is relevant as a context for this thesis, not only because it is an expression of the ANZ coastal and marine research landscape, but also because it has (co-)shaped the current (scientific) discourse in ANZ and beyond that, and its members, projects, and other elements are closely intertwined with the coastal and marine (political, professional, and social) field in ANZ. The SSNSC was not only an interdisciplinary research association; it also engaged with and had participation from a diverse range of societal sectors (SSNSC 2024d). During the research for this thesis, the names of SSNSC members came up frequently in interviews with professionals or civil society actors. Many contexts in which this research was conducted were intertwined with SSNSC projects, or contexts were also researched, monitored, or supported by SSNSC researchers or projects. Additional interactions emerged during the course of my research as the SSNSC transitioned into its second phase. Researchers or participants in the SSNSC often took on very different roles, as SSNSC researchers, but also as more or less independent consultants or as civil society members of projects and initiatives.

Ethics (or morality), terms that are central to an urban ethics and this thesis' perspective, have rarely been used in the (written) communications and publications of the SSNSC's projects. The final report of Lewis et al. (2020) on the *Creating value from a blue economy* project uses ethics and ethical synonymously for 'good' (e.g. in the sense of ecologically driven and/or livelihood focused practices). It also speaks of *ethical coordinates* in the sense of Lewis (2019), who understands ethics as diverse and inherent to different categories of economy that "have distinctive structural forms, practices, and ethical coordinates (forged in relation to differing economic rationalities and imperatives)" (p. 78). Ethics is otherwise only used in the context of mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga, such as by Anne-Marie Jackson et al. (2017) and Jay Whitehead et al. (2023), who define kaitiakitanga as a Māori *ethic* and practice, or who speak of distinctive *Māori ethics*, often alongside values and practices, for example, in the context of: "goods produced according to Māori values, *ethics*, and practices" (Whitehead et al. 2023, p. 6, emphasis added).

*Values* is a term that SSNSC's projects refer to more frequently than ethics. Although commonly used, most publications lack an explicit definition or conceptualisation of value(s) (Le Heron et al. 2019; SSNSC 2024a; see Lewis 2017 for an exception and detailed discussion of value). The context and use of the term in many SSNSC publications and projects implies an understanding of values as a shared characteristic of a group or sector, closely linked to their uses of the coasts and seas, interests, and knowledges (Hitlin &

Piliavin 2004). Marine spaces are considered as spaces with multiple uses, values, and sources of knowledge (Le Heron et al. 2019). Values appear to be inherent to a group or individuals and relatively fixed and static. An example often cited is *Māori values and aspirations or knowledges*, in which case distinctive values appear to be shared among *tan-gata whenua* (Indigenous people), and the term appears to be used similarly and almost synonymously with ethics in the examples above (SSNSC 2024a). In other instances, *value(s)* is more explicitly linked to an ecosystem services approach or understood as part of an ecosystem services framework in that they need to be identified and measured in order to inform decision-making (SSNSC 2024b). Finally, authors place *value(s)*, and *valuation*, into an economic (and political economic) context, such as Lewis (2017). It is important to note that the present research does not assume that the concepts of values and ethics are synonymous. However, when or by referring to *value(s)*, claims or discourses can be linked to questions of ethical (good, right) living, and can thus be understood analytically as *problematizing* urban ethics (Dürr et al. 2019).

### 1.3 Conceptual framing: Analysing urban environmental ethics in Auckland

There are several volumes and publications on *urban ethics* (see Mostafavi 2017; Pavoni 2018; Chan 2019; Mōraītēs & Rassia 2019; Buyuksarac & Özkan 2020; Ege & Moser 2020b; Acosta et al. 2023a). This section, and thesis, refers to the approach – research agenda – of urban ethics and the research that has developed in the context of the DFG Research Group on *Urban Ethics. Conflicts over good and proper urban living in the 20th and 21st centuries*. At its core, the agenda and the related research take an analytical perspective on urban-ethical normativity, investigating “ethics as a sociocultural phenomenon that involves discourses, practices, and materiality” (Ege & Moser 2020a, p. 3; Dürr et al. 2019). It is important to note that the research perspective and interest differs from work that seeks answers to urban-ethical questions in a normative register (Ege & Moser 2020a, p. 3) – and thus a philosophical notion of ethics – as well as from generative or performative approaches, such as those mentioned earlier for the field of human geography.

The research itself does not seek answers to the question of “how should one live in the city” (Collier & Lakoff 2005, p. 22), but it is interested in the practical and theoretical answers given to this rather general question by city dwellers, planners, and others (Dürr et al. 2019). While the research agenda can be understood to be coined by social construc-

tivist and post-structuralist thinking (see Foucault 1985; Collier & Lakoff 2005), it brings together very different accounts of ethics in social and cultural research – also those which are “more relational and less rationalistic” (Ege & Moser 2020a, p. 4).

The discussions of a quite wide-ranging body of literature, and the multifaceted research conducted in the context of the research group, are guided and connected by a common interest to better understand the dimension of normativity in urban situations (Dürr et al. 2019). The objective is to investigate events, movements, and projects in which “urban ethics surface [to] help us understand a wide variety of urban situations” (Ege & Moser 2020a, p. 3), and the role of urban ethics in these situations, better. Urban ethics is thus rather a research perspective, interest, – or agenda – than a set framework. The term *urban ethics* as a research objective or interest denotes the “field of interaction in which a range of actors in cities negotiate moral and social ideals, principles, and norms” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 2) as well as the means – the forms of ethical problematisation – with which people and organisations negotiate urban life.

The question of “how one should live in the city” helps to *analytically capture urban ethics*. The question goes back to the work of anthropologists Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff (2005), who, following the method of Michel Foucault in his genealogy of ethics, “seek[] to identify the elements – techniques, subjects, norms – through which the question of ‘how to live’ is posed” (p. 23). The original question posed by Collier and Lakoff (“how should one live”) has been expanded to fit for the specific context and purpose of analysing urban ethics – the city (Dürr et al. 2019)<sup>10</sup>. Sites and forms of urban ethical problematisation occur when city dwellers, planners, and others engage with the question of “how one should live in the city” practically or theoretically, explicitly, or implicitly (Ege & Moser 2020a): Social actors “may or may not label [their] debates explicitly as ethical, but, in engaging with how one should live in the city, they refer to values, virtues, and the conduct of life, and can thus, in an analytical sense, be understood as problematising urban ethics” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 2).

While this provides a general perspective for researching urban ethics, urban ethical situations are complex, unique, and place-specific. They therefore need to be understood from within and in depth. Specific questions guide different investigations, and different theories and concepts help to make sense of different situations, – and to broaden and deepen our understanding of urban ethical situations as a whole. In this thesis, certain pillars of the original urban ethics research agenda (as presented in particular by Dürr et al. 2019;



Ege & Moser 2020a) have been developed and expanded by incorporating approaches and literature from human geography, political ecology, and Indigenous Studies and research. This has been done primarily regarding an understanding of multiplicity and ontological pluralism in ethical claims-making, expressions of urban ethics in narratives, discourses, and imaginaries, environmental ethics and human-nonhuman relationships, politics and the operation of power in urban ethical discourse and negotiations, spatial aspects of urban ethics, and the specific context of urban ethics at the ‘watery urban edge’ (Dürr et al. 2019; Fig. 1.5).



**Fig. 1.5** Conceptualising urban ethics in the case of Auckland’s *blue backyard* (Figure: M. Aschenbrenner).

The following sections provide a more detailed explanation of the individual aspects that formed the basis of the conceptualisation of urban ethics in the research, and their connection to the original urban ethics research agenda.

### 1.3.1 Multiplicity and ontological pluralism in ethical claims-making and discourse

Multiplicity is a central assumption of the urban ethics research perspective. It assumes a multiplicity of actors practicing, claiming, contesting and negotiating different moral and social ideals, principles, and norms in a field of urban ethics. These ideals, principles, and norms are not fixed and static, but dynamic. “Multiple actors call for good or just solutions, each on different grounds and each colliding with alternative ethical positions” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 6). Furthermore, practices that are considered ethical by some actors may take on different social meanings in the eyes of other city dwellers (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 2). Alongside this actor-oriented view of a multiplicity of urban ethical practices and positions, the perspective sees urban ethics expressed in discourses that are multiple and follow different logics.

In the course of the research the concept of *ontological pluralism* was added to this idea of multiplicity. While an urban ethics perspective acknowledges the plurality of answers to the question of how one should live in the city, the question itself, and thus the analytical standpoint, turned out to be biased towards a central (human) agent (be it a singular *one* or a more relational *we*). Zigon (2021) argues for a more relational perspective on ethics, guided by the question “how is it between us?” Thinking through ontological pluralism reveals the plurality of *ethicalities* (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 132) that underlie these questions. Urban ethical claims made by actors or discourses in the field differ in their ontological assumptions, particularly those made from a human-centred Western ontological perspective and those linked to still non-hegemonic or anormative worldviews (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), such as relational Māori worldviews (while the former may address the question of how one should live, the latter would rather fit a more relationally framed question). Contestations and negotiations are not just about different ideals, principles, or norms, but about ontological politics and the struggles of coexistence in an ontologically plural world. This perspective was developed throughout the research and on different dimensions (see chapters 3, 4, and 7).

### 1.3.2 Expressions of urban ethics in narratives, discourses, and imaginaries

The urban ethics research agenda pays attention to ethics-in-practice and ethics-in-discourse (Acosta et al. 2023b, p. 1). Nevertheless, it “emphasises claims-making and ethical problematisation ‘on the ground’ [...] and has a particular interest in the ways in which the normative dimensions of sociocultural conflicts are negotiated by different actors” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 7). Coming from a social constructivist and post-structuralist political ecology background, this research was likewise interested in the context, (ontological) politics and truths induced by the normative assumptions and propositions made. The research focused on actors’ narratives of events and processes, as well as a broad range of other texts (such as project or planning reports), to identify ethical claims, propositions, and problematisations and analyses them as expressions of broader discourses and (discursive) contradictions in the field (see chapter 4).

Discourses were in this context understood as “frameworks that embrace particular combinations of narratives, concepts, ideologies, and signifying practices, each relevant to a particular realm of social action” (Barnes & Duncan 1992, p. 8). They are “not merely reflective of dominant social values, but [...] also constitutive [, and they] can be seen [...] as a set of unspoken rules which govern, control, and produce knowledge in a culture” (Berg 2009, p. 216). In the research, discourses were considered as part of a broader assemblage or urban (governmental) *dispositif*, understood as “a heterogeneous set of *discourses*, practices, architectural forms, regulations, laws, and knowledge connected together into an apparatus of government” (Braun 2014, p. 49, emphasis added; see also chapter 5).

During the course of the research, the divergences between a post-structuralist, and almost transcendental, perspective on the (ontological) difference of ethical claims-making and problematisations (as Larsen and Johnson 2017 have warned) and relational, particularly Indigenous, perspectives became increasingly apparent. Likewise, the entanglement of theoretical approaches and conceptualisations and on-the-ground efforts to re-imagine and reconceptualise reality towards more relational and decolonising perspectives became evident. This raised a number of questions, such as: What are the politics of choosing a particular theoretical approach or perspective? Do particular contexts require particular theoretical perspectives? Is there such a thing as a neutral research perspective or body of theory? These questions and struggles around theory-building are not new, but they became immediate in the work for this thesis (see chapter 8.3 for a detailed discussion of these issues).

The conceptual term of (urban, naturalcultural) *imaginaries* helped to bridge some of these tensions – it is a commonly used, yet fuzzy concept (Strauss 2006), and as such consistent with a focus on discourse (Gabriel 2014; Jasanoff 2015; Gandy 2021), dispositifs (Braun 2014) as well as with other relational approaches (Gesing 2016, 2019). An urban ecological or naturalcultural imaginary, as defined by Matthey Gandy (2021) following Castoriadis and Williams, is understood as an intersubjective and historically specific framing of urban environmental thinking, including in some cases the cultural articulation of potentially counter-hegemonic alternative worlds (p. 31). Urban naturalcultural imaginaries are constitutive of urban space, they contain assumptions about and make visible certain human-nonhuman relationships and interactions in the city (while rendering others invisible), and thus enable the creation of one kind of urban environment rather than another (Gabriel 2014, p. 40). Friederike Gesing (2016) also notes a normative and future-directed dimension for imaginaries: “they are ‘at once descriptive of attainable futures and prescriptive of the kinds of futures that ought to be attained’” (Jasanoff 2007, as cited in Gesing 2016, p. 43).

### 1.3.3 Environmental ethics and human-nonhuman relationships

The urban ethics research agenda encompasses all kinds of *urban ethics* (Ege & Moser 2020b; Acosta et al. 2023a). This research focused on urban ethics that have at their centre the problematisation of human-nonhuman relationships, whether in practice or in discourse. In a conventional Western context, one might speak of *urban environmental ethics* in this context, but as political ecology research has pointed out, speaking of *environmental ethics* in the conventional sense includes a particular understanding and social construction of nature and the environment, and fails to take into account the embedded power relations and cultural politics of *nature* or *the environment* (Braun & Wainwright 2001). The research thus made productive the concept of natureculture (naturalcultural) to draw attention to the plurality of ontologies entangled in and around the Gulf, including those within and beyond Western philosophical traditions. The closely related concept of socionature (or social nature), which is often used in political ecology and human geography contexts, was used in some places where the focus is on the *production* of hybrid processes and relations (rather than on ontological pluralism and politics). Although, they have slightly different connotations and research foci, both concepts draw on the critique of a nature/culture dualism as embedded in modern, Eurocentric thinking, and aim to draw attention to the hybridity of processes and objects (Swyngedouw 1996;

Blaser 2013; Bear 2017; Gesing et al. 2019). In some cases, the term (urban) environmental ethics was still used to refer to a hegemonic environmental ethics that invokes individual subjectivity, a nature/culture dualism (as well as other categorisations and demarcations), and specific ideas and practices of governance (Braun & Wainwright 2001; Latta 2014; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Choi 2020).

#### 1.3.4 Politics and the operation of power in urban ethical discourse and negotiations

A central focus and interest of the urban ethics research agenda is the (empirical) connection between ethics and politics. This connection and the operation of power in the context of urban ethics has been explored on several dimensions throughout the research. Fundamentally, I drew on the concepts and ideas of ontological pluralism and politics, which challenge the assumptions of a singular, antecedent reality as often present in *modern* thought (Mol 1999; Blaser 2013; Boucquey et al. 2016; Choi 2020). This approach helped to focus on the ways in which urban ethical forms of problematisation, claims-making, discourse, and practice assemble, shape, or claim a particular reality (or realities) – while potentially excluding, rendering invisible, or delegitimising others. This is particularly true where urban ethics pursue settler-colonial epistemic norms and ontological assumptions. The dimension of ontological pluralism and politics must also be taken into account when using the main interpretative frameworks – or perspectivations – that were embedded in the original urban ethics research agenda, namely social creativity or new models of coexistence, moral economies, techniques of governing, and ethical subjectivation (DFG research group on Urban Ethics 2015). Two of these perspectivations, *social creativity or new models of coexistence* and *techniques of governing*, were of particular importance for thinking about urban ethics, and the relations between urban ethics and politics in this research.

The theoretical perspective of *techniques of governing* addresses an expert, professional, and political level of urban ethics – it conceptualises urban ethics *from the top down*, so to speak. It draws on Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, Nikolas Rose's ethopolitics or ethopower, and Erik Swyngedouw's theorisation of neoliberal governance-beyond-the-state (DFG research group on Urban Ethics 2015; Ege & Moser 2020a). As the research focused on human-nonhuman relationships, it made use of the concept of environmentality, which transfers and focuses processes of governmentality in relation to environmentalism (see chapter 5). At the heart of this perspectivation are “non-repressive ethico-

political strategies and tactics ('technologies' in Foucauldian parlance) to instigate improvement and change" (Ege & Moser 2020a, p. 8). They are part and parcel of a neoliberal governmentality that understands governance in positive terms and aims to create spaces for ethical reflection in which urban dwellers are guided and encouraged to behave as self-reliant and responsible subjects (note: there are ontological politics implicit in assumptions of responsible, self-reliant subjects, as chapter 3 and 4 will discuss in more detail) (N. Rose 2000; Swyngedouw 2005; DFG research group on Urban Ethics 2015). Rose (2000) describes strategies and techniques (such as focus groups, citizens' juries, boards and groups selected to represent different sectors and interests, partnerships of all kinds) also as *techniques of legitimation*, designed to achieve accountability and reconcile competing interests, and to replace other democratic processes that are, for example, regarded as inefficient or unnecessary (see chapters 3-6). Finally, from this perspective, the emergence of 'community' can be understood as an affective and ethical field, and object of governance – a politically instrumentalised space "through which individual identities are constructed" (N. Rose 2000, p. 1401; see chapter 7). At the same time, the perspective of social creativity offers a way of understanding processes of community building and other forms of self-management and subjectivation *from below*.

The concept of social creativity, taken from anthropologist David Graeber, helps to "not lose sight of bottom-up and potentially disruptive aspects of urban ethics" (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 8), and to frame and understand new forms of self-management and subjectivation *from below* (DFG research group on Urban Ethics 2015). Graeber understands "social creativity as a crucial dimension of social existence [It takes into account] people's capacity to institute, to (re)create social relationships and sociality" (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 8). From this perspective, "practices, debates, and lived urban ethics where actors generate (new) models of urban coexistence and urban life, or even invent as a new urban art of living" (DFG research group on Urban Ethics 2015) come into focus. Drawing on the idea of ontological pluralism, this means not only people giving new "practical answers to the question of how one should live one's life in the city" (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 8). It is in and by place that the multiplicity of human and nonhuman ontological styles coexist, intertwine, are contested, and negotiated (Larsen & Johnson 2017), and new – or alternative or non-normative – models of coexistence emerge or are (re)claimed. According to Dürr et al. (2019) social creativity in the city "often involves explicitly ethical motivations like overcoming isolation [It] tends to be a collective rather than individual practice" (p. 8). Taking Indigenous ethical systems into account, the emergence of new models of coexistence and

ways of living are not merely motivated by a (human) collective but have their origin in the land and the reciprocal and ethical relations and obligations it teaches. What can be said for both, the perspective of social creativity and a conceptually broader perspective of new models of coexistence is that they both have “optimistic, maybe even utopian meanings” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 8), but are nevertheless permeated by power dynamics and entail relations of inclusion and exclusion (ibid.).

Both perspectivations, *social creativity or new models of coexistence* and *techniques of governing*, have significantly shaped this research, which focused on both top-down and bottom-up aspects of urban ethics and the workings of power, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and the ways and possibilities of change and transformation in the urban ethical context of the Gulf. The urban ethics research agenda includes other perspectivations, notably *urban ethics and moral economies* and *ethical subjectivation*, which have also played a role in exploring and interpreting urban ethical negotiations, problematisations, and claims-making in and around the Gulf in Auckland, mainly on a discursive dimension (DFG research group on Urban Ethics 2015). I refer to *moral economies* as it is understood in human geography and political ecology scholarship, and in particular by Boucquey (2017): as a way of claiming (a)moral economic practices, often in relation and opposition to capitalist market economies and economic principles, such as when actors engage with or claim principles of the circular use of goods and resources, (ir)responsible fishing practices or uses of caught fish, or general practices of gifting and sharing (see chapter 7).

The perspectivation of *ethical subjectivation* plays a particular role in relation to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and (de)legitimation. This perspectivation focuses on the “appropriate subject positions [that are created in urban ethics discourse and that] must be performed in order to be accepted as a participant in ethical debates” (DFG research group on Urban Ethics 2015). This is true for the *expert* spaces of politics or planning, as well as for more ordinary spaces. While urban ethical, and environmental, subjects are, often unintentionally, created, and reinforced in narratives and practices, processes and logics of subjectivation can also be part of political and planning processes and the work of urban authorities to indirectly govern the way urban dwellers conduct themselves (the *conduct of conduct*). In this case, the *techniques* through which authorities promote processes of subjectivation come into focus (see chapter 5). Ege and Moser (2020a) note in this context that the “the power of governmentality always also moves in the medium of ethics” (p. 14). Ultimately, as good, proper, responsible, sustainable, etc.

urban ethical subjects are created, opposing images of bad, improper, irresponsible, unsustainable, etc. urban life and dwelling are produced. In the end, certain subject positions, and thus people, groups, and ways of life, are challenged, delegitimised, and excluded. These perspectivations, together with the perspective of ontological pluralism and politics, have provided the main analytical framework for identifying and interpreting the operation of power in urban ethical negotiations and discourses.

Finally, the idea, and critique, of consensual politics by Chantal Mouffe (2005), Jacques Rancière (2006), Eric Swyngedouw (2009), and others, which also inspired the urban ethics research agenda, is raised and discussed at many points in the thesis in order to understand the workings of power and the connection between *ethicised* and *moralised* discourse, and a post-political conjuncture (Dürr et al. 2019). Particular attention was paid to the rationality and claims of a foundational rational consensus, the techniques of governing aimed at creating consensus, collaboration, and consensual (non-oppositional) subjects through claims of ethical conduct. The general assumption in the analysis was that rationalities and claims of an all-inclusive rational consensus deny actual antagonisms and disguise relations of inclusion and, above all, exclusion (Hoskins 2012, p. 94). Not only is this important for analysing modes of exclusion and delegitimation, and for identifying what some authors have defined as the emergence and consolidation of a post-political and post-democratic state (Swyngedouw 2009, p. 601), but claims of a foundational social consensus also potentially deny Indigenous relational accounts of the world and Māori ethics and political practices that are oriented towards plurality, contestation, and responsiveness to the Other (Hoskins 2012, p. 95).

### 1.3.5 Spatial aspects of urban ethics

From a human geography perspective, the research focused on spatial aspects and issues of place in relation to urban ethics, issues that have not yet been explicitly placed at the centre of the urban ethics research agenda. In its conceptualisation, the research drew primarily on the work of Affolderbach et al. (2012) on *remapping*. The concept of *remapping* accounts for “the specific changes to land use designations and zoning regulations, built on techniques of assembling, analysing, and representing geospatial data” (Affolderbach et al. 2012, p. 1392) – and the (ethical) assumptions, imaginaries, and claims inherent in them. It also takes into account the processes of contestation and negotiation in which established resource valuations or property rights and governmental norms are challenged, changed, and reflected in changing – or emerging – plans and spatial imagi-



naries in which “land uses shift from an industrial and commodity base to incorporate [for example] environmental and nonconsumptive uses” (Affolderbach et al. 2012, p. 1393). This may be the case in official mapping exercises and documents or texts, where processes of remapping can be linked to techniques of governing or subjectivation, for example when the city is reimagined and remapped as a holistic water ecosystem and its population as its constitutive elements (see chapter 5). At the same time, remapping can be used to assert alternative or insurgent values, ideals, and interests.

In addition, as the research process continued, it became clear that attention needed to be paid to *how space and place is generally conceptualised* – and its political implications (see chapter 7). In many contexts where space is being remapped, space/place is understood in a rather simplistic and abstract way, allowing it to be designated or zoned, and consequently implying or predetermining certain behaviours or ethics (Tuck & McKenzie 2016). In other contexts, place (e.g. the city) is merely the backdrop for ethical experiences, practices, and negotiations (Ege & Moser 2020a). As outlined above, place or land plays an active, and much more fundamental and concrete role in Indigenous ethical practice and thought. Also other, non-Indigenous scholars who take relational approaches towards the world, break with conventional, Western understandings of space and “place [as] a container” (Massey et al. 2009, p. 416; Latour & Weibel 2020). As the Gulf – or rather its representations – are being remapped to represent and accommodate ontological pluralism and diverse ethical systems and ethical models of coexistence, *place* is reimagined and reconceptualised. The spatial imaginaries and different concepts of place that emerge, and the way in which they challenge not only established land use designations and zoning regulations, but also the general Euclidian idea of space, and established notions of territory and boundaries, become part of the remapping of the Gulf and an analytical focus (see chapter 7).

### 1.3.6 The urban and the watery city edge

At the heart of *urban ethics* is the connection between ethics and the city or the urban. It is the good life *in cities* that is under negotiation and at stake (Acosta et al. 2023b). So, how does the urban / the city enter the equation? Dürr et al. (2019) and Ege and Moser (2020a) identify different ways in which “the city and concepts of the urban figure in [...] ethical negotiations” (Ege & Moser 2020a, p. 16). First, the city can be understood as “a backdrop for ethical experiences and negotiations” (Ege & Moser 2020a, p. 16) – with no particular analytical attention given to the city / the urban. Dürr et al. (2019) regard this

“idea [as] analytically unsatisfactory” (p. 3). Second, the urban (e.g. housing, transport, pollution, or broader questions of a good and just city) can emerge “as an object of ethical negotiation and reflection” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 3) – in which case conceptions of *the city* or *urban problems* often follow popular or actor understandings. Third, urban ethics can be understood “as ethics ‘under urban conditions’” (Ege & Moser 2020a, p. 16). Ege and Moser (2020a) note in this context:

“In a long tradition of urban and anti-urban discourses, aspects of anonymity, heterogeneity, and population density, for example, have been treated as detrimental to ethical motivations and behaviour, but they have also been seen as conducive to a more reflexive distance from conventional moralities. This again illustrates the fundamental entanglement of ethics and the urban and of urban ethics and relationships of power” (p. 16).

Fourth and finally, ethical postulations can be urban in the sense that they are linked to views of what it means to be *emphatically urban*:

“People should be urban and behave in specific ways when making use of the potentials that are seen as specific to cities and, thus, to urbanism. In this understanding, urbanity comprises particular ways of life and aesthetics, the social texture and built environment of a city, and the ideas and discourses related to them such as order, diversity, or the negotiation of different interests. These views of what it means to be emphatically urban, of how truly urban lives are to be lived, frequently have strong normative implications” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 3).

Following these meanings of the urban in urban ethics, ethical negotiations and discourses on the Gulf can be identified as *urban* in many ways. Not only is the city of Auckland the place where many ethical experiences, negotiations, and discourses on the Gulf form and take place, but its urban conditions (e.g. the availability of resources or the connectivity of experts) influence and enable spaces for ethical experiences, negotiations, or the (re-) production of discourses. In addition, there are “significant [...] ecological dynamics, and associated cultures of nature, to be found in different types of socioecological formation” (Gandy 2021, p. 34). It is the specific *urban* ecological dynamics and cultures of nature that give rise to and are identified as problems, such as marine pollution, demographic change, or recreational fishing, that become the object of ethical reflection and negotiation, and of processes and initiatives that seek and develop ethics as solutions.

Erana T. Walker et al. (2019) also note how the urbanisation of Māori communities (the changes in societal structures, narratives, and connections with nature) and urban spaces present challenges for maintaining relationships of *kaitiakitanga* or guardianship with the

environment. The authors suggest “the inclusion of Indigenous values [or ethics] such as *kaitiakitanga* into the urban agenda” (p. 1) – an idea that is pursued in Auckland (see chapters 3, 4, and 7). *Urban* ethics in its fourth sense can also be observed in Auckland, for example, in the context of expectations and negotiations about the future of the city’s waterfront – where different ideas and discourses about *urban* lifestyles, aesthetics, and the built environment compete (see chapter 6).

While these aspects or illustrations of *urban* ethics are of interest for the research – and are researched – in this thesis, the research on the Gulf adds another analytical dimension to the understanding of the urban in urban ethics: that of the ‘watery city edge’. The city edge (or the urban fringe) is a metaphor that has been used in different contexts, often as a metaphor for marginalisation (Pawson 2002; Gandy 2013; Ranganathan & Balazs 2015). Eric Pawson (2002) uses the working metaphor “on the edge” to analytically “explore the roles that towns and ‘the urban’ have occupied relative to both ‘the nature’ and ‘the rural’ in New Zealand between about 1900 and the 1960s” (p. 201). The author identifies three themes: of the progressive town on the edge of wilderness, of the vulnerable town on the edge of unpredictable nature, and of the suburbs that create “a landscape on the edge that is neither urban nor rural, but suburban” (p. 211).

Pawson (2002) also briefly explores *the beach* as a place on the edge, a place that has also been described by others as a ‘liminal zone’ (Shields 1991), ‘liminal space’, or ‘space-in-between’ (Lambert et al. 2006; Choi 2020). Some authors use this metaphor to describe a space of social and moral transgression and fantasy production, a space where “everything is relativised a little, turned around” (Denning 1989, as cited in Lambert et al. 2006, p. 485), “where behavioural norms of what it is (and with whom it is) legitimate can be relaxed to provide pleasures for people otherwise bound by convention” (Shields 1991, as cited in Pawson 2002, p. 212). Young Rae Choi (2020) regards land-water spaces – liminal water worlds – from a more materialist perspective, describing how tidal flats’ dynamic and ambiguous materialities produce slippery ontologies that challenge ‘modern’ knowledge systems and geographic imaginaries such as of matter, verticality, and boundaries.

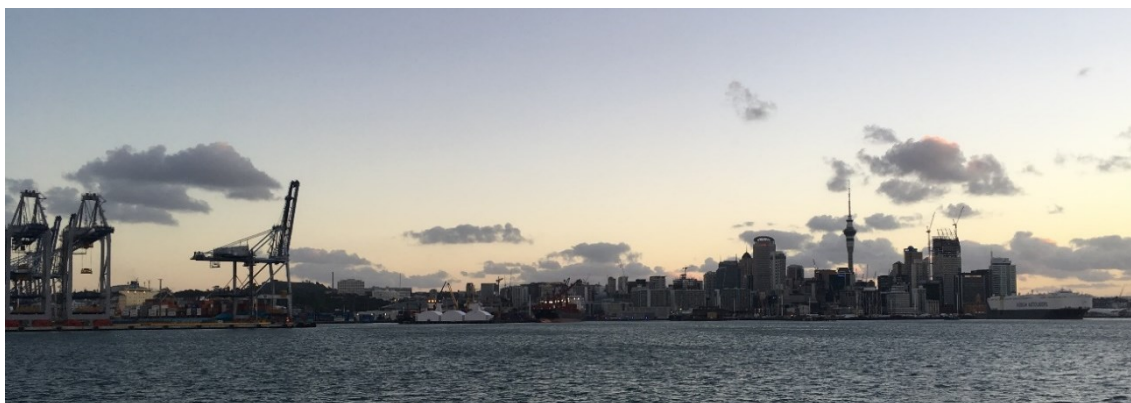
Extending from the coastal zone to the ocean, Steinberg and Peters (2015) see the “ocean [as] an ideal spatial foundation for theorisation” (p. 248). They conceptualise a *wet* ontology that emerges from the ocean’s “materiality as a space of fluidity, volume, emergence, depth, and liquidity” (p. 260). The ocean, the authors argue, “creates [through its material reformation, mobile churning, and nonlinear temporality] the need for new understand-

ings of mapping and representing; living and knowing; governing and resisting” (p. 260–261). It is also, and especially, Indigenous participants, researchers, and writers who are generating alternative ways of thinking, politics, and ethics based on sensory, intellectual, and embodied knowledge of the ocean (Ingersoll 2016; Makey 2021).

What these perspectives show us is a different way of looking at how the oceans can inform and expand our ways of thinking and seeing. They draw our attention to the specificity of oceanic encounters and experiences, to the inapplicability of current governmentalities and territorialities based on (idealised) notions of space, such as a land/water divide, and thus to the emergence of alternatives, to difference and experimentation – also regarding policies regulating oceanic encounters. In comparison to the *dry* and built urban environment, that appears more or less fixed and static in its spatial imagination, “the sea [...] has been imagined and experienced in a variety of ways by different cultures in different times and places” (Lambert et al. 2006, p. 483; Salmond 2021). Looking at the city from its watery urban edge, opens, and invites these different, often non-normative and marginalised, imaginaries and ideas of thinking, living, and governing.

How does this change the understanding of and analytical perspective on *urban* ethics? *The city edge* draws analytical attention to questions of relations and distinctions between urban and non-urban, urban and rural, urban and nature or wilderness, and their connection to ethical claims and negotiations (Gandy 2013). How are questions of *urbanity* (or non-urbanity, rurality) related to and negotiated in an ethical field? The entanglement of questions around urbanity and non-urbanity or rurality with ethical claims-making and practices can be observed in several cases in the Gulf, for example on Waiheke Island – an island in the Gulf that is administratively part of the city of Auckland. Questions of *urban* water infrastructure and wastewater treatment (but also street lighting or transport infrastructure) intermingle and conflict here with ideals of autonomy and imaginaries of a *rural* community – and are closely related to claims of environmental stewardship, responsible water use and treatment, and active citizenship. The research explored these questions of administrative as well as imagined urban boundaries and identities and how these relate to ethics on Waiheke Island (see chapter 7). It depicts a liminal environment in the sense that it is neither urban nor rural, but its relations are constantly negotiated, not only but also in a field of ethics.

The Gulf also draws analytical attention to difference, to emergence, experimentation, and the challenging and negotiation of preconceived urban imaginaries and established norms. Looking at the city from the sea (with a watery perspective) drew my attention to governmentalities, imaginaries, and representations that regard and create urban space differently – as mobile, fluid, and relational. This also reveals new ways of using and claiming ethics or ethical lifestyles. Overall, conventional and normative understandings of naturalcultural relations and space, of governing, planning, mapping, living, and knowing have been challenged, experimented with, and replaced in the Gulf context, such as in the SCTTTP process (see chapters 3, 4) or in the planning for the future of the port (see chapter 6) – often giving space to non-normative, marginalised ways of thinking and knowing the world. It is a certain openness to the unconventional and the unexpected (for me as a landlocked Western European academic researcher), to formation rather than stability or solidity that I take from the coast and the ocean as the centre of my research.



**Fig. 1.6** View of Auckland's CBD and Port from its watery city edge (Photo: M. Aschenbrenner, 2019).

## 1.4 Specifying research questions and objectives

This thesis seeks to understand the role that ethics play in the struggles, negotiations, and attempts to govern, reimagine, and remap Auckland's urban-blue relationships. Chapters 3-7 of the thesis each correspond to a publication and take different ways of approaching and analysing this question (see Table 1). Firstly, chapters 3-6 address questions of urban ethics at the expert, professional, and policy level, so to speak from a top-down perspective. More specifically, chapters 3 and 4 take the MSP process SCTTTP as a starting point to explore urban ethical problematisations, claims, and discourses in and around the Gulf. They focus on the contested ethics of – and in – expert planning for the Gulf. Chapter 3 asks in this context for the kind of ethics that were imagined and claimed *in* SCTTTP. It is

interested in how they relate to a particular kind of coastal city and the nature-culture relations that were imagined. In doing so, the emergence of an ethics of marine stewardship as a response to many of the problems identified in the MSP process is explored. Also, the chapter theorises *ethicalities* to better understand ontological pluralism and difference in ethical claims-making and discourse.

Different narratives and discursive strands emerged from the SCTTTP process and are assessed in chapter 4. The chapter is interested in the ways in which SCTTTP reinforced conventional managerial claims and discourses as well as assembled new, ethical, emancipatory and potentially disruptive urban marine-environmental geographies. To this end, chapter 4 analyses the different discursive strands and the naturalcultural and governmental imaginaries and narratives embedded in them. The chapter discusses theories of the post-political state, depoliticisation, and neoliberal governmentality in more detail and relates them to urban ethics and urban-coastal transformations.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on contexts, where urban coastal and ethical futures were being reimagined. Their focus is not so much on the negotiation and emergence of different urban environmental ethics or ethicalities, but on the role of urban ethics in urban governance and in negotiating the uses of urban coastal space. Chapter 5 explores the matter of *environmentality* and the creation of environmental subjectivities in Auckland and in Mexico City, as both cities are reimagined and promoted as ecosystems by urban planners, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and in processes such as SCTTTP. Chapter 6 analyses how decisions are made and negotiated in the context of debates about the relocation of POAL and the redevelopment of Auckland's waterfront. It identifies ethical claims-making and a vocabulary of ethics in debates and challenges over the location of the ports in Auckland. The question of an *ethicisation of the conflict* is raised, and how this connects to decision-making in coastal transformation projects.

Finally, chapter 7 takes a bottom-up perspective and focuses on the (re)negotiation and emergence of urban ethics at a community level. It reflects on how new ideas of marine care and environmental subjectivities are employed, approached, and realised in the coastal community of Waiheke Island. The chapter, like the others, specifically explores and discusses conflicts and issues of power relations, legitimacy, and inclusion and exclusion. It is also interested in the spatial implications of urban ethics, asking how governance relations and the Gulf's geographies are reimagined and remapped in the case of Waiheke Island – and how these can be interpreted in terms of a potential socio-natural coastal

transformation in Auckland. In this context, different conceptualisations of space, place, and land, and their implications come to the fore.

**Table 1.1** Overview of chapters and their corresponding publications, research questions, and objectives (Table: M. Aschenbrenner).

Chapter in thesis	Publication	Publication type	Research questions	Research objectives
3	Aschenbrenner, M. 2023a.	Published book chapter	(1) What kind of urban coastal ethics were imagined and claimed in and around a process of marine spatial planning in Auckland (SCTTTP)? (2) In what ways was an ethics of marine stewardship imagined and assembled in SCTTTP? (3) What role does the assembling of a specific environmental ethics play?	(1) To establish <i>ethicalities</i> as an analytical lens to understand ethics in their ontological diversity (2) To trace ethics/ethicalities in the process of SCTTTP (3) To understand the coming-together and assembling of diverse urban environmental ethics in SCTTTP
4	Aschenbrenner, M. 2023b.	Published peer-reviewed article	(1) What kind of natural/cultural and governmental imaginaries and narratives emerged from SCTTTP? (2) In what ways did SCTTTP assemble new, ethical, emancipatory, and potentially disruptive urban marine-environmental geographies? (3) Is there a tendency of ethicisation or of new and disruptive ethical imaginaries and narratives?	(1) To theorise the difference between coastal transitions and coastal transformations, and the role of normativity in each (2) To theoretically, as well as empirically, explore and discuss the normative and ethical dimension of urban environmental bargaining and coastal transition endeavours (3) To understand urban ethical claims-making between neoliberal projects of ethicisation and responsabilisation and modes of claiming alternative/non-normative and progressive coastal futures
5	Acosta García, R., Aschenbrenner, M., Dürr, E., and Winder, G. 2022.	Published peer-reviewed article	(1) How are environmental subjects (subjectivities) created by producing imaginaries of cities as <i>ecosystems</i> ?	(1) To explore and understand the role of <i>re-imagining cities as ecosystems</i> in and for urban (neoliberal) governance in Auckland and Mexico City (2) To analyse environmentality and the making of environmental subjects by creating and communicating ecosystem imaginaries (3) To understand the connection between neoliberal governmentality (environmentality), urban environ-

					mental imaginaries, and urban ethics
6	Aschenbrenner, M., and Winder, G. 2023.	Published book chapter	(1)	How are decisions made in the contested issue of Auckland's port location, and what role do urban ethics play?	(1) To analyse how decisions are made and negotiated in the contested case of Auckland's waterfront and port location
			(2)	What constitutes <i>good</i> decision-making in this case?	(2) To better understand the role of urban ethics in negotiating urban coastal and waterfront transitions
7	Aschenbrenner (under review)	Peer-reviewed article	(1)	How has a relational perspective on community, place, and localism emerged in relation to ideas and practices of marine guardianship and kaitiakitanga?	(1) To analyse the (re)negotiation and emergence of urban ethics at a community level
			(2)	What are the social and political implications of the emergence of an ethics of kaitiakitanga/guardianship?	(2) To explore how new ideas of marine care and environmental subjectivities are employed, approached, and realised in the coastal community of Waiheke Island
					(3) To explore and discuss conflicts and issues of power relations, legitimacy, and inclusion and exclusion
					(4) To focus on the spatial implications of urban ethics in practice

## 1.5 Designing the research and methodology

The research questions and objectives did not exist in their final form at the beginning of the research. The DFG research project began with a series of questions about how urban environmental ethics are being used and what role they play in the context of the Gulf in the city of Auckland. Our research project identified SCTTTP as a starting point for exploring the professional mobilisation of an urban ethics of environmental care in Auckland. From here, the plan was to follow its further implementation and stakeholders' responses to the SCTTTP's report and consultation process<sup>11</sup>. It was with this in mind that the idea arose to undertake a series of case studies to observe how the discourses and narratives identified in SCTTTP were being deployed, reflected, and negotiated in other contexts around the Gulf in Auckland. From several possible contexts, the negotiations around the relocation of POAL, a civil society initiative to protect and regenerate Waiheke's marine environment, and the swirling debates around recreational fishing behaviour were identified, with the first two being explored in separate publications and the data from the third being fed into the various publications and chapters of this thesis<sup>12</sup>.



Further ‘fields of urban marine and coastal environmental ethics’ were identified during an exploratory stay in Auckland from October to December 2018. During these months, and in subsequent stays, I took an ethnographic approach to the field, undertaking exploratory walks and observations along several urban sites and the Gulf, as well as sites that might not be identified or self-identifying as urban, but are within the Auckland Council’s administrative area<sup>13</sup>. Some of these sites were mentioned or suggested by interviewees and people I discussed Gulf issues with. Others I found by chance. Still others resulted from my aim to map sites along the Gulf at regular intervals, and with an eye to their importance, popularity, and distinctive features. Often, I would spend several hours at a site, making unstructured observations of people and non-human elements, taking notes, taking photographs, drawing maps and sketches, and having informal conversations. I usually recorded the data in my handwritten field diary, which I later converted to a digital format, creating folders containing the collected data from a particular site. I also walked around the city looking for signs and references to the sea (and water in general). I systematically walked along the coastline, such as when exploring the original shoreline of the Waitematā prior to land reclamation, visited events such as fairs or exhibitions, and witnessed the arrival of cruise ships at the waterfront (Fig. 1.7, 1.8). The results of these observations can be found throughout the thesis, especially in chapter 5.

The research was designed in 2016-17, during the application phase of the research project and in close dialogue with the other subprojects of the DFG research group on urban ethics (while being continuously adapted during the research process). This influenced among other things, the planning of the three field research phases in October-December 2018, February-April 2019, and January-April 2020 (8 months in total) in Auckland. The proposal envisaged two phases of fieldwork, with the third phase arising from the objective of conducting a series of additional case studies to the previous expert and planning focus. In the second phase of my fieldwork, a colleague from the research group accompanied me to Auckland for two weeks as part of a planned tandem research visit. Together we toured the greater Auckland area, conducted several participant observations, and discussed findings and experiences from different disciplinary perspectives, namely European Ethnology and Human Geography. The global spread of Covid-19 and the resulting travel restrictions made research visits after 2020 impossible, so some interviews and data collection were conducted remotely and via video calls.



**Fig. 1.7** Watching the arrival of the Ovation of the Seas (Royal Caribbean Cruiseships) from Queens Wharf in November 2018 (Photo: M. Aschenbrenner, 2018).

Overall, much of the data evaluation and discussion took place within the context of the research group and at international meetings and conferences, sometimes attended by researchers from ANZ. Being part of the urban ethics research group has greatly guided my theoretical perspective and approach, while my background in human geography and political ecology has given me specific research priorities and foci<sup>14</sup>. From the perspective of the research group, we understood our collaborative work as an *extended case method* (Burawoy 2009). The objective was to rethink the results of the individual subprojects in an ongoing discussion process at the meta-level. In this respect, the individual research projects did not adopt a comparative approach with the aim to compare the individual cases. Instead, we pursued an integrative approach with the aim of advancing the debates on urban ethics on the basis of different empirical conditions and findings.

The aim of the urban ethics research agenda is to look at the phenomenon of urban ethics from multiple perspectives: at different groups of actors, different types of sources, and levels of action. My research followed an actor-oriented approach – as is also often used in political ecology – and included different types of sources and levels of action. It used and combined qualitative methods of discourse analysis and ethnographic methods such as participant observation. In total, I conducted 39 formal in-depth and narrative interviews and collected more than 45 hours of interview material, as well as analysing newsletters,

cartographic and digital media material, planning and other official documents, and using cognitive and visual methods of documentation, such as mapping, drawing, and photographic works. Finally, drawing on work done in the field of assemblage thinking (Li 2007; Le Heron et al. 2013; Mattissek & Wiertz 2014), I traced human and nonhuman actants and their relationships starting from the Gulf and SCTTTP. Although I did not make these visualisations the central object of my analysis, I relied on them at various stages of my research to understand contexts, plan interviews, or select documents and plans for analysis. Each publication used its own particular methodology to answer the research questions, drawing on different data sets and methods of analysis (see Table 2). The methodology used is therefore outlined and discussed in more detail in the individual chapters of the thesis.



**Fig. 1.8** Walking along the original foreshore on Fanshawe Street in Auckland. This street is on the old beach with the cliffs still visible behind the petrol station (Photo: M. Aschenbrenner, 2019).

**Table 1.2** Overview of chapters and their corresponding research questions, methodology, data base, and analytical approaches (Table: M. Aschenbrenner).

Chapter in thesis	Research questions	Methods	Data base	Analytical approach
3	(1) What kind of urban coastal ethics were imagined and claimed in and around a process of marine spatial planning in Auckland (SCTTTP)? (2) In what ways was an ethics of marine stewardship imagined and assembled in SCTTTP? (3) What role does the assembling of a specific environmental ethics play?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tracing and mapping the SCTTTP process</li> <li>• Conducting qualitative interviews</li> <li>• Conducting participant observations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reports, media sources, newsletter articles, and other publications</li> <li>• 27 semi-structured and narrative interviews</li> <li>• 2 participant observation protocols</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative content analysis and open coding with MAXQDA</li> <li>• Tracing and mapping actants and relationships with Visual Understanding Environment (Tufts University)</li> </ul>
4	(1) What naturalcultural and governmental imaginaries and narratives emerged from SCTTTP? (2) In what ways did SCTTTP assemble new, ethical, emancipatory, and potentially disruptive urban marine-environmental geographies? (3) Is there a tendency of ethicisation or of new and disruptive ethical imaginaries and narratives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting qualitative interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 semi-structured, qualitative interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abductive analysis using memo writing, open coding and creative coding with MAXQDA</li> </ul>
5	(1) How are environmental subjects (subjectivities) created by producing imaginaries of cities as <i>eco-systems</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting ethnographic walks and explorations</li> <li>• Analysing official documents and reports, newsletters, media campaigns, and photographic material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation protocols, photographic material</li> <li>• Official documents and reports, newsletters, media campaigns, and photographic material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretive analysis</li> </ul>
6	(1) How are decisions made in the contested issue of Auckland's port location, and what role do urban ethics play? (2) What constitutes 'good' decision-making in this case?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting qualitative interviews</li> <li>• Analysing planning and strategic documents and reports, media coverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27 semi-structured and narrative interviews</li> <li>• Planning and strategic documents and reports, media coverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative content analysis and open coding with MAXQDA</li> <li>• Interpretive analysis</li> </ul>
7	(1) How has a relational perspective on community, place, and localism emerged in relation to ideas and practices of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting qualitative interviews and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 narrative interviews, and 4 interviews for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounded theory approach using memo writing, open</li> </ul>

	marine guardianship and kaitiakitanga?		participant observations	background information	and selective coding, and the creative coding tool in MAXQDA
(2)	What are the social and political implications of the emergence of an ethics of kaitiakitanga/guardianship?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analysing newsletters, media, and project reports gathered on-site and remotely</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 6 participant observation protocols</li><li>• Newsletters, media, and project reports (Waiheke Marine Project, gathered between February 2020 and April 2024)</li></ul>		

My involvement in the urban ethics research group also influenced the analytical design of my own research project. Overall, I followed an inductive and abductive understanding of research in my analysis and theorisation. The latter approach assigns an important role to a researcher’s theoretical sensitivity and embeddedness in the process of analysis and theory building, which also determines a researcher’s ability to identify unexpected observations (Timmermans & Tavory 2012). In this sense, my formal involvement in the research group had a great influence on my analysis and theory building. Starting from the shared perspectivations and research questions, I developed new categories of analysis and propositions in the research process, aiming at a consistent but differentiated understanding of *urban ethics* in Auckland.

While a visual mapping software application (VUE) was used to trace human and non-human actors and their relationships, the qualitative data analysis process was mainly carried out using the software programme MAXQDA, and in particular its memo, open and creative coding functions. The software programme was also used to conduct a final meta-analysis of the content and findings of sections 3-7 in this thesis, in order to reflect on the individual findings, and to discuss them in relation to the overall research question. The results of this meta-analysis are to be found in the final section of this thesis.

## 1.6 Structuring the thesis

This thesis is divided into six main parts. The section that follows, included in this first introductory part, is intended to ‘set the scene’ for understanding the subsequent analytical parts and chapters of the thesis. It consists of three sub-sections, one of which reflects the recent past and current state of neoliberal urban planning, developments, and discourses in Auckland. The second sub-section examines the background and current state of Indigenous (urban) struggles for decolonisation in which claims and settlements under the Treaty of Waitangi, the foreshore and seabed controversy, and neoliberal developments play a role. The third sub-section discusses the Gulf as a multi-use environment. All three aspects have surfaced at several points in my research and are important for understanding current debates around the Gulf and its coastline.

The three subsequent parts structure the analytical chapters of the thesis into (1) the two chapters analysing ethical problematisations, claims, and discourses in an urban planning context, namely SCTTTP; (2) the two chapters focusing on the role of urban ethics in urban governance more generally and in negotiating the use of urban coastal space; and (3) the chapter exploring urban ethics *from below*, in the case of a caring marine community on Waiheke Island. As mentioned above, all analytical chapters are based on existing publications. Chapters 3 and 6 have been published as chapters of edited volumes, while chapters 4, 5, and 7 have been published as peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals. While these articles officially count towards the completion of my doctorate, the book chapters were crucial to the development of the theoretical approach and the overall propositions and conclusions of this thesis. Therefore, I have chosen to include them as full chapters in this thesis. Minor changes have been made to the publications to conform to the formatting and spelling of the overall thesis (specifically, changing from US to British spelling, aligning figure and table numbering, replacing “paper” with “chapter” in the respective publications, converting footnotes to endnotes, and conforming the format of emphases, in-text citations, and references to the format of the thesis). Reprints of the original articles are included in the appendix of the thesis (A.2-A.4). Comprehensive tabular overviews of all publications are also included in the thesis appendix (A.1). Finally, part six reports the overall findings of the cumulative dissertation, discusses them, and places them in a broader context in terms of the thesis’ answer(s) to the overall research question and its contribution to existing research and theory.

## 1.7 Excursus: Discussing my positionality and research ethics

Writing about urban ethics and conducting research in ANZ required a critical examination of my own ethical stance and positionality. In the following sections, I reflect on these aspects in relation to formal ethics approval procedures, expectations from the field, and my research practice. As this has shaped my research and led to considerable uncertainty and self-reflection, I am also exploring what it meant to do research in the post-colonial, settler-society context of ANZ. My position as a German but *white* researcher has played an important role in this process. Engaging with ethical frameworks, including feminist and Indigenous perspectives, has prompted me to question my fundamental understanding of research ethics – an issue I discuss in the third section. Through this lens, I have come to see my intellectual journey as one of “leaving the hall of mirrors” (Larsen & Johnson 2017, p. 13) – a process of challenging dominant worldviews and discourses without a clear destination, but rather as an open-ended, transformative experience<sup>5</sup>.

### 1.7.1 Navigating research ethics and expectations from the field

In contrast to the German social sciences, research ethics is a lively and institutionalised topic in ANZ. “Ethics committees emerged out of a critical inquiry into the so-called ‘Unfortunate Experiment’” (Gremillion et al. 2015, p. 83) in Auckland between 1966 and 1982, in which “a prominent medical academic [...] withheld standard treatment from patients with cervical carcinoma in situ” (Skegg 2011, p. 235) without obtaining his patients’ consent. Today, ANZ universities and other tertiary institutions have ethics committees not only for human health and disability research, but for any research involving human participants (University of Auckland 2024). “In the German social and cultural sciences, attention to research ethics is growing” (von Unger et al. 2016), but the debates – also from my own experience – have been rather restrained. Only recently have ethics review boards and advisory committees been established outside of medical research and experimental studies such as psychology, but they are not mandatory – as is their consultation – and attached to particular faculties<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, my research relied on several guidelines and conventions adopted in Germany to ensure ethical standards, such as written participant information sheets and consent forms based on current data protection guidelines and legislation, guidelines for good scientific practice, and also the research ethics guidelines and requirements of ANZ universities and institutions (von Unger et al. 2016; University of Auckland 2024). During my



research in ANZ, several people, often participants in my research, raised general questions about the ethics of my research, which I also see as an expression and reflection of the current discourse on research ethics, not only in ANZ. This often goes beyond official ethical guidelines and regulations. As these challenges provided an important space for reflection on my research ethics, I will discuss them in more detail here.

The question of my role as a German and/or academic researcher and the professional benefits that I gain from my research (e.g. in terms of funding, an academic career, prestige) was regularly raised by interlocutors. Often this was linked to the question of what I was 'giving back'. How would my research benefit others, especially research participants and the community? An ethics of reciprocation, with the purpose "to give back both ownership of knowledge and material benefit to those participating in the research" (Swartz 2011, p. 49), has been long and intensely debated by researchers, and particularly in feminist and post-colonial research (Kirsch 1999 and Murphy & Dingwald 2001, as cited in Swartz 2011). While some expert participants called for a degree of substitution in the form of information exchange, I felt that an active stance of 'giving back' was particularly important in the case of my more ethnographic research with the local community on Waiheke Island. After consulting with the Waiheke Marine Project (WMP), I contributed to the project on a practical level: I helped to set up and run information desks at various events and conducted short interviews with passers-by for the project to create a collection of Sea Stories – stories from Waiheke Island about people's relationship with the ocean. The transcripts of these interviews were anonymised and only shared with the WMP – no content was used in relation to my own research.

While deliberately building relationships and giving back to the people you research with can be seen as an ethical principle and ideal of doing ethnographic research (Swartz 2011; Fischer 2020), these expectations occasionally clashed with my critical, post-structuralist and political ecology research perspective and interest. As part of my work with the WMP, I have actively contributed to the current discourse around the Gulf, which supports people's relationship and emotional attachment to the Gulf and sees them as guardians and voices for the Gulf. Simultaneously, I have critically analysed and evaluated this discourse in my research (see chapters 4, 7). This reflects the inherent messiness of the research process and the researcher's own "messy self" (Baker 2021, p. 356). I also took up a position as a WMP participant in the contested environment of Waiheke Island. Relationships with some of the project participants intensified, and I would 'sit' their house and pet while



they were away or join them in activities such as kayaking. Building comparable relationships with individuals who were not involved in the WMP proved more challenging<sup>17</sup>. While interviewees indicated that they ‘gained’ a space for self-reflection from the interviews, there was an imbalance in my reciprocal engagement with different participants. Being transparent with all interviewees about my involvement and research perspective helped to navigate this messy space. However, this imbalance also shaped my research focus, leading Chapter 7 to centre on the WMP, while other island community perspectives primarily emerge as external critical voices.

The Covid-19 outbreak significantly impacted relationships. After departing on a German government flight in April 2020, I conducted two missing interviews via Zoom. During the closure and travel restrictions from 2020 to 2022, international online conferences became invaluable, providing opportunities to share my work, receive feedback, and engage with other researchers, including those in ANZ. However, interactions with research participants have been limited to a few instances. Submitting my article on Waiheke Island to the *New Zealand Geographer* was not only an effort to receive local feedback on my research but also to contribute my findings to the regional discourse.

Beyond an ethics of reciprocity in research relationships, the ideals of collaboration and partnership – particularly the expectation that the research itself should benefit the community and society – have become increasingly prominent, especially in areas like environmental restoration and protection, and I encountered them frequently in the context of my research. This resurgence aligns with broader academic trends (Reznikova 2023; Tetley & Koch 2024). In ANZ, the emphasis on collaboration and stakeholder or community engagement is particularly strong, reinforced by initiatives such as ANZ’s National Science Challenges. These efforts aim to enhance the applicability and practical relevance of research outcomes (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment 2024).

While I openly shared and discussed my ideas and findings with research participants (Reznikova 2023), I did not systematically involve them in the decision-making processes of my project and research. This was mainly due to the project’s integration within a German research group, which imposed a fixed timeline and research focus, as well as the absence of formal institutional partnerships in ANZ. Our research on urban ethics was theoretically driven but empirically grounded, making it difficult to align with expectations of applicability and practical outcomes. Communicating the nature of this research was often challenging, as it could seem abstract and less immediately relevant in a context

where urgent problems demanded practical solutions. However, theoretically driven basic research has significant value, particularly in exposing and critically examining normative discourses, practices, and power structures – as demonstrated in this study. Frequent discussions with research participants helped me better understand my own research approach and reflect on different forms of collaboration, shared authorship, and knowledge exchange. These reflections will likely influence my future research.

### 1.7.2 Doing research in a post-colonial, settler-society context and environment

Questions of my positionality have arisen in different ways and to different degrees in relation to the research context and the people I have spoken to. They were particularly present and important against the background of research in a post-colonial, settler-society context and environment. The tense relationship between Māori and Pākehā also had an impact on my research context (Fischer 2020). Although I am not a ‘settler’ in ANZ, my position as a *white* researcher shaped my perspective, research design, relationships with research participants, and my access to and understanding of Te Ao Māori (Smith 2012). Constant reflection on the research context and my positionality within was therefore necessary and inevitable (Rose 1997; Fischer 2020).

The history of Western and Pākehā research into Māori knowledge, customs and society has been largely abusive and ‘through imperial eyes’ (Smith 2012). Critical voices such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (2012) influential book on *decolonising methodologies* (first published in 1999) emerged against the background of the Māori political and cultural renaissance, challenging the power dynamics and character of Pākehā/Western-centred research on Indigenous peoples. The goal was to reclaim authority over Māori knowledge and ways of being in ANZ (Tolich 2002, p. 169; Buklijas et al. 2024).

Martin Tolich (2002) described a state of ‘paralysis’ among Pākehā researchers due to the critique of Pākehā-centred research on Māori, coupled with fears of being accused of culturally insensitive, colonising, and disempowering research practices (Fischer 2020, p. 72). This led to the exclusion of Māori from some general population research samples. Other researchers responded by including ‘disclaimers’ in their research publications, questioning their own authority and knowledge of Māori ways of knowing (Tolich 2002, p. 171). Today, especially within the framework of the National Science Challenges, including the SSNSC, the *Vision Mātauranga* policy, published by the Ministry of Research, Science, and Technology in 2005, sets standards for non-Māori researchers working with

Māori. *Vision Mātauranga* emphasises the importance of respecting the needs and aspirations of Māori and unlocking the potential of Mātauranga Māori, its resources and its people (Le Heron et al. 2019). As Le Heron et al. (2019, p. 3) note, this approach to research participation diverges from conventional collaboration or participation models that focus primarily on applicability and practical relevance. It is based on the principles and obligations resulting from the Treaty of Waitangi, and calls for “an approach that is by, with, and for Māori communities, seeks to realise their dreams, addresses challenges they face, [and] is centred on Mātauranga Māori” (Le Heron 2019, p. 4; SSNSC 2024c).

While my research was not embedded in the ANZ science system or classified as Māori-centred or Kaupapa Māori research (Rauika Māngai 2020), my research did involve Māori participants. It was important to reflect on how it was relevant to Māori aspirations or addressed critical issues (and to take a critical, ethical stance). *Vision mātauranga*, but also the ethical guidelines of the Pūtaiora Writing Group (2010) helped me to think about Māori research ethics. In addition to considering these issues, I introduced “elements of uncertainty” (Rose 1997, p. 319), situatedness, and subjectivity into my texts, as well as disclaiming my positionality and knowledge background.

In my reflections, I found it also helpful to consider the following questions raised by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) – questions that were also raised at times by interview participants:

“Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interest does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? [...] These questions are simply part of a larger set of judgements on criteria that a research cannot prepare for, such as: Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us [as Indigenous/colonised community]? Can they fix up our generator? Can they actually do anything” (p. 10)?

Although I am not (generally) part of the everyday processes of colonisation in ANZ, these questions invite us to reflect on our roles and positions within such dynamics – which are also manifested through Western-centred research agendas and structures. They encourage us, as researchers, to recognise that decolonisation is far from an empty term and to adopt an ethical stance toward it<sup>18</sup>.

### 1.7.3 Rethinking research ethics through relationality

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) questions also remind us that research is not solely assessed based on procedural ethics or the researcher's self-reflective ethical stance. According to Carolyn Ellis (2007, p. 3; emphasis added) "*relational ethics* requires researchers to act from our hearts and minds, acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and take responsibility for actions and their consequences". Reflecting on the pluralism of ethical systems in my own research, I began to reconsider research ethics through a relational lens, recognizing that certain ethical and positionality-related questions could not be resolved through self-reflexivity alone or by adhering strictly to ethical guidelines. Particularly inspiring here were also Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) perspective on ethics and Tuck and McKenzie's (2016) notion of relational validity and a relational, dialogical ethics.

In my research, the feedback from interviewees and others – the questions I was asked, the challenges I was posed, and the conversations I had – created what Jarrett Zigon (2021, p. 391) describes as "pull[ing] and place[ing] demands on [me] to respond". This was not about being judged or expected to adopt others' valuations but rather about encountering what Zigon (2021) calls situations of *ethical demand* – in-between spaces shaped by difference, requiring continuous, context-sensitive responses and attunement. This, for me, defines relational ethics. In interview situations, in particular, this involves adopting an open, dialogical stance that resists "the projection of a pre-established set of criteria onto an Other" (Zigon 2021, p. 393). Instead, it enables the creation of a "clearing" – a space of potentiality – where new ways of being together can emerge (Zigon 2021, p. 393).

This understanding was particularly helpful in some situations where my position as a *white* academic was interrogated and the question of me and my research being *tika* (true, good, correct) was being posed. Through the lens of relational ethics, I came to value them as openings – place-specific, situational, and transformative – into an *in-between* space of ethical engagement. These questions called for responsiveness and relationality, embodying the very essence of relational ethics. By negotiating differing perspectives on what is *good* research, these interactions engaged with ontological difference and plurality. In practice, I responded by listening attentively, sharing my research and position with transparency and openness. My aim was to foster dialogue and engage with the demands that emerged in these encounters. In this process, language became my central "modality of ethics" (Zigon 2021, p. 390). However, as Tuck and McKenzie (2016) remind us, ethical

demands do not arise from language alone; they also come from the land and future generations, calling us to act with awareness and responsibility.

I also came to understand the deep insecurities I often felt regarding my positionality in my research context as *ethical moments* – instances in which I critically examined and reshaped my ways of being in the world. These moments challenged previously unexamined assumptions and prompted transformation. Relationality, ambiguity, and uncertainty, I realised, are essential for escaping what Larsen and Johnson (2017, p. 14) describe as the *hall of mirrors* that often dominates academia. They argue that academic discourse tends to be self-referential, exclusionary of non-academic worldviews, and assimilationist in nature. More broadly, it is deeply anthropocentric, denying the agency of more-than-human beings, and imposing a self-validating form of knowledge that enacts epistemic violence. To counter this, Richard Howitt and Sandie Suchet-Pearson (2003, as cited in Larsen & Johnson 2017, p. 14) propose a practice of *situated engagement* – an embodied, active, and relational way of knowing, which Larsen and Johnson (2017) also endorse. This perspective has been central to my evolving understanding of research ethics as something that does not emerge in isolation but is shaped through reciprocal relationships with both human and more-than-human research environments. Ultimately, *responsible* research is inherently geographic: it is rooted in place and shaped by the relationships it nurtures with all its inhabitants, human and non-human alike.

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<sup>1</sup>The estimated population for the Auckland region at 30 June 2021 is 1.72 million. About a third of the ANZ population (34 per cent) lives in Auckland. This is projected to increase to 37 per cent by 2048. The Auckland Council's Land Use Scenario projects that Auckland's total population could reach 2.38 million by 2048 (Auckland Council 2018, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> "Coasts are naturally dynamic environments which are constantly changing in response to processes such as wave action. The response to these processes is controlled by natural characteristics such as the underlying geology. Changes to our coast are also caused by human modification and the ongoing effects of climate change induced sea-level rise" (Ross Roberts et al. 2021, p. 1).

<sup>3</sup> Knowledge is used here in the plural to "acknowledge that knowledge is inherently situated, biased and partial" (Maxwell et al. 2020, p. 3; Haraway 1988). Maxwell et al. 2020 are just one example of authors who speak of plural worldviews, knowledges and values in the context of ANZ, and in particular their He Waka Taurua framework (see also section 1.2.3).

<sup>4</sup> The research group's approach was guided by Burawoy's (2009) approach, which he has developed in the context of his own research on four continents and which, following the Manchester School

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of Social Anthropology, he calls the *extended case method*. Micro-studies, as are common in cultural studies, can therefore achieve overarching gains in knowledge by extending them in terms of research strategy: Starting from a broad corpus of sources of individual studies based on a variety of methods, these possibilities for expansion, according to Burawoy, consist in the extension of categories of observation across space and time, which allows for a connective transfer of questions; they consist in the extension of perspectives from micro to macro processes, in the sense of a constant comparison, and thus also in extensions of theory. In such an understanding, it is possible to rethink the results of the individual research projects on a meta-level in an ongoing discussion process. In this respect, the individual research projects are not concerned with a comparative approach that aims to compare individual cases, but with an *integrative approach* that aims to advance the debates on urban ethics on the basis of different empirical premises (Dürr et al. 2014).

<sup>5</sup> However, Dürr (2011, p. 504) observes that the Auckland's lived reality is "multicultural and cosmopolitan" (see also Kolig 2006, as cited in Dürr 2011).

<sup>6</sup> The Treaty of Waitangi / Te Tiriti of Waitangi is ANZ's founding document made between representatives of the Crown and Māori rangatira (chiefs) in 1840, that assured the latter certain rights like sovereignty and full authority over their treasures. There were many serious breaches of the Treaty which "resulted in many Māori tribes losing ownership of, and access to, much of their land, waterways and marine space" (Peart 2019, p. 4).

<sup>7</sup> Co-management/co-governance are terms used worldwide in the governance and management of environments and resources, often to improve sustainability and "foster more equitable sharing of power between the state and Indigenous peoples" (Parsons et al. 2021, p. 325). They are meant to give recognition to Indigenous people's rights and values, and address injustices faced by Indigenous peoples. Co-management arrangements take on very different forms in ANZ, such as arrangements involving central or local government, those set up through legislation and implementing Treaty settlements, semi-formal arrangements, or those "established through entirely different structures such as charitable trusts" (Magallanes 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Mario Blaser (2013) characterises *ontology* as "way of worlding, a form of enacting a reality" (p. 551). The discussion of Indigenous ethical systems as *cultural* perspectives or specificities serves to perpetuate the complex modern myth, as Blaser terms and graphically depicts it (see Blaser 2013, p. 554). This myth, among other dynamics, divides culture from nature. Blaser posits that "modernity exorcises the threatening difference of other worldings by taming them and allowing them to exist just as cultural perspectives on a singular reality. In other words, all the different ontologies described by ethnographers are shrunk and made to fit into [the cultural realm] labelled 'Other culture'" (Blaser 2013, p. 555). Describing Indigenous ethical systems as *cultural perspectives* not only serves to perpetuate „the enactment of a modern world that actively produces other ontologies or worlds as absence" (Blaser 2013, p. 555). Furthermore, it precludes the empirical observation and comprehension of dynamics and conflicts in settler-societal contexts that involve claims for sovereignty and an acknowledgment of Indigenous worldviews and knowledges *outside*

of the coloniser's subjectivity and ways of knowing. Epistemic violence can be understood as manifesting when coloniser's ways of knowing are privileged, and Indigenous knowledge systems are disqualified (Carter & Warren 2021). It is important to note that speaking of ontological pluralism still means that "some ethnographic subjects (or stories/worldings/ontologies) can be wrong, not in the sense of a lack of coincidence with an external or ultimate reality, but in the sense that they perform wrong: they are/enact worlds in which or with which we do not want to live" (Blaser 2013, p. 552). In this sense, it does not mean to legitimise all stories that claim to be right.

<sup>9</sup> Kaipara Harbour is one of three harbours in Auckland Region, the others being Waitematā and Manukau Harbour.

<sup>10</sup> The question of how one should live in the city includes the following components, which can vary and take different forms, but which are the basic components of a definition of ethics / ethical problematisations: "(a) Imaginations of practices and virtues deemed good and proper ('how'), (b) types of normativity involved, that is, the norms, values, virtues, incentives working on what Foucault (1985, p. 26) calls the 'ethical substance' ('should'), (c) actors and the imagined models of the ethical subject ('one'/'we'), [and, in addition,] (d) imaginations of good, right or proper urbanity and urban form of life ('live in the city')" (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 2, emphases in original).

<sup>11</sup> As proposed to the DFG when applying for funding as part of the multidisciplinary research group on Urban Ethics. Conflicts over good and proper urban living in the 20th and 21st centuries.

<sup>12</sup> Potential case studies were identified through a media analysis conducted in Auckland at the beginning of the research process, looking for conflicts and tensions in and around the Gulf.

<sup>13</sup> I had some prior knowledge of Auckland, where I did a three-month internship in 2011/2012, and of marine and coastal contexts in ANZ from a three-month stay in Raglan, Waikato Region, in 2012.

<sup>14</sup> The urban ethics research group brought together researchers from European Ethnology, Social and Cultural Anthropology, Japanese Studies, Urban Design and Architecture, East and Southeast European Studies, History, American Studies and Human/Economic Geography. The theoretical perspectations were largely based on the work of anthropologists.

<sup>15</sup> Parts of the content of this chapter have been shared and were published as part of a session on Responsible Geographic Practice at the German Congress of Geography (DKG) in 2023.

<sup>16</sup> For example, at the LMU Munich (to which I belong), the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Cultural Studies each have a research ethics commission responsible for researchers within their faculties, while the Faculty of Geosciences (including the Department of Geography) has no such institution.

<sup>17</sup> Differences in my relationships with people, my position in the field, and my research perspective have also arisen from my personality - ethnicity, gender, age, but also, for example, my background of commitment to environmental protection and sustainability. Growing up in Munich, a land-locked city, I had little experience of recreational fishing, diving, and other coastal or marine activities. This led to a different closeness and relationship with different people. Especially in contact

with recreational fishermen, but also with senior experts, I often felt that I was perceived as an inexperienced but neutral outsider and that things were explained to me in a certain way.

<sup>18</sup> For me, adopting an ethical stance included recognising Treaty principles and remaining vigilant against claims that generalised or undermined these principles, or expressed anti-Māori or racist sentiments. It involved amplifying Māori voices, ensuring inclusion rather than exclusion (or paralysis), and taking Te Ao Māori seriously – not merely as a cultural perspective but in the sense of ontological pluralism – while actively identifying and addressing epistemic violence.

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## 2 Setting the scene: Auckland's blue backyard

This thesis seeks to understand the role of ethics and normativity in struggles and negotiations over coastal and marine spaces and projects in the *neoliberal* and *post-colonial* city of Auckland. As the research posits that both neoliberal urbanisation and struggles for decolonisation are important to developments in the Gulf context, this chapter sets out how Auckland and the Gulf context can be understood as embedded in both. In what ways can Auckland be said to be influenced by, or a subject of, neoliberal urban reforms and developments? And what is the current state of struggles for decolonisation at the national level and in the urban context, particularly in relation to coastal and marine spaces and futures? Finally, it is not only urban neoliberal reforms and struggles for decolonisation that shape the scene in which this research is embedded. The Gulf is also part of the ANZ's *national* marine estate, occupying a place of national significance. As such, it needs to be considered in a broader context of multiple governmental constellations, users, uses, activities, (moral) discourses, and claims.

### 2.1 Neoliberal urbanisation in Auckland and the Gulf context

The transformation of Auckland's coastline, and the responses to it, are situated within a broader neoliberal policy context, both at the local and national levels. Since 1984, ANZ has a history of “radical and enthusiastic engagement with neoliberal ideals” (Murphy 2008, p. 2521) replacing the Keynesian Welfarism of the postwar period. “During the 1980s and 1990s [ANZ] was an early example of the move from social democracy to neoliberalism, manifest in widespread economic liberalisation” (Larner et al. 2007, p. 228). Authors distinguish between different phases of neoliberal reforms in ANZ, namely the initial phase of *rolling back* the state in the 1980s and *rolling out* neoliberal policies in the 1990s (Peck & Tickell 2002; Murphy 2008).

Larner et al. (2007) further summarise the multiple political projects that have been established since the fifth Labour government under Helen Clark as *after-neoliberalism period*. They note:

“In the case of [ANZ] it is quite clear that this new approach [of after-neoliberalism] does not mark a return to the nation-state-centred understandings of the postwar period [...] Contemporary policies continue to draw on highly economic language and are tied to increasing participation in the globalizing economy [...] At the same time, they involve the active build-

ing of new relationships with nontraditional actors. Environment, sustainability, and culture have entered into the domain of economic policy, and community, partnership, and ethnic diversity now feature centrally in social policy” (Larner et al. 2007, pp. 228-229).

The neoliberal reforms and projects established on a national level have greatly influenced and altered Auckland’s institutional landscape, put into place new policy and planning imaginaries, trends, and practices, and resulted in tangible urban and coastal changes like waterfront developments (Murphy 2008). Increased interest in Auckland’s economic performance and the desire for innovation and a *knowledge economy* by the Wellington-based central government since 2000 led to the amalgamation of Auckland’s former regional council and several city and district councils into a competitive *super-city* (and metropolitan authority) in 2009 (Murphy 2008; Le Heron 2009; Lewis & Murphy 2015; Asquith et al. 2021). While some of the former districts overlapped with the current Local Boards, others were redrawn. In particular, shifts in rural-urban boundaries have mobilised communities that were previously characterised and self-identified as rural (Fischer 2020). Administrative responsibilities for the Gulf and Waitematā Harbour under the Resource Management Act (RMA) shifted from city and district councils to the unitary Auckland Council, as did seats on the Hauraki Gulf Forum (HGF), an entity representing all local authorities bordering the Gulf or its catchments (see chapter 3).

Auckland Council is responsible for the governance, monitoring, and review of four (previously seven) substantive council-controlled organisations (CCOs) (Lewis & Murphy 2015; Auckland Council 2024a). “Key infrastructural, economic development, and economic management functions [were transferred] to CCOs, along with control over substantial assets” (Lewis & Murphy 2015, p. 108). All four are involved in some way with coastal and marine issues, particularly Watercare Services Ltd and Eke Panuku Development, which manages Auckland Council’s assets, including those on the waterfront. POAL is a special organisation in here (see chapter 6). As ANZ councils are constrained “in scope and capacity by tight central government control of the state” (Lewis & Murphy 2015, p. 103), councils are increasingly relying on public-private partnerships and CCOs as vehicles for raising private sector funds. CCOs, in turn, have been criticised for “lack of transparency, inefficiency, [and for] introducing private sector priorities and market disciplines into the management and delivery of essential services and utilities” (Lewis & Murphy 2015, p. 108) in cities like Auckland.

*The Auckland Plan*, a 30-year guide to Auckland's growth, and *the Unitary Plan* were meant to be key elements to create a “vision for making and performing Auckland as a unitary space” (Lewis & Murphy 2015, p. 98). The Auckland Plan 2012 initially set out the overarching spatial imaginary of *the liveable city* for the new Auckland supercity, guided by the mayor's vision to become *the world's most liveable city* by 2041. *Liveability* replaced the guiding spatial imaginary of *sustainability* that had been central to local development in the after-neoliberalism period, recoupling it with competitiveness (see chapters 4, 6). The Auckland Plan 2012 also shifted the “dominant governmental rationality [...] from effects-based to spatial planning” (Lewis & Murphy 2015, p. 109). This rationale is also reflected in the directive to “ensure integrated and sustainable management of marine areas through marine spatial planning for the Hauraki Gulf, Kaipara Harbour, Manukau Harbour, and west coast” (Auckland Council 2012).

The goals set out in the Auckland Plan 2012 call for citizens to take active responsibility for the environment (Auckland Council 2012). This is a further shift in the rationale and responsibility of local environmental governance, adding to the *building of active networks and partnerships* that have emerged from the after-neoliberalism period as a new approach to local governance. This focus on partnership arrangements had since the 2000s contributed to the emergence of diverse communities, involving different actors, and the working together of volunteers and local politicians in environmental projects, crossing the boundaries between those who govern and those who are governed (Larner et al. 2007; Fischer 2020).

In June 2018, the Auckland Plan 2012 was revised and adopted as digital *Auckland Plan 2050*. While retaining a spatial planning rationale, it replaced the *liveability* imaginary with a vision of *social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing* and the integration of social, economic, environmental, and cultural objectives (Auckland Council 2018a, 2018b). This approach also replaces the earlier focus on competitiveness and is more reminiscent of the after-neoliberal period. The shift in policy and planning imaginaries has taken place during and is strongly reflected in this research. With regard to Auckland's marine environment, the Auckland Plan 2050 adopts the idea of integrating various objectives and brings together different programmes, such as those on water quality or SCTTTP, into a *ridge to reef* imaginary. An imaginary that can be found in several urban projects around the Gulf and is used in later documents to connect different actions to

each other (Department of Conservation et al. 2021). The plan reinforces the active role, responsibility, and *care* of Auckland's citizens for reversing environmental decline.

With the establishment of the new city of Auckland, the Waitematā Harbour and Gulf became its big blue backyard (Morton 2017, 2023) – whether as the city's asset (Auckland Council 2012) or as a foundation for the wellbeing of its citizens (Auckland Council 2018a). As will be shown in the following chapters, new imaginaries, projects, and practices for its governance and management have emerged, influencing how urban and coastal or hinter-land relationships are imagined, managed, and lived. While this section has followed the “neoliberal essence of the new Auckland” (Lewis & Murphy 2015, p. 102), political projects and interventions do not follow a pre-constituted (neoliberal) political program but are subject to innovation, experimentation, and contestation (Larner et al. 2007). This shows in the case of SCTTTP, in debates around waterfront development and the location of POAL, as well as in local disputes over proper care for the Gulf. In the case of the Gulf, there are other discourses and projects to consider than those outlined above, especially struggles for coexistence and decolonisation.

## 2.2 Urban and national struggles for decolonisation

“City life is the reality for the great majority of Māori today” (Gagné 2013, p. 4). Around 85% of the Māori population live in urban settings, both as Mana Whenua (local tribal groups) and *mātāwaka* (Māori whose ancestral connections lie outside of the region). They account for nearly 12% of Auckland's population (Ryks et al. 2016; Stats NZ 2022). Struggles for recognition of Māori rights and autonomy therefore take place to a large extent in cities. They are also embedded in a broader political context. In the context of Auckland and my research, three series of events have had a particular impact on change and are closely intertwined with urban developments: the claims and settlements that have been made under the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1972 to the established Waitangi Tribunal, the series of events known as the *foreshore and seabed controversy*, and the advance of neoliberalism in society and urban politics and practices.

The case of Ōkahu Bay illustrates the role that opposition, protest, and ultimately treaty settlements have played in the legal recognition of Mana Whenua rights in Auckland. In the 1900s, Auckland's main sewer discharge line was laid across the beach in front of what was then the Mana Whenua Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei settlement and the city's raw sewage was discharged into the bay (Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei 2021). This was one of many steps in

urban development plans that displaced Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei from their papa kāinga (village, original home) and led to massive changes in the ecosystems of Ōkahu Bay. In 1977-78, a governmental plan to develop Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei land for high-income housing was met with protest and a 506-day occupation of the land. As part of a Treaty of Waitangi settlement process, the Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei Trust Board was eventually granted title to 60ha, including the beach down to the mean high-water mark at Ōkahu Bay (NZ government 1991; Cumming 2004).<sup>1</sup>

The settlement established an early example of urban co-management in the Gulf context. It established the joint Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei Reserves Board that comprises an equal number of Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei and Auckland Council representatives and manages the land “as a Māori reservation [...] for the common use and benefit of the members of the hapu and the citizens of the City of Auckland” (NZ government 1991; Fig 2.1). In my research, I would repeatedly come across projects in which Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei works with Auckland Council and organisations like Revive Our Gulf to improve waste and storm water networks and re-establish mussel beds in Ōkahu Bay (Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei 2024).



**Fig. 2.1** Signs indicate the ownership of Ōkahu Bay by Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei and the bay’s co-management with Auckland Council “for the enjoyment of all” (Photo: M. Aschenbrenner, 2018).

Apart from individual claims, the *Ngā Mana Whenua o Tāmaki Makaurau Collective Deed* provides collective redress for the shared interests of iwi and hapū in the Auckland area, including maunga (volcanic cones) and motu (islands). It vested ownership of 14 maunga in the Tāmaki Collective and established a co-governed body for their management, while the motu were with the exception of a few sites vested back to the Crown “for the benefit of all New Zealanders” (Te Arawhiti 2024). Many negotiations for other settlements, both individual and collective, particularly in relation to the harbours and Gulf were still ongoing at the time of writing this thesis. They “will significantly shape the cultural, economic, and political landscape” (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016, p. 34) of Auckland, its harbours, and the Gulf. They will also potentially put “increased emphasis on co-governance” (Department of Conservation et al. 2021, p. 89), but will also maintain public access and recreational use as other settlements do.

The issue of access and ownership of the foreshore and seabed, and the right to make customary claims, has been a highly contentious issue in ANZ. Tensions peaked in *the foreshore and seabed controversy* in the beginning of the 2000s, when the government refused “to allow Māori the right to go to the courts to determine proprietary rights to the foreshore, seabed, and fresh water” (Sullivan 2017, p. 39):

“In June 2003, the Court of Appeal of New Zealand [had] ruled that Māori should be allowed the opportunity to prove in court their customary rights to the foreshore and seabed. In essence, the Court was saying that Māori customary title may exist in some form to some areas of the foreshore and seabed. Implicit in the ruling is that Māori customary title applies not only to land, but to the foreshore and seabed as well [...] The government’s immediate response was to indicate to the public that it would protect Crown ownership of the foreshore and seabed with new legislation to ensure that Māori would not have an ownership title to the foreshore and seabeds. That legislation came into effect under Helen Clark in January 2005, despite vociferous criticism from a number of sectors of New Zealand society and explicit disapproval from the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination” (Sullivan 2017, pp. 40-41).

The nationalisation plan was met with fierce opposition. Māori organised a huge hīkoi (march) that drew tens of thousands of people to protest outside Parliament in Wellington in May 2004. In July 2004, the Māori Party was formed (Gagné 2013; Larsen & Johnson 2017; Sullivan 2017). “The Māori Party [was] the first one to appeal to mainstream Māori opinion and to cut across tribal and social class divides” (Miller 2005, as cited in Gagné 2013, p. 7). In March 2011, the Foreshore and Seabed Act of 2004 was replaced by the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act. The Act restored Māori customary title



interests that had been extinguished under the 2004 Act. At the same time, it provided for public ownership of the foreshore and seabed and, as Ann Sullivan (2017) has noted, extinguished certain common law rights to property interests arising from customary title. The Waitangi Tribunal also confirmed that the original 2011 Act was inconsistent with the Crown's treaty obligations, in that claimants were disadvantaged by aspects of the procedural and resource regime (Waitangi Tribunal 2011).

"Ethnic tension has heightened, and a polarised nation has emerged" (Sullivan 2017, p. 40) in and from the foreshore and seabed controversy. Throughout my research I was struck by the rhetoric of *democracy* and *equality* that was used to discredit co-government and co-management arrangements and Treaty partnership and principles. In March 2019, I attended a SCTTTP public engagement meeting. The same event was attended by three persons, one of whom I subsequently identified as a member of Hobson's Pledge, a right-wing lobby group formed in 2016 and led by Don Brash. The group neglects the partnership and principles created by the Treaty of Waitangi between the Crown and Māori, seeks to abolish the Waitangi Tribunal, to remove Māori electorates, and restrict tribal powers and rights (Hobson's Pledge 2024). At one point, one of the group spoke up to, in their words, "address the elephant in the room". The person identified the *elephant* as the issue of *democracy* and asked at length about the inclusion of mātauranga Māori in the presentation shown and that Mana Whenua were not democratically elected. They also strongly criticised Mana Whenua participation and co-governance as fundamental and non-negotiable elements of SCTTTP. I have also found similar rhetoric from others in personal communications and in the context of co-management efforts and a marine reserve application of Waiheke Island (Observations, March 2019, January-March 2020).

Authors such as Natacha Gagné (2013) and Ann Sullivan (2017) attest to the emergence and reinforcement of such rhetoric in the events of the foreshore and seabed controversy. Don Brash, who was then leader of the National Party, gave a speech in 2004 in which "he accused the government of promoting race-based policies and creating two standards of citizenship" (Brash 2004, as cited in Gagné 2013, p. 6). The racist theme of *we are all one people, one rule for all* is a quite commonly used theme by centre-right political parties in ANZ such as New Zealand First and ACT (Sullivan 2017; Treaty Resource Centre – He Puna Mātauranga o Te Tiriti 2024). It uses Western democratic ideals of equality that are "generally underpinned with ideologies of individualism and nationhood [and places them above] collective tribal rights to customary resources that Māori claim as Indigenous peo-

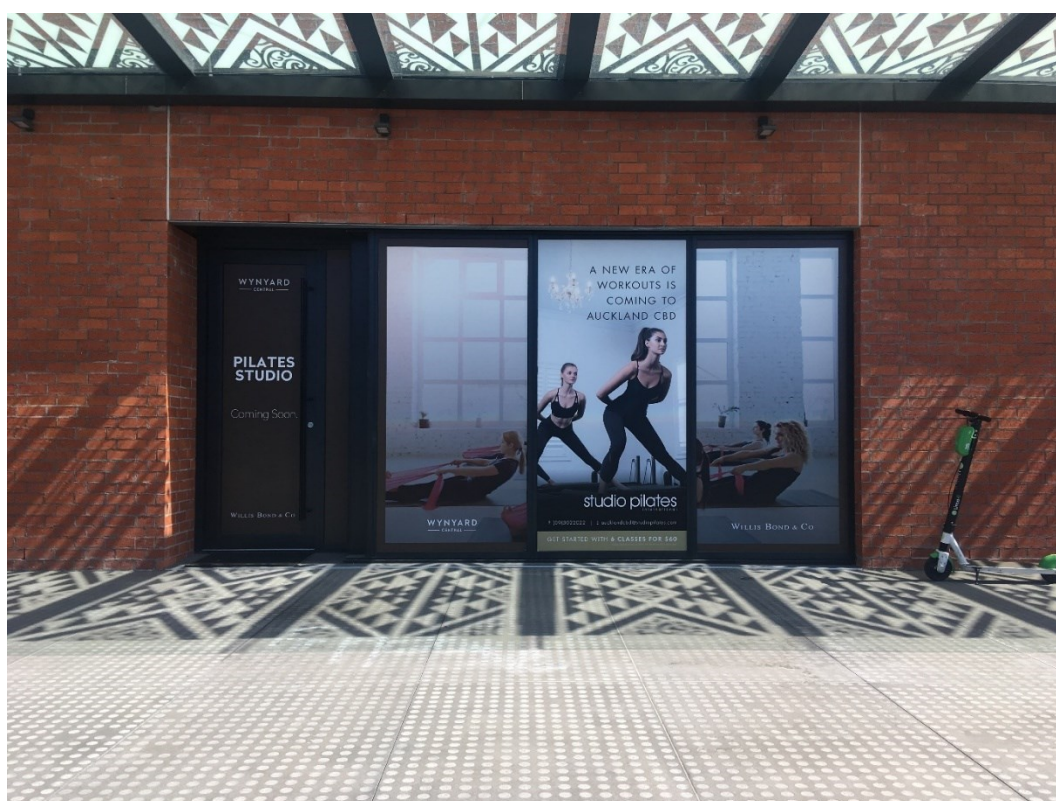
ples and signatories to te Titiri o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi” (Sullivan 2017, p. 41)<sup>2</sup>. “The notion of everyone having equal rights and access to the beaches effectively denies Māori native title and sets mainstream New Zealand against the Indigenous minority” (Sullivan 2017, p. 47).

As Sullivan (2017) notes, “race is a powerful nation-building tool [...] Only two of the minor political parties supported the Māori position” (p. 51) in the foreshore and seabed controversy. The media further promoted private property arguments and the public perception “that Māori were seeking exclusive ownership of the foreshore and seabed and that the general public would be denied access to the beaches and recreational fishing grounds” (Sullivan 2017, p. 41). A perception that was contradicted by the Waitangi Tribunal, which “responded that history shows that contrary to the actions of a number of private owners who do prohibit public access, Māori have not done so” (Sullivan 2017, p. 54), also referring to the example of Ōkahu Bay. Racial lines, and the controversies and misunderstandings they foster, continue to divide people in ANZ and are reflected in the rhetoric of Hobson's Pledge and others in the Gulf context (Sullivan 2017; Democracy Action 2018; Hobson's Pledge 2024). With a coalition of the National Party, ACT, and New Zealand First in government from November 2023, assimilation/integration into a Western system, equalisation of policies, racial discrimination, and ultimately the reproduction of colonial relations are likely to increase (Brown 2024; Cugely 2024).

Nevertheless, Gagné (2013) acknowledges positive effects of the political events of the foreshore and seabed controversy on the transformation of struggles for recognition of Māori identity, rights, and autonomy in recent years, particularly in the city. Walking along the waterfront – especially in the western part of Wynyard Quarter being developed under the Waterfront Plan 2012 – I could see Te Ao Māori reflected in many places be it in street names like *Tiramarama Way*, in language, or in architecture and design (Fig. 2.2, 2.3). According to Gagné (2013) “many Māori, generally speaking, do not consider the city and its institutions, and Auckland in particular as Māori places; for one thing, they do not ‘look’ and ‘feel’ Māori” (p. 3). This was confirmed to me by an interview partner being Mana Whenua to Tāmaki Makaurau:

“And you know, here in Aotea Square or you went down Queen Street, if you were walking up Queen Street, you know, you could be in any city in the world, and you wouldn't actually know you were in *Aotearoa*” (Personal conversation, 2019, emphasis added).

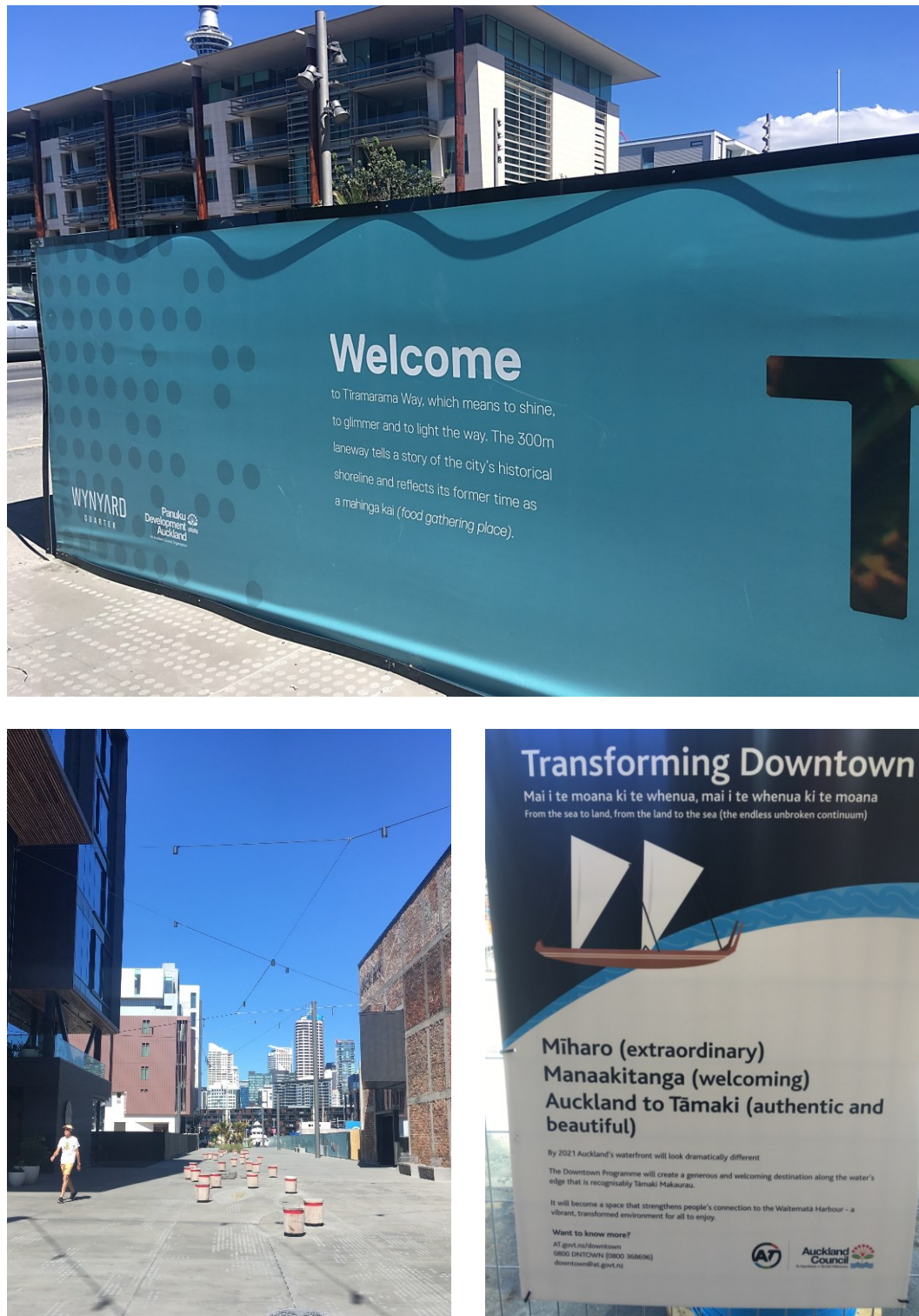
This seems to be changing with recent developments, such as Wynyard Quarter. Networks of Māori and Indigenous design professionals, such as Ngā Aho, have been “support[ing] each other to better service the design aspirations of [...] Māori and Indigenous communities” (Ngā Aho 2024) and advocating for the implementation of Māori design principles throughout Auckland. Since 2016, Auckland Design Office has had a Māori Design Leader, the first of its kind in ANZ. *Reflecting mana whenua mātauranga and Māori design principles throughout Auckland* is also a focus area of the Auckland Plan 2050, named under the target outcome of *Māori identity and wellbeing* (Our Auckland 2016; Auckland Council 2018a).



**Fig. 2.2** The design of Wynyard Quarter at Auckland’s waterfront, here on Tiramarama Way, incorporates Māori patterns to reflect Indigenous identity (Photo: M. Aschenbrenner, 2019).

Changes in Auckland to recognise Māori identity and rights also came with the amalgamation in 2009, with plans such as the Auckland Plan 2012, which prioritised Māori social and economic wellbeing within a *liveability* framework, the Auckland Plan 2050, and the Waterfront Plan 2012. Houkura (the Independent Māori Statutory Board) was also established after the amalgamation. The Board is governed by representatives of Mana Whenua and mātauranga and is mandated to identify and promote issues of importance to Māori

communities in Auckland. It monitors the activities of Auckland Council, provides advice and assists in the development of official plans and documents (Auckland Council 2024b).



**Fig. 2.3 a, b (top and bottom left)** Tiramarama Way means to glimmer, shine and light the way. It is the name of a laneway in Wynyard Quarter and meant to represent the original shoreline of the Waitematā Harbour that was a mahinga kai (food gathering place) for tangata whenua. 480,000 dots are sandblasted into the laneway to represent the original shoreline while the light display above maps out stars and constellations that are important to Māori astronomy (Our Auckland 2021). **c (bottom right)** Posters in Wynyard Quarter, which provide information about the developments, quote Māori tikanga (Photos: M. Aschenbrenner, 2019).

In this context, the question of possible interrelations between the advance of neoliberalism in ANZ society and (urban) politics and governance and struggles for decolonisation arises – a question that has been lively debated by academics (Bargh & Otter 2009; Lewis et al. 2009; McCormack 2012; Smits 2014; McCormack 2016; Bargh 2018; O'Sullivan 2018). In general, authors agree that there is a link between Māori political projects and the introduction of neoliberal policies since 1984 (Lewis et al. 2009; McCormack 2012, 2016; Howard-Wagner et al. 2018). Neoliberalism's "amenability to socially liberal identity politics [appears to have] opened up spaces for indigeneity" (McCormack 2012, p. 421) and has coincided with increasing government support for Māori economic development and reparation (Howard-Wagner et al. 2018).

Some assess this development rather critically as „channel[ling] Māori aspirations for self-determination into a neoliberal market framework" (Howard-Wagner et al. 2018, p. 419) and see only a kind of indigeneity awarded that fits within this framework (McCormack 2012). There are also voices who see "both Māori radicalism [being restrained and] its radicals [being co-opted] into the system" (Edwards & Moore 2009, p. 50) and tensions in intra-Māori relations created by these developments (McCormack 2012). At the same time, authors argue that the neoliberal reforms "opened the door for greater economic self-sufficiency [and promoted] equity, cultural affirmation, and a greater measure of Māori autonomy" (Durie 2004 and Tomlins-Jahnke 2005, as cited in McCormack 2012, p. 425).

Bargh and Otter (2009) see Indigenous struggles for decolonisation as *productive* in themselves – according to them Indigenous struggles have the potential to promote "diverse political economies of production, trade, and enterprise [that are] distinct from neoliberalism" (p. 154). Lewis et al. (2009) come to a similar conclusion in their research on Māori political projects that pursue alternative forms of local development and fill voids with localised meanings, practices, and hopes, thus creating a range of *progressive* neoliberal spaces. Maria Bargh (2018) also acknowledges the imagination and creation of alternative futures by Indigenous groups who play multiple roles in the economy, employing multiple strategies within a limited neoliberal framework from which change can emerge. This question of change and the creation of progressive spaces and alternative futures is a central one and is explored further in this thesis.

Another aspect of the impact of neoliberal reforms on Indigenous realities discussed by Fiona McCormack (2016) is "the shifting of social responsibility from the public to the



private sphere and from the government to individuals, families, and households” (p. 235). As neoliberal reforms promote partnership and the active role and responsibility of NGOs as well as citizens, for example in reversing environmental decline, they also target Māori. Indeed, McCormack (2016) sees “Māori extended kin groupings [as] provid[ing] an ideal site to which responsibilities can be devolved, a kind of readymade, Indigenous, NGO” (p. 235). McCormack (2016) further notes:

“During the Decade of Māori Development, Māori aspirations for self-determination and economic development were increasingly perceived to be consistent with the government’s promotion of free markets; the minimal state; and nongovernment provision of services, economic self-sufficiency, and privatisation (Durie 1998). Former governmental functions and schemes in the areas of employment, education, and social welfare began to be outsourced to Māori providers and hosted on marae [meeting house complexes]. Such programs can be conceptualized as an articulation or example of a potentiated neoliberal space, remaining mindful that the relationship between Indigenous actors and devolved governance is not entirely equal, and that free-market policies imply that devolution is accompanied with limited resources and limited power. Notably, the Decade of Māori Development [...] have not significantly altered the socioeconomic disparity between Māori and Pakeha” (p. 235).

In this context, Katherine Smits (2014) describes a *double duty* of Māori culture and its complex appropriation in neoliberalism. According to the author,

“neoliberals argued that their programs increased social capital, by reinforcing networks of voluntary associations [and] that the devolution of state services [...] foster community, by promoting particular, local and voluntary communities [yet] community in this sense was given no substantive content” (p. 55).

Neoliberal reforms eroded historically embedded social norms of national belonging, community, and tradition, and subsequently appropriated Indigenous culture to supply these values. In this sense, Māori culture does *double duty*: it, first, “sustain[s] the neoliberal state through providing a lexicon of cultural references and practices to market and then [...] provid[es] the values of communal belonging that are absent from the discourse of neoliberalism” (Smits 2014, p. 57). In conclusion, Smits (2014) refers to Indigenous identity as “an attractive source of communal value for the neoliberal state” (p. 57) in ANZ. It is within these complex and multifaceted debates and developments that claims of kaitiakitanga, community, and other developments in Auckland and around the Gulf need to be considered.

## 2.3 Shallow regulations and multi-use environment

Finally, it is not just urban neoliberal reforms and developments and struggles for decolonisation that shape the *scene* in which this research is embedded. While the Gulf and part of its coastline is administrated by the Auckland Council and the Auckland Plan, it is, at the same time, part of ANZ's national marine estate – an estate that “is 20 times larger than the country's landmass and [...] has the [fourth] largest exclusive economic zone in the world” (Le Heron et al. 2019, p. 3). The Gulf is recognised not only as an asset or place of importance to Auckland, but also for its *national* significance (NZ government 2000). Le Heron et al. (2019) therefore frame the SCTTTP initiative in national terms, as “most complex and ambitious participatory process initiative of the country” (Le Heron et al. 2019, p. 6). From this perspective, they see the process as primarily embedded in a contested multi-use/user space, contemporaneously shaped by principles and practices defined by Vision Mātauranga as well as *shallow regulations*<sup>3</sup>. According to the authors, “the complexities and complications of multi-use/user spaces [...] are a severe test of conventional approaches which are for the most part led by collaborations amongst existing institutions [They thus lead to] novel and stand-alone participatory configurations” (p. 3) such as SCTTTP. From this conceptual perspective, governance issues appear as “claims over rights of access and property to available or potential resources” (Le Heron et al. 2019, p. 3).

Le Heron et al. (2019) further argue that

“marine spaces can be viewed as ‘social arguments’ about restricting or expanding the greater good of common resources. They are spaces where integrative thinking can emerge from grounded dialogue, synthesis, and collaboration. This conception in turn prioritises making visible the multiple trajectories of uses and users in a space [Participatory initiatives] are created and emerge in a nexus of extant activities and actors where conflict abounds” (p. 3).

Approaching the Gulf and its coastline from this perspective requires an understanding not only of the national and urban context in which the developments considered in this thesis are embedded (as set out in this chapter), but also of the broader governmental constellations, users, activities, (moral) discourses, and claims. The empirical chapters that follow will therefore outline these in more detail.

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<sup>1</sup> However, processes and struggles like those at Ōkāhu Bay are not unique or issues of the past: In 2016 to the end of 2020, a movement against breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi and a proposed housing development at Ihumātao in Māngere, South Auckland, occupied the land. Again, the debates and development plans were preceded by earlier urban environmental issues, in this case, the construction of the municipal sewage treatment plant – and other industrial sites – next to Ihumātao that degraded the waters, mussel beds and fisheries of the Manukau Harbour (Fischer 2020). During my research, people often mentioned the perceived unfairness of the Council's recent efforts (and funding) to restore the more economically *valuable* Waitematā Harbour and Gulf, while neglecting Manukau Harbour.

<sup>2</sup> According to Sullivan (2017) this “perception was fostered by the democratic ideals on which British sovereignty in New Zealand was based, with notions of egalitarianism and everyone seemingly having equal rights and equal opportunities as a core value. It was an ideal that was articulated and advanced at the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, when the British representative Captain Hobson made the statement ‘He iwi tahi tātou’. This was commonly interpreted as ‘We are all one people’. It encapsulated the generally held conviction of the new settlers and the colonial office that Māori would amalgamate into the British model of representative government based on western liberal ideals of democracy. The presumption of ‘we are all one nation, all one peoples and everyone must be treated equally’ has been constantly reinforced by the government and underpins government policies of assimilation, integration, devolution and mainstreaming from the 1850s until today” (p. 42).

<sup>3</sup> Le Heron et al. (2019) use “the concept of shallow regulation in [ANZ] to describe a particular system of checks and balances within which contestation can play out with fewer rather than more policy and other restrictions on investor and public decision making and investment directions” (p. 4). Such a context, they argue, places “a premium on purposive self-organising behaviour instead of acquiescing to government directives [...] proactive and evolutionary [participatory] processes [are] made possible because they are largely outside established formal institutions” (p. 4). However, the downside is that such movements depend “on wider acceptance into existing institutions and investor worlds before change can be initiated” (ibid., p. 4).

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## Part II: Urban environmental ethics in expert marine spatial planning

Chapter 3 is based on the published book chapter

Aschenbrenner, M. 2023a. The political ecology of a diverse urban ethics of marine stewardship in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. In *Urban ethics as research agenda: Outlooks and tensions on multidisciplinary debates*, eds. R. Acosta, E. Dürr, M. Ege, U. Prutsch, C. v. Loyen, and G. Winder, 56-78. Routledge: New York, London. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003346777-4> © 2023 by Routledge. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/CC-BY-NC-ND>

Chapter 4 is based on the published peer-reviewed article

Aschenbrenner, M. 2023b. Urban environmental ethics and coastal transformations: Remapping the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, in a process of marine spatial planning. *Maritime Studies*, 22 (3): 33. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-023-00321-5> © 2023 by SpringerNature. Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, Changes in title, spelling and formatting.





### 3 The political ecology of a diverse urban ethics of marine stewardship in Auckland

This chapter is based on the published book chapter by Aschenbrenner, M. 2023a. The political ecology of a diverse urban ethics of marine stewardship in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. In *Urban ethics as research agenda: Outlooks and tensions on multidisciplinary debates*, eds. R. Acosta, E. Dürr, M. Ege, U. Prutsch, C. v. Loyen, and G. Winder, 56-78. Routledge.

#### 3.1 Introduction

Coastal zones can be urban. Historically, they have been places of settlement and arrival, of food sources, transport, and networking. Multiple and complex nature-culture relations have evolved as cities have formed in and with coastal environments. Urban coasts can be regarded as interwoven networks of nonhuman and human actors, matter, and discourses – from the land to the sea (and *vice versa*). Modern coastal urban life(style) is shaped by and shapes coastal/marine relationships and interactions, be it in terms of climate change-induced rises in sea level, built infrastructure for flood protection, pollution, leisure activities, or sea-related business (McGranahan et al. 2007; Wong et al. 2014; UN Atlas of the Oceans 2016; Wyles et al. 2017; Gesing 2019). Thus, urbanity and urban lifestyles are also made, experienced, and negotiated in coastal cities. Their local context and land-sea interconnectedness needs to be considered when thinking about the question of ‘How should one live in the city?’ This chapter localises urban ethics in a coastal city with a special focus on its nature-culture entanglements. It is concerned with the ethics imagined and claimed in a coastal urban ethical field and places a particular emphasis on nature-culture relations and the kind of coastal city and coastal urban environmental ethics imagined. The chapter focuses on a governance process for coastal transformation, framing it as a meeting point of diverse urban ethical discourses, imaginaries, and claims. Analytically, it takes a governance perspective as well as one of social and environmental (in)justice (Barnett 2017; Dürr et al. 2019; Acosta García et al. 2022).

The analysis deals with a specific project of marine spatial planning (MSP) in the city of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa NZ). The process took place between 2013 and late 2016. A central part of the planning was the extensive participation of governmental agencies, Indigenous partners, business stakeholders, and civil society (all to a varying degree). The chapter is concerned with the negotiation and emergence of a new urban

environmental ethics and associated nature-culture imaginaries in this participatory planning space. Some questions are: What kind of urban coastal ethics were claimed, imagined, and assembled in this process? What role does the assembling of a new environmental ethics play? And what potential effects in terms of imagining and claiming specific lifestyles and nature-culture relations does it have?

Auckland and its urban dwellers share a long, interconnected history with the sea. The city has grown between three harbours of which the Waitematā, with its access to the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana (in the following: the Gulf), a designated coastal and marine part of the Pacific Ocean, can be considered the more central harbour – in terms of modern (Western) city dynamics and functions. The relationships between the Waitematā and the Gulf, Auckland’s urban dwellers, and the nonhuman parts of the land/sea are manifold. They are part of collective and individual identities, economic-environmental projects and imaginaries. Those interrelations, perceived as environmental risks such as runoffs, pollution, or overfishing, have been increasingly problematised in the last decade. A report by government authorities on the environmental state of the Gulf in 2011 brought to the fore the historical changes and environmental degradation which have occurred there and emphasised “the need to take urgent action” (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2011b; Peart 2019, p. 4). Former reports concentrated on urbanisation as “one of the great drivers of change in the state of the Hauraki Gulf’s environment” (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2008). The 2011 report was consciously aimed at “creating a [different] narrative that was ultimately disruptive,” as one of the lead writers framed it in 2019 (personal communication, March 7, 2019). Peart (2017, 2019) sees the 2011 report as providing an important impetus to efforts to initiate the subsequent MSP process, which was called Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari (SCTTTP).

The process differed considerably from other – technocratic – processes of MSP worldwide (Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019; Flannery & McAteer 2020). Process participants raised not only questions of spatial behaviour and (non-)use or management within the ongoing process but ethical claims, and narratives of *care*, *responsibility*, and *stewardship* that aimed at a transformation in behaviour and lifestyles, in imagining and relating to the Gulf. It seems that a new governmental rationality emerged in the participatory spaces of SCTTTP that aimed to disrupt current behaviour considered as unethical and environmentally harmful, and to improve the environmental state of the Gulf by making urban dwellers collectively into ‘good’ coastal citizens. The quest of reassembling nature-culture relations converged with particular forms of governing that greatly involved nongovern-

mental actors and motivated ethical reflection and self-governance – such as spaces of participation, round tables, and a repeated logic of consensus and collaboration in planning and decision-making (Campbell-Reid 2013; Dürr et al. 2019). In conclusion, SCTTTP could be read – and analysed – as a process of neoliberal, depoliticising governmentality (N. Rose 2000; Mouffe 2005; Swyngedouw 2009; Wilson & Swyngedouw 2014; Tafon 2018; Flannery & McAteer 2020). At the same time, this way of interpreting the urban ethical field of SCTTTP falls short in the particular context of Aotearoa NZ. Ethical claims and narratives in the settler state of Aotearoa NZ are not only connected to neoliberal forms of governing but – as the chapter aims to show – entangled with claims of (in)justice, diverse ontologies and discourses, and (post-)colonial relationships. It is necessary to acknowledge the place-specific context of this watery urban ethical field to understand what role ethical claims, narratives, and discourses play, and to learn more about dynamics of ethicisation in (coastal) urban contexts (Choi 2020). With this in mind, the chapter asks for the ways in which an *ethics of marine stewardship* was assembled in SCTTTP. It is interested in the *diverse* origins, discourses, and narratives of ‘good’ environmental stewardship and the nature-culture imaginaries and relations linked to it. It explores how exactly commonly accepted planning and decision-making norms and techniques, such as collaboration and consensus, were linked with an emergence of an ethics of stewardship. The aim is to understand the implications and effects of this emergent ethics of marine stewardship within both the political ecology of the Gulf and the nature-culture relations that are being (re)imagined and (re)assembled in the SCTTTP process.

The empirical analysis of the process of SCTTTP is based on data collected between April 2018 and July 2021 within a German Research Foundation research project. The mapping of the process, its actors, and important elements (e.g. actors’ interests and objectives, claims, narratives, events, legislations, documents) were identified from several primary and secondary sources, such as official and semi-official plans, reports and other publications, newsletter articles, and further media resources (videos and radio broadcasts). Authors and distributors of these sources were government and municipal institutions, science and academia, environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community organisations, private companies, and public media. In order to retrace the process of SCTTTP, selected elements were assembled and mapped using a visual mapping software application (Mattissek & Wiertz 2014). Semi-structured and narrative interviews and participant observations were incorporated to complement the data collection and analysis. These were conducted in three field stays in Aotearoa NZ from the end of 2018 to the

beginning of 2020 (a total of eight months). Concerning this chapter, 27 semi-structured interviews with experts regarding their role in and knowledge of SCTTTP were analysed in an inductive way and interpreted. Integrated in the following sections, these relate the diverse narratives of marine stewardship emerging in and from the process and their further implications.

The overall chapter is structured along following lines: I first outline the theoretical concepts influencing my understanding and viewpoint following the idea that “land-water spaces are place-specific entities, where geographic materialities and local contexts are deeply intertwined” (Choi 2020, p. 6). These concepts are themselves inspired and shaped by the research field and its entities. This means I take up *ethicalities* as an analytical lens to make an understanding of ethical ontologies in their diversity possible. The subsequent section accordingly analyses the Gulf as an ontologically diverse urban ethical assemblage where different moralities and ethical practices meet. The results section then traces the assembling of a diverse urban ethics of marine stewardship in the MSP process SCTTTP. Finally, the results are discussed from a political ecology viewpoint. Accordingly, I look at what ethical claims and imaginaries prevailed or were excluded. Did the assembling of an urban ethics of marine stewardship allow for claiming non-hegemonic nature-culture imaginaries, relations, and practices? Did it give justice to claims of Indigenous sovereignty and rights or can it rather be seen as a post-political form of neoliberal governance – reinforcing hegemonic perspectives, interests, and coastal practices. More generally, the question of inclusion and the potential marginalisation of people and social groups is raised.

### 3.2 Urban ethics, *ethicalities* and ‘ethical’ nature-culture relations

The chapter engages with *urban ethics* as a research approach (Dürr et al. 2019; Ege & Moser 2020a). It starts from an understanding of urban ethics as a field of interaction where actors problematise moral and social ideals, principles, and norms of living in a city. They all reassemble around the question of “how should one live in the city?” Instead of looking to identify a particular definition of ethics, the interest is in the claims and discourses that can be read as answers to the central question of how to live in a city. The process of SCTTTP is framed as a space where different ways of urban living with, in, and around the Gulf were problematised, and new ‘ethical’ nature-culture relations were assembled and imagined. The approach has benefited from the work of and exchange in the wider multidisciplinary German Research Foundation research group on urban ethics,

where contrasting traditions and approaches to ethics have been used and discussed (DFG Research Unit Urban Ethics 2021).

Commonly ethical claims, discourses, and practices are understood to be centred around human subjects and subject formation (Foucault 1993; Collier & Lakoff 2005; Dürr et al. 2019; Ege & Moser 2020a). Dürr et al. (2019) see ‘the ethical’ as defined by processes of subject formation. In their foundational contribution on a research agenda of urban ethics, they see the ethical as a question not just of individuals but of collectives, milieus, and groups, but which ultimately passes “through individuals’ work on their selves” (p. 2). Ege and Moser (2020b) link ethics to choices of individual subjects in their introduction to the anthology *Urban Ethics – Conflicts Over the Good and Proper Life in Cities*. They suggest *ethics* as choices that individuals “should make freely, on their own accord, because they are motivated by a desire to do what is ‘good’ and ‘right’ or ‘proper’” (Ege & Moser 2020a, p. 4). A lot of other publications on (urban) ethics, especially those written in the context of urban policy and governance (Rose et al. 2006; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), support such an understanding. The contributions to the anthology edited by Ege and Moser (2020b) also show that most (urban) ethical projects work with and through personal action and conduct, refer to moral orders, and link to human individual intentionality.

The empirical exploration of *urban ethics* in and around the Gulf in Auckland, Aotearoa NZ, challenges the focus on human agency, reflexivity, and individual intentionality identified and made by a lot of authors working on (urban) ethics (Foucault 1993; Butler 2005; Zigon 2008; Muehlebach 2012; Dürr et al. 2019). In the case of the Gulf, it is not necessarily the reflective engagement of individuals (or a group of individuals) with moral codes and their ‘good’ or ‘proper’ conduct of life that are fundamental and lead, or can lead, to an urban ethical situation (Ege & Moser 2020a). D. B. Rose (2000, p. 185) and others (Whyte & Cuomo 2017; Makey 2021; Wheaton et al. 2021) make us aware how Indigenous ethics must be understood more in a humanly decentred and relational way. D. B. Rose (2000) refers to Indigenous ethics as a “dialogical approach [located] in a system of mutually embedded relationships of care [in which] one can neither unfold nor enfold one’s self” (p. 186). Possibilities for mutual care emerge in connections and reciprocities, which “include humans, non-living things, and environments” (D. B. Rose 2000, p. 175). This short ‘definition’ does not display the complexity, multiplicity, and local embeddedness of Indigenous ethics. However, it suggests that a human-centred understanding of urban ethics in Auckland’s settler-colonial society probably falls short of the diversity of *ethicalities* pre-

sent and in formation (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Limiting one's view on discourses of and claims made on individuals' (or groups') agency means to potentially (re-)inscribe a Western *regime of truth* (Smith 2012). It overlooks the political-ecological aspects and implications of exactly such individual and human-centred claims and ethics being assembled in and around the SCTTTP process. Thus, this chapter understands urban ethics as a field of interaction where fundamentally different – *diverse* – ontological conceptualisations of ethics are problematised and assembled. The claims made in SCTTTP concern the question of how one should live in the city, but answers rely on different knowledge and ontological understandings of subjectivity, agency, and the emergence of ethical living.

Indigenous, feminist, ecofeminist, deep-ecology, and relational materialist analyses have questioned anthropocentric conceptualisations of *ethics* (D. B. Rose 2000; Barad 2007; Whyte & Cuomo 2017; Olson 2018). Indigenous and feminist practices and movements place an emphasis on ontologies, ethics of care and caretaking, and the inter-connectedness of all human and more-than-human elements. However, Indigenous ethical systems and other more-than-human approaches should not be conflated (D. B. Rose 2000; Whyte & Cuomo 2017; Makey 2021). They differ in ideas, such as kinship, and Indigenous ontologies have long been “‘more-than-human’ and ecologically grounded [while] Euro-Western thinking is recently beginning to follow suit” (Yates 2021, p. 109). Western academics often reinforce colonial injustices by remaining silent on Indigenous ontologies when speaking of care ethics and more-than-human agency (Todd 2016).

María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) works in a feminist materialist tradition. The author's conceptualisation of *ethicalities* stands in this tradition but can offer a useful lens and understanding of the overall diversity of ethical ontologies, including Indigenous ethical systems. She understands ethics from a relational, natureculture point of view, as complex and emergent (also see Barad 2007). In referring to diverse *ethicalities*, the author differentiates between such an understanding and an anthropocentric understanding of ethics – attached to “rational, individual, [and] obviously human subjects” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 129). In the second case, Puig de la Bellacasa speaks of an *Ethics hegemonic*. Other ontological understandings – such as feminist approaches or Indigenous ethical systems – are framed as “anormative or not yet normative ethicalities” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 132). In the author's view, an *Ethics hegemonic* (with ‘Ethics’ capitalised) refers to modes of ethical normalisation. We live, according to the author, in an ‘age of ethics,’ in which the diversity of ethicalities remains unacknowledged. When authors criticise an

ethicisation and “*depoliticisation* of social life in neoliberalism” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 135; emphasis in original), they refer to an increasing resort to Ethics – thus, more claims made to the individual, rational subject (Dürr et al. 2019; Ege & Moser 2020a). At the same time, anormative or not yet normative ethicalities are being further disregarded. There is a diversity of ethical ontological systems in Auckland’s MSP which creates the background for the emergence of a new diverse urban ethics for the Gulf. An awareness of ethicalities in their diversity and the “possibilities emerging in terrains where the meanings of ethics are being reconfigured” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 135) is necessary to understand the dynamics in this complex field. It differs from a “blanket rejection of the spreading of ethics as depoliticisation” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 135) and is interested in the “colonising uses of Ethics and the particular forms of biosocialities that are produced in these processes” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 133).

Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) aims at opening speculative paths and possibilities for proposing new ethical visions in more than human worlds. This chapter takes a more analytical, post-structuralist perspective while trying not to do what the author criticises as ‘distant critique’. The chapter takes up a relational way of thinking about ethics in its view (Gesing 2019; Fischer 2020), based on Zigon (2010). The latter uses an analytical framing of a “moral and ethical assemblage [being a] unique aspectual combination of various institutional, public, and personal moral discourses and ethical practices” (Zigon 2010, p. 5). Broadening its view to anormative or not yet normative ethicalities and forms of ethical agency, the chapter explores the assembling of human and nonhuman entities, relations, and moral and ethical narratives, and claims and discourses in the process of SCTTTP. It is interested in how, in a field with a various assortment of knowledge, actors, and potentially conflicting agendas, certain nature-culture relations, imaginaries, and discourses are being assembled as ‘good’ (desirable, sustainable, caring) interactions. Taking a political ecology point of view, both nature and ‘ethical’ human interaction with it are approached as being results of political processes, with certain knowledge and its understanding of nature-culture relations and imaginaries becoming strategically naturalised ahead of others (Gesing 2016, 2019). The research explores the stabilisation of a potentially hegemonic urban ethical assemblage and its nature-culture relations in SCTTTP, as well as its effects and implications. It is concerned with the production of new territorial organisations and the remapping of space as new urban ethical claims and imaginaries emerge (Affolderbach et al. 2012; Müller 2015).

### 3.3 The Gulf as a diverse urban ethical field

Rather than comprehensively mapping the ethical and moral discourses at work in Auckland's coastal context (a task beyond the scope of this work), this section begins by using Zigon's (2010) approach to conceptualising a local moral and ethical assemblage and then moves to sketch in the additional elements – namely, Māori (Indigenous) concepts and ethics – required for an understanding of the Auckland assemblage.

Regarding the connected and fluid materiality and the historic and legislative context of the ocean, there is a multiplicity of institutions – and institutional moralities – coming together and overlapping in the context of the Gulf. Most originate from or are dominated by Euro-Western perspectives and share similar conceptions of nature-culture relations, such as those following binary logics (e.g. nature/culture, human/nonhuman), and their basic understandings of environmental morality and ethics (Yates 2021). At the same time, agendas, priorities, and ideas of how to arrange 'good' human-environment relations differ and partly conflict with each other.

The United Nations Law of the Sea of 1982 is the foundational document that sets out rights, standards, and principles in terms of coastal and marine government and management. It follows and consolidates a particular Euro-Western norm of stewardship that allows "individual social actors – or communities of actors – [to] act [...] temporarily appropriate, manage, and even transform the stewarded space in order to ensure that it continues to serve specified social ends" (Steinberg 1999, p. 258). The state of Aotearoa NZ is granted rights to its coastal waters under the law of the sea, and the Crown allocates responsibilities to ministers, ministries, agencies, and other actors to 'steward' the living and non-living resources of its waters. The Department of Conservation (DOC) with its competence for environmental conservation as well as the Ministry for Primary Industries responsible for the management of fisheries and aquaculture are just two examples along a wide spectrum of Crown officials, ministries, and public service departments with competences in the coastal area. The main interests and moralities of Crown institutions often differ and are partly incompatible. The DOC is interested in establishing a network of marine protected areas in the Gulf (Department of Conservation 2018). Its overall aim is one of environmental conservation connected primarily to moralities of non-use and protection, while the Ministry for Primary Industries wants to achieve sustainable *use* of Aotearoa NZ's fisheries through neoliberal market mechanisms (Winder 2018; Ministry for Primary Industries 2019). National agendas and norms are influenced by international



regulations, consultancy, and expert networks, and draw on international discourses of marine protection, sustainable development, or a blue economy, which often prioritise disparate aspects and principles while referring to mutual terms such as sustainability.

Multiple regional and local authorities complicate the moral and ethical assemblage around the Gulf. They hold responsibilities for managing the effects of using coastal waters, harbour navigation, safety, and marine pollution, as well as local infrastructure that may affect coastal waters, such as sewerage (Local Councils NZ 2020). Auckland Council and Waikato Regional Council have competencies in the Gulf as its two neighbouring regions. Auckland is Aotearoa NZ's most populous city and major financial centre (Stats NZ 2019). The Gulf area of Waikato Region is considered rural. This results in different imaginaries of the Gulf and how to exercise one's responsibilities and to what ends. Waikato Regional Council emphasises, among other things, the Gulf's value as a resource for aquaculture and primary production activities in the catchment area, such as forestry and farming (personal communication, March 23, 2019). Auckland Council frames the Gulf as a crucial economic, cultural, and social asset of the city, which distinguishes its identity and is essential in terms of its urban, recreational liveability (Auckland Council 2012, 2018). Auckland Council is again fragmented in itself. Its 21 local boards, although part of Auckland Council, identify in a variety of ways. Waiheke Local Board, for example, distances itself as the 'Gulf island community,' with its ideals, principles, and moralities, from the 'big city' and employs imaginaries of rural activities and relationships (Fischer 2020; personal communication, April 5, 2019). One can also identify controversial claims – and moralities – along lines of a good urbanity and urban living. Auckland City's different institutions, such as the council-controlled organisation Panuku Development or the council-owned company Ports of Auckland, follow disparate imaginaries, such as urban residential living, liveability, and access to the Gulf at a renewed waterfront, on the one hand, and trade development, industrial economic performance, and efficiency, on the other hand (POAL 2010; personal communications, April 5, 2019, and January 23, 2020).

The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act of 2000 established a marine park in the Gulf with a new statutory authority, the Hauraki Gulf Forum (HGF), to oversee its management (Peart 2017). The HGF consists of representatives of the multiple institutions and local Māori representatives. The idea of the forum was to integrate the management of the Gulf for better environmental outcomes – the HGF's key concern since its establishment. Since

then, the park act and HGF have not resulted in a unified morality among its members (Peart 2019).

In addition to the multiple formal institutional moralities, there are a number of nonformal NGOs with their own interests, views, and ideals of the 'good'. Many international (e.g. Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund) and national environmental organisations (e.g. Forest & Bird, the Environmental Defence Society) are active in the region. They connect largely to international moral discourses of nature conservation, and raise environmentalist concerns and interests, such as non-use areas (WWF New Zealand 2019), and others address governance and management practices (Environmental Defence Society 2019). Environmental NGOs also address societal attitudes and individual behaviour – they aim to initiate 'environment-friendly' practices – through education and environmental volunteer work (Keep NZ Beautiful 2019). Volunteer cleanup groups, such as the non-profit organisation *Sea Cleaners* organise rubbish removal activities in the Gulf, proclaim (and presuppose) individual responsibilities and an anthropocentric ethics in terms of addressing rational and knowledgeable (or yet to become knowledgeable) urban human subjects who are asked to reduce their harmful impacts on and restore the marine environment (own observation, February 17, 2019; Munro 2021). Private foundations and companies also support environmental conservation activities, networks, and developments. Toyota, for instance, initiated, in cooperation with the DOC, the *Kiwi Guardians* program for children's conservation education, which works all over Aotearoa NZ, including the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park (Department of Conservation 2022). Private companies, of course, follow additional interests and moralities oriented to economic and profit interests. What stands out is how NGOs, companies, and the public are enlisted especially as stewards of the Gulf's living resources, extending ocean governance "beyond the realm of [the] state [...]" (Steinberg 1999, p. 261) and its agencies.

Public discourses of moralities often offer "an alternative moral voice to that of institutional morality" (Zigon 2010, p. 8). Moral beliefs, conceptions, and hopes are articulated in several different public spheres, including media, protest, the arts and literature, or academia (Zigon 2010). People engage with, reflect, and problematise moral beliefs in ordinary urban practices of environmental care, as Jeannine-Madeleine Fischer (2020) shows in the case of 'land-based' Auckland, leading to them becoming *ethical*. This might be closely intertwined with the self-formation of individuals as ethical subjects and their work on themselves (Dürr et al. 2019; Gesing 2019; Fischer 2020). At the same time, this does

not to exclude the possibility of other public ethicalities which can be better understood as relational or post-human (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; also see Fischer 2020; Gesing 2019; Wheaton et al. 2021).

Crossing the conceptual categorisations made by Zigon (2010) and extending them, the overall moral and ethical assemblage in and around the Gulf ‘involves’ Māori world views and ethical ontological constructs. “In the case of [Aotearoa] NZ, marine spaces have been stewarded over the centuries by Māori. [In] the contemporary [Aotearoa] NZ marine scene [...] Māori and European worldviews, knowledge, and modes of governing“ (Le Heron et al. 2018, p. III) coexist. However, Māori moral/ethical ontologies cannot be understood as one morality amongst others, with ethics emerging out of a reflective and practical human engagement with the overall moral assemblage (Zigon 2010). Māori world views traverse (Indigenous) institutions and forms of organisations, sea- and water-related companies, and communities. They differ from the Euro-Western hegemonic ethicality of many institutions and need to be understood in their own terms (Wheaton et al. 2021). Acknowledging the problematic nature of thematising Māori concepts as a Western European (German), non-Māori author, which “can easily become instances of cultural appropriation” (Scott & Morton 2021, p. 3; Smith 2012), the limitations of my understanding of *kaitiakitanga* (to be explained hereafter) and Māori world views needs to be mentioned at this point. However, regarding the theoretical discussion of urban ethics in Auckland, I engage with authors and the work of human and nonhuman collaborators (Makey 2021) who bring these concepts to the fore in multifaceted ways. The aim is to bring these aspects to the discussion of urban ethics as a concept, and not to claim ‘objective correctness’ – while working to the best of my knowledge and beliefs.

“For Māori [...] connections to moana (sea) have particular significance having provided physical and spiritual sustenance since the arrival of the seminal voyaging canoes between 800-1350AD” (Wheaton et al. 2021, p. 6). Leane Makey (2021) describes Māori ontology as a complex system of connection and mutually embedded relationships bridging, or dissolving, European binary distinctions between humans and nonhumans. “[N]ature is indistinguishable from culture” (Makey 2021, p. 1) within Māori ontology, and “it is the relation, or connection, not the thing itself, that is ontologically privileged” (Hoskins & Jones 2017, p. 26). Geological, atmospheric, hydrological, and biological entities are “connected to people through kin-based relationships and treated as (or are) ancestors and family members” (Makey 2021, p. 7), which is why authors prefer the term *more-than-human*

(and not, e.g. nonhuman) (Makey 2021; Yates 2021). “*Mauri*, a life-force or spirituality [flows] from, through, and between matter(s). Such embodiment connects the body with the metaphysical/spiritual to have relations with the mauri of M[ā]ori ancestral beings and Deities” (Makey 2021, p. 7; emphasis added). It enmeshes life “as a field or more-than-human collective” (Yates 2021, p. 102). A change in “mauri [...] of any part of the environment [...] would cause [changes] in the mauri of immediately related components” (Harmsworth & Awatere 2013, p. 276). According to Amanda Monehu Yates, “a care-full and ethical attention to living-well-with the more-than-human [is vital] in order to maintain mauri ora or life-field vitality” (2021, p. 102).

“For M[ā]ori people involved with the caring of ecosystems, the value and practice of kaitiakitanga maintains this relationship” (Makey 2021, p. 8). *Kaitiakitanga* as a socio-environmental ethic is not human centric but interwoven with and emergent from *whakapapa* (genealogy), reciprocal relationships, and *mauri*, *inter alia* (Makey 2021). *Kaitiakitanga* is a “practical philosophy” (Walker et al. 2019, p. 2) which “recognises that along with the privileges (food, shelter) associated with the environment, there is also a responsibility to offer care and maintain and sustain it for future generations” (Wheaton et al. 2021, p. 7; also see Kawharu 2010).

Place and practice are inextricably linked in tribal relationships with the land and the sea, and the maintenance of connections is of central importance and essential to well-being (Forster 2016; Wheaton et al. 2021). “British colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand diminished the influence of the tribal territory on Indigenous autonomy, identity, and belonging” (Forster 2016, p. 316). It established British forms of governance and English norms as “valid and appropriate structures for governing the environment” (Forster 2016, p. 321). This included an extractive economy agenda for ocean resources and Euro-Western norms, such as property and stewardship. At the same time, it displaced Māori environmental beliefs and practices and deliberately excluded Māori from participation in systems and institutions (Forster 2016). Colonial repression and disregard of Māori environmental interests and perspectives were exercised despite the presence of the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840. The agreement between representatives of the Crown and Māori tribes “granted British governance in New Zealand as well as the continued recognition of Māori authority over tribal matters” (Forster 2016, p. 321). Successive developments, such as the urbanisation of Māori communities, further diminished and challenged traditional relationships,

and have “changed societal structures and narratives, as well as connections with nature” (Walker et al. 2019, p. 1).

But “Māori have a long history of challenging the authority of the Crown where [...] Māori environmental perspectives and interests” (Forster 2016, p. 326) are disregarded. Forster sees *kaitiakitanga* as a key vehicle in the Māori resistance and achievements to renegotiate norms and inequitable relationships. *Kaitiakitanga* has, as contemporary socio-environmental ethics based on a Māori world view, worked to achieve involvement in systems and institutions for the governance and management of natural resources (Forster 2016). Along with the term *stewardship* and commonly translated as *guardianship*, *kaitiakitanga* has become increasingly embedded in environmental politics and is also prevalent in legislation for resource management, fisheries, and conservation (Scott & Morton 2021). Walker et al. (2019) view the increasing inscription of *kaitiakitanga* into legislation critically. The embedded definitions of *kaitiakitanga* align only weakly with current practices in Māori communities. They are also lacking in their philosophical understanding as they de-emphasise spirituality, place-based narratives, kinship, and intergenerational knowledge.

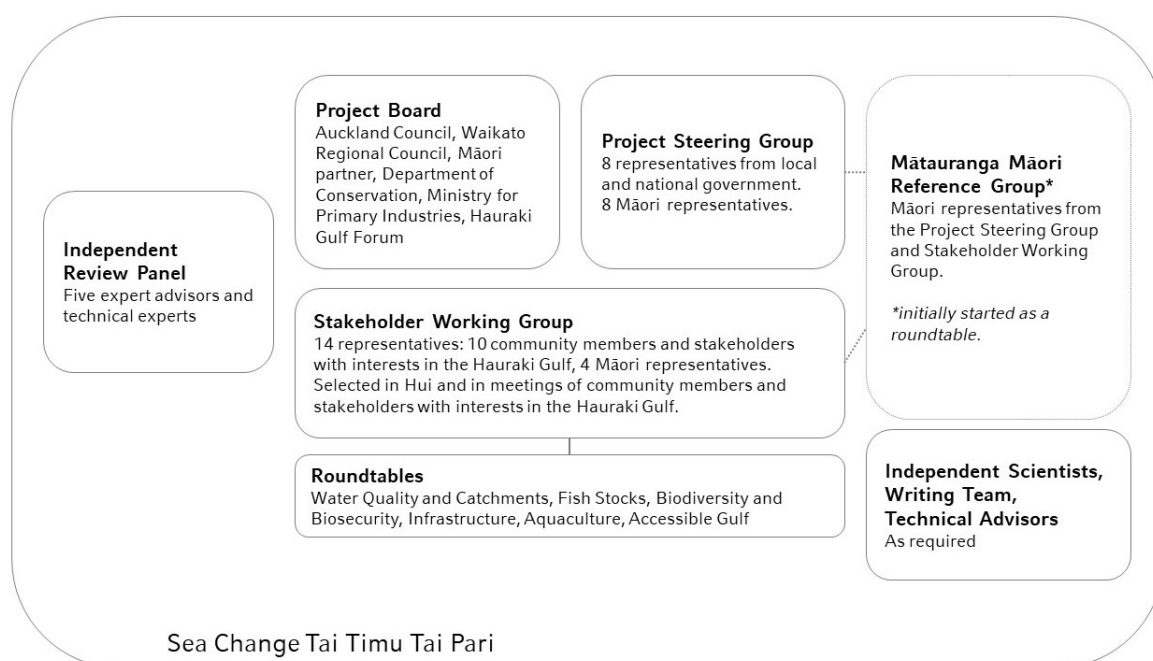
When framing Auckland and the Gulf as an urban ethical field, where different ethics become negotiated and assembled, it is utterly important to acknowledge precolonial rights and ethical systems, and the consequences of colonisation. In doing so, concepts of stewardship and *kaitiakitanga* need to be understood in their diversity and as being potentially in conflict with each other. The term ‘stewardship’ stems from Euro-Western contexts, while it has been reshaped when assembled with *kaitiakitanga* and guardianship in resource management and legislation. This changed and broadened context-specific understandings and connotations of stewardship and *kaitiakitanga*. Focusing on stewardship as a norm guiding ocean governance, connected to elements of the commons and common property and linked to a ‘pragmatic’, human-centred ethics (Steinberg 1999; Davis 2015) further marginalises the anormative and not yet hegemonic ethicality of Māori ontological systems. This understanding creates the background for the further exploration of the context-specific assembling of different ethicalities and ethical narratives in the process of SCTTTP.

### 3.4 Assembling a diverse urban ethics of marine stewardship in Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari

The emergence of a context-specific ethics of marine stewardship and *kaitiakitanga* can be traced through several spaces and moments in the assemblage of SCTTTP. Three main projects and their elements came together in the early stage of assembling the SCTTTP MSP process. First, the need for change in coastal human-environment relationships was argued by an NGO and the HGF identifying and problematising the extent of polluted waterways, eroded landscapes, sediments, nutrient flows, and other ecosystem elements (Davison 2011; Hauraki Gulf Forum 2011b; Peart 2019). At the same time, they assembled discourses of (insufficient) marine conservation, marine protected areas, and institutional stewardship. The report of the HGF in 2011 composed new ecological narratives, measures, and baselines. It detected a concerning state of the environment, adopting a baseline prior to human settlement instead of a pressure-state-response framework similar to previous reports, and, thus, reframed and reimagined nature-culture relations. Second, through people, relationships, and an HGF report in 2011 which reviewed the worldwide use of MSP, setting it up as an option for the Gulf, the growing international discourse on MSP “as a tool or method through which to achieve ‘better’ or more comprehensive ocean management” (Boucquey et al. 2016, p. 5) ‘settled’ locally. Aspects of conflict resolution in MSP – between diverse agencies, uses/users and viewpoints, ecosystems, and humans – became emphasised, and a vision of reconciliation, consensus, and agreement emerged (Mouffe 2005; Hauraki Gulf Forum 2010, 2011a; Campbell-Reid 2013). Finally, Māori have fought post-colonial and still colonising (in)justices, receiving increasing awareness. Insufficient involvement in the governance and management of the Gulf, disregard of *mātauranga* (Māori world views and knowledge) and the ongoing weakening of the Gulf’s *mauri* have diminished the ability to exercise *kaitiakitanga*. These violations of the Treaty have continuously been challenged and not yet been solved (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016a).

At the beginning of SCTTTP, several elements of these disparate ‘projects’ assembled together: Charles Ehler, leading MSP consultant to UNESCO, was present at the launch of SCTTTP in Auckland in 2013. This built a link to the global discourse of MSP, invoking certain Euro-Western norms, such as marine stewardship, spatial planning, and ecosystem-based management (Ehler 2013; Flannery & McAteer 2020). Ludo Campbell-Reid, who codesigned SCTTTP for Auckland Council, presented the project emphasising and

integrating a collaborative and stewardship vision that spoke to the common responsibility of (urban) communities and institutions to engage as ‘champions’ and ‘expert ecosystem builders’ in the management of the Gulf to improve its environmental state (Campbell-Reid 2013). Furthermore, elements to make ocean governance more just were introduced. The structure of SCTTTP involved a co-governance approach at a governance level, meaning that the Project Steering Group consisted of the same number of government institution representatives as Māori representatives with territorial authority (see Fig. 3.1). A guiding vision for the project was established that took up elements of *kaitiakitanga* and values plausible for Euro-Western ethics of environmental conservation (Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari 2015).



**Fig. 3.1** Structure of the Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari process (Figure: M. Aschenbrenner after the Office of the Auditor General 2017; Peart 2019).

The selection process for the Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) members, who would take over the main plan development, followed a bicultural agenda and norms. Māori members were selected in *hui* (meetings) corresponding with customary Māori practices. The selection of non-Māori members was asserted differently and followed logics that deviated a lot from official Euro-Western participation conventions. It involved a diverse group of people, invited as representatives of interest groups and the public. This group selected SWG members in a stepwise process. Those interested in becoming members needed to relate to a discursive set of moralities by presenting themselves as ‘good’ poten-

tial representatives in front of the group at some point of the process. As post-process narratives show, a strong ideal of legitimate participation by embodying an ‘ethical’ individual formed. As interviewees recounted, people *should* represent an individual subject. They *should* “take off [their] mandated spokesperson hat for this group” (personal communication, March 19, 2019). They had to reflect on their morality by getting “up in front of that group of people and say, I’m this kind of person [...] I can work with people to try and reach solutions [...] and become a voice for the Gulf” (personal communication, March 19, 2019). Participants were also asked to be collaborative rather than ‘disruptive.’ They should be ‘open-minded,’ in the sense of being open to a personal transformation from primarily supporting vested interests to putting their individual endeavours for the recovery and conservation of the Gulf’s ecosystems first (Peart 2018; personal communication, November 16, 2018). One’s own version of being a legitimate SWG member and steward for the Gulf was formed here.

A specific ethic of stewardship assembling particular narratives and claims of guardianship and *kaitiakitanga* was also constituted and repeatedly invoked in the subsequent planning and bargaining process. It functioned as a boundary concept in the SWG process – allowing the group to work collaboratively despite their different knowledge and interests (Affolderbach et al. 2012; personal communication, February 18, 2019). A member of the SWG described ‘guardianship’ and its role in the SWG as follows:

“It is a sort of an ethics or a principle that underpins things generally, everyone could agree at this macro level that guardianship was very important [...] But actually, when you start talking about what does it mean [...] everyone had their own different way of thinking about what guardianship means for them. But you found that they had very strong agreement that it was incredibly important” (Personal communication, February 18, 2019).

Claims of “being a voice for the Gulf” were invoked and assembled in moments in the process when conflicts arose, in order to reach agreement and collaborative behaviour, as another member recalled:

“At the end of the day, when we were discussing quite a contentious point, trying to get agreement [...] one of the members [of the SWG] said: ‘Well, at the end of the day, we have to do what is best for the Gulf [...],’ and that was the touch stone in our process [...]. At the end of the day, we were all there because we wanted the Gulf to improve [...] we were there for a purpose, everyone in there wasn’t there just to protect their own interest; they were there because they believed that something had to be done. They were concerned about the



state of the Gulf [...] certainly that was a very important touchstone; it was the state of the Gulf that was important” (Personal communication, October 23, 2018).

While becoming the common ground on which compromise could be reached, an ethic of stewardship for the Gulf was simultaneously assembled involving diversity and comprising collaborative behaviour – framed by interview partners as ‘gifting and gaining’ (personal communications, March 23, 2019, and March 03, 2020).

The final SCTTTP documents, their maps, and narratives, and the narratives of people interviewed, with some distance in time from the process, show how a diverse urban ethics of marine stewardship was temporarily stabilised in its interpretation, aspects, and ascribed role. Interviewees stressed the bicultural dimension of the emergent ethic. While a Māori interview partner described guardianship and *kaitiakitanga* as an ‘easy fit’ code of conduct, the same person made a clear distinction between *kaitiakitanga* as a practice which is open to everyone, and those who can legally and culturally be *kaitiaki*, which are only those who are linked genealogically to a tribe with territorial authority (personal communication, March 19, 2019). An essential aspect of this ethics is meant to be its ‘strong political narrative’ and the acknowledgment of biculturalism, in terms that it acknowledges *Mana Whenua* (local tribes and their authority), realises a Treaty-Crown partnership, and takes into account Māori cultural values (personal communication, November 16, 2018). Thus, it is meant to be a *diverse* ethical concept and not bound to a Western (ethical) ontology. The ethics became further shaped in the SCTTTP final document, of which it is the underlying narrative and theme (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016b). The restoration of the *mauri* of the Gulf, some non-Māori interviewees for their part used the wording ‘health of the Gulf,’ is at the centre of the report. One of the leading authors said: “It [guardianship/*kaitiakitanga*] became embedded throughout [and] each chapter would have had different ways in which you might express those principles” (personal communication, February 18, 2019).

Part of this diverse ethics of stewardship is the practice of *guardianship* and *kaitiakitanga* – used somewhat synonymously – as ‘code of conduct’ and ‘environmental ethics,’ in the sense of ‘ethical’ living. A Māori interviewee suggested an evolution and change of *kaitiakitanga* (as a concept) toward human agency and into modern needs and demands: “If people are undertaking actions that lead to revitalising the *mauri* of the Hauraki Gulf [...] they are practicing *kaitiakitanga*” (personal communication, March 19, 2019). Guardianship/*kaitiakitanga* is understood as “taking responsibility of things you can influence and

recognising the importance of long-term restoration and future generations” (personal communication, February 18, 2019). In addition to being narrated as a theoretical ethic, interviewees approached guardianship/*kaitiakitanga* from an empirical perspective. They observed it as a powerful, disrupting element that has evolved in the SWG’s process, a transformation and change in “terms of peoples’ world views” (personal communication, March 26, 2019). People *became* voices of the Gulf, paying “care-full” (Yates 2021, p. 102) attention to maintaining its health or *mauri* (personal communications, March 7, 19, 26, 2019). This also implies a narrative and growing acknowledgment with non-Māori members of the authority and vitality of the Gulf, and the role of people to speak on its behalf as it is embedded in Māori ontological systems and an ethics of *kaitiakitanga* – and as it is recognised in legislations, such as the Waikato River Authority and Te Urewera Board, where, respectively, the river or national park are recognised as legal entities/persons (Forster 2016).

The diverse ethics of marine stewardship became increasingly territorialised in the form of spatially defined areas. Māori representatives proposed *Ahu Moana* (*ahu* = nurture, build up; *moana* = the ocean) areas late in the planning process, and they were inscribed into maps and the final document. They were defined as “localised near-shore co-management areas along the length of the Hauraki Gulf and its islands, that will extend from mean high water springs (the high tide mark) generally 1 km out” (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016b, p. 52). They are meant to be co-managed by local tribes and communities. *Ahu Moana*, in their view, reflects the linkage of tribal relationships with place. They should enable Māori self-determination, *kaitiaki* responsibilities, and practice. At the same time, they assembled non-Māori communities with elements and logics of care, environmental behaviour, and localness. Eventually, interviewees narrated an ethics of marine stewardship as localness and local self-determination. One interviewee suggested that the “*Ahu Moana* concept [in] many ways reflects the guardianship [theme]. It’s about providing [...] local communities with the opportunity to have their own say” (personal communications, February 18, 19, 28, 2019). With the constitution of *Ahu Moana* and a spatial remapping, a further *urban* dimension is added to marine stewardship beyond being constituted in an urban context. Part of the logic of *Ahu Moana* is the possibility of self-determination in a tribal complex and urbanised environment. A specific form of local urban guardianship/*kaitiakitanga* is formed that imagines a nationwide unique urban marine park and specific ‘good’ and valuable nature-culture relations, as the illustrations of *Ahu Moana* in

the SCTTTP follow-up report 'Revitalising the Gulf' by the national government also show (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016b; Department of Conservation et al. 2021).

### 3.5 Interpretation and implications of an emergent ethics of stewardship for the Gulf

The complex and diverse assemblage of an urban ethics of marine stewardship that emerged in the process of MSP in Auckland, Aotearoa NZ, shows that it is essential not to confine an understanding of *ethics* to human agency, individual responsibility and behaviour. The background here is a complex urban ethical field where diverse *ethicalities* meet. While nonhuman-centric Māori ethical ontological systems have been intertwined with the land/sea and its people since the landing of the different voyaging canoes, a Euro-Western, anthropocentric understanding of ethics has become hegemonic and has been enforced in many institutions and public areas since colonisation. *Stewardship* is a contested idea here, which is interlinked with a colonising use of Ethics (hegemonic), establishing particular forms of ocean governance and nature-culture imaginaries and relations. At the same time, the term *stewardship* has taken different forms and been linked to and sometimes used interchangeably with *kaitiakitanga*. This has led to the assembling of diverse forms of 'ethical' stewardship/*kaitiakitanga* in Aotearoa NZ legislation, but often only weakly aligned with Māori philosophy and practices (Walker et al. 2019; Scott & Morton 2021).

The process of SCTTTP shows how MSP can constitute an ethical field where diverse ethicalities are assembled, claimed, and contested, especially in terms of a still hegemonic Ethics of marine stewardship (Steinberg 1999; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). It was used to challenge post-colonial and still colonising injustices against both humans and more-than-humans. In the process, a diverse urban ethics of marine stewardship emerged that assembled environmental concerns and conservation interests, self-determination, co-governance/management, and biculturalism with governmental techniques and rationalities of collaboration, agreement, and consensual decision-making. It reimagines hegemonic nature-culture relations in terms of an urban Gulf community becoming the *Voice of the Gulf* and following a code of conduct or environmental ethic of guardianship/*kaitiakitanga* for revitalising the *mauri* and health of the Gulf. It also takes a spatial dimension by assembling localness and establishing *Ahu Moana* – near shore, community and Māori co-managed 'ocean care' – areas. This shows the importance of looking at the

many possibilities emerging in such a terrain where the actual meanings of ethics are being reconfigured (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 135).

At the same time, there is a potential danger of ethical imperatives of guardianship/ *kaitiakitanga* being singled out, in the sense of governmental techniques. The 20th anniversary of the Marine Park held in February 2019 in Auckland showed how demands of ‘good’ environmental behaviour were easily singled out and used by the state to request individual responsibilities and action of individuals in the form of voluntary ‘care’ work (own observation, February 27, 2020). This holds the fundamental danger of further cultural appropriation and the continuation of colonising practices, discourses, and imaginaries.

From a political ecology point of view, it is worth looking closer at the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion and power connected to the emergence of this ethics. *Kaitiakitanga* and local self-determination is a “critical mechanism for realising Māori autonomy in relation to resource management” (Forster 2016, p. 324). When linking rationalities of care, localness, and self-determination to not exclusively Indigenous communities and participants in SCTTP as ‘voices of the Gulf,’ the question arises: *Who* speaks for the Gulf? And who is, and can be, part of a ‘Gulf community’? In the SWG selection process, people were answerable for themselves as ‘ethical’ subjects in relation to a certain discursive framework (Butler 2005), but other elements, such as living close to the Gulf or being active in some way, as well as having expert knowledge also played a role in terms of inclusion/exclusion. This determines participation in the future, which became spatially inscribed through *Ahu Moana*. While potentially excluding specific individuals not complying with the hegemonic ethical narratives, it also means limited access and participation of urban dwellers living in distant suburbs (while not necessarily determined by physical distance). This is critical when thinking about unequal urban conditions, such as property prices, access to the ocean, and (ocean) literacy. There is a risk of the Gulf becoming an ‘urban park’ closely related to and reflecting urban conditions, processes, and injustices. Potential injustices have also emerged for other marine areas, such as the Manukau Harbour located to the southwest of Auckland and its connected people (personal communication, February 19, 2019). There are less focus and financial means for these areas due to Western city structures, dynamics, and measurements. The case study demonstrates the interconnection of “‘the urban’ with place-specific ethics in the case of Auckland.

It is still generally hard to anticipate the effective consequences of an emergent diverse urban ethics of marine stewardship. Various efforts by local and national government in-

stitutions to implement SCTTTP are ongoing. A national government action report was released in July 2021 but the non-statutory nature of SCTTTP combined with the elusive character of ‘ethics’ complicates implementation. Some agency representatives and experts in power have questioned the legitimacy of the process and the rightfulness to implement the components in the plan. They have challenged SCTTTP primarily for its form and rationalities of participation. A clash is shown between their understandings and the logics of participation and decision-making along the lines of marine stewardship as made in the SWG. According to some experts and agency staff, those holding a particular expertise, such as planners, scientists, or interest holders, should be in charge of MSP decision-making. They also criticised SCTTTP for its ‘undemocratic’ approach because SWG members did not hold a proper democratic mandate and did not sufficiently engage with the broader public. More research will be needed in terms of a potentially changing ethical ontology, Indigenous rights, and changing nature-culture relations, which this chapter can only provide in a very limited way regarding my own position and perspective as a European, non-Māori researcher. A transformation also depends a lot on the ability – and willingness – of those in power to take relevant decisions and measures, especially as claims of ‘democracy’ are continuously invoked in spaces around the Gulf’s management and governance and attempt to challenge partnership approaches and principles (own observation at SCTTTP public meeting, March 6, 2019).

Finally, this chapter objects to “a blanket rejection of the spreading of ethics as depoliticisation” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 135). As has been shown, *urban ethics* can be an important dimension in urban struggles of rights, self-determination, and decolonisation. There can be a transformative dimension coming along with urban ethics. In order to acknowledge this ‘political edge,’ it is of utter importance to perceive ethics in their diversity, and to pay attention to anormative and not yet normative ethicalities. The problem and danger of a depoliticisation of social life in neoliberalism as political problems are reduced to ethics and tend to become individualised, is also linked to the narrowing definitions of and viewpoints on ethics in the field of an Ethics hegemonic. When looking at the struggles and negotiations around SCTTTP from a viewpoint of not yet normative ethicalities, it appears that “radical dissent, critique, and fundamental conflict” (Swyngedouw 2009, p. 608) were not evacuated from the political arena by ‘the ethical,’ as theories of post-politics and depoliticisation suggest (Mouffe 2005). Māori ethics constitute a collective way of living which is persistently claimed and fought for. Existing beyond and within the neoliberal paradigm, they contain non- and alternative neoliberal aspects and (co-

)constitute a diverse economy (Gibson-Graham 2005, 2008). From this perspective, they can offer hope and possibilities for coastal nature-culture futures (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Bargh 2018; O'Sullivan 2018; Lewis 2019). At the same time, ethical dynamics are complex. As possibilities emerge, their assembling in the governance of coastal urban spaces can potentially lead to depoliticised discourses of an Ethics hegemonic, cultural appropriation, and attempts of neoliberal governmentality as has been shown. One needs to be aware of these somewhat paradoxical dynamics of urban ethics in order not to lose sight of the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, (in)justices, or colonising tendencies when considering transformative possibilities of ethics in (coastal) cities.

### 3.6 Conclusion

As the public awareness of marine- and coast-related risks and problems grows, approaches and claims of how to reach 'better' ('moral,' 'ethical,' 'sustainable') coastal futures increase, and these often involve claims of 'how should one live' (Bennett 2018; Fletcher and Potts 2007). Urban coastal areas are particularly affected by growing risks, of which they are also the cause to a large extent. In these complex land/sea contexts, travelling ideas, moralities, and ethics, such as those imbricated in MSP or marine stewardship, settle and are assembled, taking effect on nature-culture relations. At the same time, ethics are, as shown in this chapter, essentially local, raised in and from networks of humans and nonhumans, and are bound to them and the specific place in their practice. They are important parts of the urban ethical field of coastal cities. In terms of 'better' coastal urban futures, it is important to acknowledge both ethics as constitutive of the political ecologies of urban, coastal spaces and coastal nature-cultures as constitutive of urban ethics.

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## 4 Remapping the Hauraki Gulf Tīkapa Moana, Auckland, in a process of marine spatial planning

This chapter is based on the published peer-reviewed article by Aschenbrenner, M. 2023b. Urban environmental ethics and coastal transformations: Remapping the Hauraki Gulf Tīkapa Moana, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, in a process of marine spatial planning. *Maritime Studies*, 22 (3): 33. For the original article see also Appendix A.2.

### 4.1 Introduction

Policy approaches like marine spatial planning (MSP) or a blue economy (BE) try to provide answers to the question of how to achieve a *better* future for marine and coastal ecosystems and people alike. Despite being shaped and promoted by international and supra-regional institutions, they are locally realised and differ in their practical implementation (Douvere & Ehler 2009; Jones et al. 2016). What they have in common is the aim to tackle increasing risks, conflicts, and change by transforming ways of interacting, doing business, and living with the sea – so reassembling the human and more-than-human, foremost in coastal spaces (Winder & Le Heron 2017). Projects that aim for a coastal transition and reorganisation entail a normative dimension and are not only political but in many ways “ethical projects” (Ege & Moser 2020). The question whether MSP/BE induce an actual transformation of socionatural relations and lead “towards more equity-based, democratic decision-making and a fairer distribution of our ocean wealth” (Flannery et al. 2016, p. 121) or rather push a neoliberalisation of marine management is of concern to academics (Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019; Fairbanks et al. 2019; Clarke & Flannery 2020; Ege & Moser 2020; Flannery & McAteer 2020). This chapter engages with the question of a socionatural transformation and empowerment in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ), where an MSP project as answer to a deteriorating environmental state of the Hauraki Gulf (the Gulf) was carried out in a wider environment of marine transition endeavours. The project involved ethicised and moralised discourse in the form of normative imperatives, reflections, and ideas of ‘good’ and ‘right’ living and planning for the Gulf such as claims of consensus, collaboration, and marine stewardship (Ege & Moser 2020; Aschenbrenner 2023a). The chapter is interested in this project and its emergent natural-cultural<sup>1</sup> and governmental imaginaries and narratives with a focus on the question in what ways new, ‘ethical’, emancipatory, and potentially disruptive urban marine-envi-

mental geographies have been assembled. At the same time, it critically discusses *ethicisation* – the tendency to frame (urban) questions (discourses, conflicts) as questions of ethics – as a form of neoliberal governmentality, by which conflicts and antagonistic positions in environmental bargaining are potentially being depoliticised and *tamed* (Dürr et al. 2019). That way it links to recent critical social scientific work, in which scholars found MSP and BE projects to be assembled around neoliberal logics and principles, and as showing signs of a neoliberal governmentality and post-political state (Tafon 2018; Flannery & McAteer 2020).

The lack of an actual transformation of urban – and marine – socionatural and power relations is often associated with an absence of “alternative[s] to the [neoliberal] mainstream paradigm and potentially disruptive ideas” (Haughton et al. 2013, p. 231). This absence is – with reference to political philosophers Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière – regarded as a characteristic of a post-political condition, which much environmental and marine politics are said to have arrived in (Swyngedouw 2009; Haughton et al. 2013; Tafon 2018; Flannery & McAteer 2020). The *political*, understood by Mouffe as a dimension of antagonism, contestation, and conflict, is being replaced in post-political arrangements by consensus-based politics and a shift to ethico-moral (instead of political) categories. Put in highly simplified terms, the ability to express antagonistic positions to question and disrupt a given order of things is being limited (Mouffe 2005; Rancière 2006; Allmendinger & Haughton 2012). Several authors observed a containment of conflict and progressive elements in MSP favouring neoliberal objectives such as economic growth, efficiency, or a narrow definition of sustainable development – often by measures of technocratic-managerial forms of governance, tokenistic participation, and claims of singular, objective truths (Flannery et al. 2018; Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019; Clarke & Flannery 2020).

While scholars identified (aspects of) post-political conditions in several MSP projects, some concluded that this does not mean a general depoliticisation of these spaces (Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019). Authors researching neoliberal governance and planning in other contexts described and discussed similar and somewhat complex and apparently paradoxical processes: While neoliberal modes of governance might “foreclose or displace [the] proper political dimension” (Haughton et al. 2013, p. 222), they can be accompanied by a change in state-civil society relationships attributing an increasing role to civil society, including non-governmental organisations (NGO). Greater public in-



volvement and socially liberal identity politics can create open spaces where “everyone is treat[ed] as equal speaking beings” (Haughton et al. 2013, p. 222), and people or groups are able to freely express their political views (Swyngedouw 2005; McCormack 2012). Assessments of and opinions on these processes have been manifold and also contradictory (Speed & Sierra 2005; Kingfisher & Maskovsky 2008; Lewis et al. 2009; Swyngedouw 2009; Haughton et al. 2013; Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017; Bargh 2018). Scholars generally agree that there actually is not *one* neoliberalism or form of neoliberalisation but processes and effects like those of (dis)empowerment or (de)politicisation that are contextual, complex, and potentially coexist (Peck & Tickell 2002; McCormack 2012; Olesen 2014). In terms of researching marine management and politics, this indicates the value, and necessity, of a general openness and “reading for difference” (Gibson-Graham 2008). In relation to this chapter, it means going beyond diagnosing a potential post-political condition, by untangling the multiple, tangled truths, narratives, and imaginaries and thereby paying attention to disruptions and progressive alternatives to/in (potentially) neoliberal MSP, especially when expressed in *ethical* terms (Flannery & McAteer 2020; Aschenbrenner 2023a).

The chapter thinks through and with a lens of *urban ethics* (Dürr et al. 2019; Ege & Moser 2020). It understands the project of MSP in Auckland, *Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari* (SCTTTP, 2013-2016), as a process of environmental bargaining (Affolderbach 2011). SCTTTP was initially championed by an environmental NGO and the Hauraki Gulf Forum (HGF), an integrative, statutory body with the purpose to enhance the conservation and sustainable management of the Gulf (NZ government 2000; Peart 2019). Here, environmental bargaining is understood, drawing on Affolderbach (2001), as “a process through which [antagonistic actors] seek to change existing decision-making processes and outcomes [...] to reflect environmental imperatives” (p. 182).<sup>2</sup> The political-economic context of Auckland is one of far-reaching neoliberal reform and relaxing regulatory conditions. SCTTTP took the form of a formal bargaining process without being properly formalised – it was non-statutory but publicly funded, quasi-independent, and broadly participatory (Lewis & Murphy 2015; Le Heron et al. 2018). This complies with ideas of, especially urban, neoliberal governance, where a greater role and responsibility is assigned to private economic actors and civil society, thus allowing the formal integration of processes like SCTTTP into a greater neoliberal logic (Swyngedouw 2005; Haughton et al. 2013). The SCTTTP process and its outcomes were intended to be collaborative and consensus-based, and they involved ethical claims-making and questions. A research perspective of *urban ethics* draws these aspects into focus. It brings awareness to normativity and ethics as a

register in which environmental bargaining takes place, not only since, but increasingly as neoliberal forms of governing become normalised (Rose 2000; Muehlebach 2012; Dürr et al. 2019).

An “ethicisation of discourses and conflicts” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 8) is often considered symptomatic of a neoliberal governmentality and post-political condition. Urban ethical lines of thought, as outlined by Dürr et al. (2019), bring, at the same time, awareness to ethics as antagonism to capitalist, neoliberal logics. Claiming ethics of care, collective responsibilities, commoning, interdependence, or affect can provide progressive imaginaries, and be part – or the basis – of attempts to establish an alternative *better* social order, enhanced resourcefulness, and to intervene into the economisation of marine resources (Tronto 1999; Sevenhuijsen 2000; Amin 2006; Gibson-Graham 2006; Popke 2006; St Martin 2007; Gibson-Graham 2008; Popke 2010; McCormack 2018; Lewis 2019). It is important to take an explicit focus on these complex, and somewhat ambiguous dynamics of an ethicisation, to better understand processes and power struggles in land/sea contexts.

The chapter’s objective is to theoretically, as well as empirically, explore and discuss the *informal* – normative and ethical – dimension of urban environmental bargaining, and coastal transition endeavours. Therefore, the chapter centres urban ethics in its theoretical approach and research. It draws a distinction between a normative-strategic transition approach and an analytic, post-structuralist point of view on *transformations* (affected by, but not confined to, transition objectives). Its perspective is the latter. Coastal transition initiatives like MSP are said to be in many ways ethical projects – spaces for bargaining and implementing ethico-moral principles (Ege & Moser 2020). This framing facilitates a focus on ethical problematisations and claims-making, in which ‘good’ (right, sustainable, etc.) ways of living are problematised and/or claimed, and their role in remapping urban coastal spaces. Urban ethics as a research perspective opens up a spectrum on which these can be understood – as indicators for an ethicisation linked to a neoliberal governmentality, or as providing progressive naturalcultural imaginaries, and conceptions of subjectivity and responsibility. From this stance, the chapter examines Auckland’s MSP. The analysis disentangles the different narrations of SCTTTP subsequent to the planning process. It identifies emergent discursive strands that each interweaves specific problematisations, naturalcultural imaginaries, and governmentalities. Ethics are problematised and seen as a mode of intervention in several strands but linked to differing naturalcultural

imaginaries and governmentalities. Bearing the diverse interpretations of ethics in mind (linked to a neoliberal governmentality, or as opening up diverse alternatives in neoliberal capitalism), the chapter discusses the politics and transformational potential of ethics in and for the remapping of Auckland's land/seascape.

The chapter engages with different conceptualisations of ethics, aiming to acknowledge diverse worldviews and “ethicalities” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). My positionality is one of a Western European (German) author, and ‘outsider’ to Māori viewpoints and ontology. My limited understanding of Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) needs to be mentioned at this point. My intention is to add to critical discussions of normativity and ethics in the fields of MSP, BEs, and coastal transitions, while contributing to urban ethics thinking *from the Gulf* as a distinct naturalcultural territory. My own research ethics is linked to a political ecology perspective, concerns of power relations and dynamics, justice, decolonisation, and environmental sustainability.

## 4.2 Urban ethics as an agenda for researching coastal transition projects

### 4.2.1 Ethics and normativity in marine spatial planning and blue economy practice and research

Questions of a transition/transformation towards a ‘better’ (more sustainable, more resilient, etc.) future of marine and coastal ecosystems and livelihoods have a normative dimension – as have the answers given by international organisations, state authorities, so-called experts, and scholars. “Transition and transformation [as buzzwords] are often used interchangeably” (Hölscher et al. 2018, p. 1) – in a growing consensus of a need for change. Brand (2016) notices a mingling of analytic and normative (normative-strategic) dimensions in the transition-transformation debate and proposes a clearer distinction by using *transformation* as a critical-analytical concept. Transition ideas and concepts broadly express “the ambition to shift from analysing and understanding problems towards identifying pathways and solutions for desirable environmental and societal change” (Hölscher et al. 2018, p. 1). Heidkamp and Morrissey (2019) formulate one of the central questions in terms of coastal transitions as: “How can a transition towards a sustainable and resilient but also just and equitable coastal zone be facilitated” (p. 8)? Thus, *transition* holds various ideals, normative principles, and assumptions.

The chapter utilises *transformation* to analytically capture the dimensions of normativity in transition endeavours, and to critically understand *emergent* patterns of changes and (unintended) outcomes. The main intention is to differentiate between a normative, problem-centred and *foretelling* transition perspective and a more retroactive, post-structuralist point of view. Emergent ethical, naturalcultural, and governmental narratives and imaginaries may be transformative in a way that they break with some of the normative principles, and assumptions connected to dominant (initial) transition discourses.

Publications on MSP and BE can be, and often are, understood using a distinction of normative (while normativity-denying) process-oriented and problem-oriented approaches versus ‘critical’ scholarship which challenges and makes apparent issues of normativity (see Fairbanks et al. 2019; Garland et al. 2019 for extensive literature reviews; Flannery et al. 2020). Most often, critical approaches put normative discussions in the centre: They question the *normality* (norms) of MSP/BE arrangements while leading an ethically informed debate on issues of power relations and ‘what is just’ (Boucquey et al. 2016; Flannery et al. 2016; Ntona & Schröder 2020). A clear distinction is hard to make, and it seems that authors are increasingly “embracing the normative” (Olson & Sayer 2009) when accounting for power dynamics in sustainability transitions (Morrissey & Heidkamp 2019), discussing concepts like environmental sustainability and equality in ocean governance (Bennett 2018; Bennett et al. 2019), or by calling for a rethinking of the BE along altered and diverse ethical co-ordinates (Lewis 2019). Nevertheless, these approaches are often relatively abstract, and the question remains in what ways ethics and normativities are discussed and enacted *on the ground*. How do people and institutions negotiate urban coastal life in normative registers? What role do ethics and normativity play in the re-mapping of the land/seascape? And in what ways does an ethicisation lead to an urban coastal reorganisation and transformation?

#### 4.2.2 Urban ethics as a field of bargaining: coastal transitions and neoliberal ethicisation

We live, according to Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), in an “age of ethics [where] everything is ethical” (pp. 130-132). Dürr et al. (2019) and Ege and Moser (2020) adopt the term *ethicisation* to refer to the conjuncture of ethics with the rise in ethicised and moralised discourses that has been identified and critically reflected on in the social science and humanities disciplines. Dürr et al. and Ege and Moser pursue and address such a shift in negotiations within cities and urban life. They notice that “questions about urban life have

increasingly been raised explicitly as ethical questions” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 1). In the following, the authors describe a research agenda on *urban ethics* that brings negotiations of moral and social ideals, principles, and norms in cities to the fore.<sup>3</sup> The aim is to make sense of the role of ethics in urban contexts by understanding when and how urban actors problematise – explicitly or not – *good life* and *living in the right way*.<sup>4</sup> Thus, urban ethics denotes a field of problematisations and interaction, while it also refers to what is problematised and claimed as (un)ethical in this field. Ethical problematisations, and thus urban ethics, are also part and a dimension of environmental bargaining in cities and under urban conditions (Hayter & Patchell 2015; Ege & Moser 2020), as well as of negotiations in marine contexts and over ocean space (Boucquey 2017). Urban ethics functions, in this chapter, as a lens to focus on and understand such urban ethical problematisations and claims-makings.

Dürr et al. (2019) observe that “multi-layered ethical questions and rhetoric [which] come to the surface in urban conflicts are difficult to address with conventional frameworks of analysis” (p. 4). Urban ethics as a research approach, then, does not start with or aim to devise a definition of ethics. It takes in and reviews multiple and interdisciplinary theories and conceptualisations of ethics, bringing them into conversation with each other and with empirical research. The relationship between politics and ethics is a question that recurs in this context. Urban ethics approaches this relationship from various analytical perspectives or ‘perspectivisations’, in particular from a Foucauldian focus on (neoliberal) forms of governing and subjectivation (Rose 2000), and David Graeber’s concept of social creativity (Graeber 2005).<sup>5</sup>

The broad theoretical conversation around the research agenda of urban ethics underlies the research process, and this chapter. The specificities of the research context in ANZ, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are summoned into dialogue by place, require the further development of the urban ethics conversation (Timmermans & Tavory 2012; Larsen & Johnson 2017). The (attempted) understanding of urban ethical articulations and problematisations in and around the Gulf requires an understanding of ethics from a point of *ontological diversity*. The very conceptualisation of ethics, and what is acknowledged as an urban ethical claim or articulation, is political. This does not mean to define ethics in a certain or different way, but to open up the understanding of urban ethics as a field of coexistence where not only moral and social ideals, principles, and norms are negotiated, but the very understanding of ‘ethical’ living in the city in its onto-

logical pluralism (Larsen & Johnson 2017). María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) uses in *Matters of care* the concept of *ethicalities* (ethical ontologies) to capture the plurality of ethical framings/systems, emphasising the coexistence of multiple non-normative/anormative *ethicalities* with(in) Western-anthropocentric, hegemonic *Ethics*.<sup>6</sup>

Approaching urban ethics from a perspective of ontological pluralism implicates a broadening of the understanding of the relationship of ethics and politics, too. My understanding is that *politics* – or questions of politics – represent an important dimension that links different ethicalities to each other. European colonisation has incorporated ANZ in the capitalist world economy, concepts and practices of capitalist production, whereby individual freedom and private property rights have been established and normalised. Nature has been constructed as external to the individual and *culture* (Pawson & Brooking 2002; Christensen 2013; McAloon 2013). An (environmental) *Ethics*, often framed as ‘modern’, have become hegemonic. It invokes an individual subject, a human/nature dualism (as well as other categorisations and demarcations) and, what is relevant to this chapter, specific ideas, and practices of governance (Braun & Wainwright 2001; Latta 2014; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Choi 2020).

It is within this context of a hegemonic *Ethics* that most mainstream ethical projects<sup>7</sup>, patterns, and workings of an *ethicisation* need to be understood. Theories and interpretation frameworks, such as the perspectivisations of an urban ethics approach, help to make sense of empirical materials that draw on or invoke urban *Ethics* in the context of Auckland’s neoliberal governing environment (Lewis & Murphy 2015). The chapter focuses on the following aspects: (1) ethical projects and how they overlap with neoliberal urban governance, foregrounding consensus-oriented techniques, ethico-moral principles, and networked arrangements of *governance-beyond-the-state* (Swyngedouw 2005; Ege & Moser 2020). Ethical projects, their embedded ethico-moral principles, and techniques of governing are, in this context, discussed to exclude (antagonistic) voices, systemic critique, and the discussion of alternatives. Ethico-moral principles define who (what) is able / allowed to speak (‘stakeholder’) and what can be said or imagined (Haughton et al. 2013). The organisation of governance (decision-making) in soft planning spaces and horizontal networks of public, private, and third sector actors further eliminates opposition and critique, especially as civil society “takes the role of participant and co-initiator of ethical projects” (Ege & Moser 2020, p. 10). (2) Urban *Ethics*’ role is further understood as supporting neoliberalising dynamics as political questions “become indi-

vidualised, contained in the domain of personal ‘choice’ or lifestyle, seemingly depoliticised as custom or culture” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 133). Responsibility here is transferred to free and economically rational human subjects and their self-conduct (Rose et al. 2006) – asking individuals for an ethical self-formation – for instance, when “marine conservation [...] focuses attention on addressing individual behaviour [...] while ignoring large-scale structural issues” (Flannery & McAteer 2020, p. 271).

Both aspects link back to the question of the ontological politics of urban ethics, making apparent the “colonising use of Ethics”, as Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) termed it. As ethical projects and urban Ethics take a neoliberalising and depoliticising role, they reinforce colonising framings, principles, and practices. (Re)Centring alternative/non-normative ethicalities, thus, plays an important role in decolonising and transforming land/sea environments, and are, here, in the focus of *reading for difference*.

#### 4.2.3 (Re)Centring progressive alternatives in a field of urban ethics

Māori are the descendants of Ranginui, the sky father, and Papatūānuku, the earth mother. Kin-based relationships connect the ancestors of forests, wild/cultivated food plants, the ocean and waterways, wind and people, and all other life forms (human and more-than-human entities) (Makey 2021, p. 7). Human beings “inherited the mana (ancestral power) to harvest the offspring [of their ancestors] but the aim is to keep these exchanges in balance, so that the life force remains strong and healthy (mauri ora)” (Salmond et al. 2019, p. 46). Māori ethicalities see relationships as mutually embedded and reciprocal, and involve both rights and responsibilities to care for other life forms. “Rights to take particular species were passed down genealogical lines and through relationships of alliance and friendship” (Salmond et al. 2019, p. 46), and have been maintained by reciprocal care, use, and occupation.

Ethics of care and alternative modes of responsibility that see humans and more-than-humans enmeshed in complex, life-sustaining relationships are also at the centre of feminist approaches that seek alternatives “to the subjects and spaces of liberal-democratic political theory” (Popke 2006, p. 506) and a better social order (Gilligan 1982; Fisher & Tronto 1990; Tronto 1999; Held 2006). Fischer (2020a, 2020b) observed ethics of care as a specific articulation of urban ethics in the practice of urban environmental caring relationships in Auckland, ANZ. The author shows how care ethics and practices are entangled with neoliberal institutional set-ups in Auckland and cannot easily be separated from their

neoliberal context. Trnka and Trundle (2017) open up a way of understanding these entanglements with their conceptualisation of *competing responsibilities*. The framing points out the need to appreciate the nuances of *multiple responsibilities* in researching urban ethical projects. While Trnka and Trundle acknowledge the existence of and research on neoliberal projects of *responsibilisation* – the divestiture of obligations from the state onto individuals – they stress the value of looking “beyond [this state] to examine modes of responsibility that extend, challenge, or coexist with neoliberalism’s emphasis on a particular kind of individual” (2017, p. 3) subjectivity. To read for ethical co-ordinates of care, interdependence, or reciprocity can be understood as a performative act and normative stance, as well as fundamental to the deconstruction of a capitalism that is often depicted as monolithic, rational, and morally indifferent (Gibson-Graham 2008; Dürr et al. 2019; Lewis 2019).

### 4.3 Research method and analytical focus

SCTTTP’s formal bargaining process lasted from September 2013 to December 2016, and the plan was published in April 2017. National government reviewed the non-statutory plan and developed the government action plan *Revitalising the Gulf*, published in June 2021. This analysis draws on 21 qualitative interviews conducted between 2018 and 2020.<sup>8</sup> Thus, data collection took place after the official process ended, while discussions around its implementation were ongoing.

The material encompasses 29 h of interviews, with the average interview lasting 1.44 h (median value: 1.19 h). The chapter and research are backed by extensive desk research, document, and media analysis, which went into the acquisition of interview partners as well as into the subsequent section. Interview partners were selected based on their knowledge of and responsibilities in SCTTTP – as diverse as possible and a large coverage of the different planning spaces – as well as by their specialised knowledge about general activities and relations in and around the Gulf (see Table 4.1). The in-depth interviews followed a guideline with four sections, each of which included a narrative and open-ended first question, followed by more specific follow-up questions. The sections included questions on: (1) the Hauraki Gulf, personal interrelationships with the area and its more-than-human elements, (2) a person’s activities or institutional background and their understanding of their position and work, (3) SCTTTP, one’s perception of, and role in the process, and (4) general urban living with, in and around the Gulf, ‘ethical’ behaviour, and



one's envisioned 'Gulf future'. Interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed (exactly verbatim).

**Table 4.1** An overview of the interviews included in the chapter. It differentiates between interviews and interviewees as some interviews involved more than one interview partner. The interviewees' numbers are used in the chapter for citation purposes (Int1, etc.). The table also involves columns with information on interviewees' background, as well as the research period when the interview was conducted (Table: M. Aschenbrenner).

Interview	Interviewee (Int.)	Expert knowledge on / expert background*	Research Phase**
1	1	SCTTTP, Social Sciences	1
2	2	SCTTTP, Planning Consultant	1
3	3	SCTTTP, Stakeholder Working Group	1
4	4	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	1
5	5	SCTTTP, Auckland Council	1
6	6	Independent Planning Consultant	1
7	7	SCTTTP, Environmental Conservation	1
8	8	SCTTTP, Social Sciences	1
8	9	SCTTTP, Social Sciences	1
9	10	SCTTTP, Waikato Regional Council	2
10	11	SCTTTP, Marine Biology and GIS	2
11	12	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	2
12	13	SCTTTP, Auckland Council	2
13	14	SCTTTP, Department of Conservation	2
14	15	SCTTTP, Hauraki Gulf Forum	2
15	16	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	2
16	17	SCTTTP, Planning Consultant	2
17	18	SCTTTP, Auckland Council	2
18	19	SCTTTP, Recreational Fisheries	2
19	20	SCTTTP, Hauraki Gulf Forum	2
20	21	SCTTTP, Department of Conservation	3
20	22	SCTTTP, Ministry for Primary Industries	3
21	23	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	3

\* Some respondents were active participants or formally involved in SCTTTP, while others provided insights into SCTTTP through their profession or work for relevant agencies.

\*\*Research phases: Oct-Dec 2018 (1), Feb-Apr 2019 (2), Jan-Apr 2020 (3)

Following Timmermans and Tavory (2012), the process of data analysis and theory building can be understood as abductive analysis.<sup>9</sup> The process of data analysis was inspired by

“grounded theory’s [...] methodological guidelines of iterative rounds of coding and memo writing” (Timmermans & Tavory 2012, p. 169). The coding process started with assigning detailed memos to text passages followed by open coding (Mey 2011). Memos also helped in the later process to link codes to each other, and to revisit and test concepts and thoughts in relation to findings. They, thus, facilitated my conversation with text passages (codings) and codes against the background of my theoretical knowledge and continuing theoretical readings. The software programme MAXQDA was used for the qualitative data analysis process. Besides using the memo and open coding functions of MAXQDA (resulting in over 2000 codings and over 200 memos), the built-in creative coding tool helped to visualise and organise codes and their relations, and to conceptually abstract codes by grouping and renaming them. This step was repeated throughout the process, taking care not to jump to conclusions or make later alternative interpretations impossible through premature abstraction.

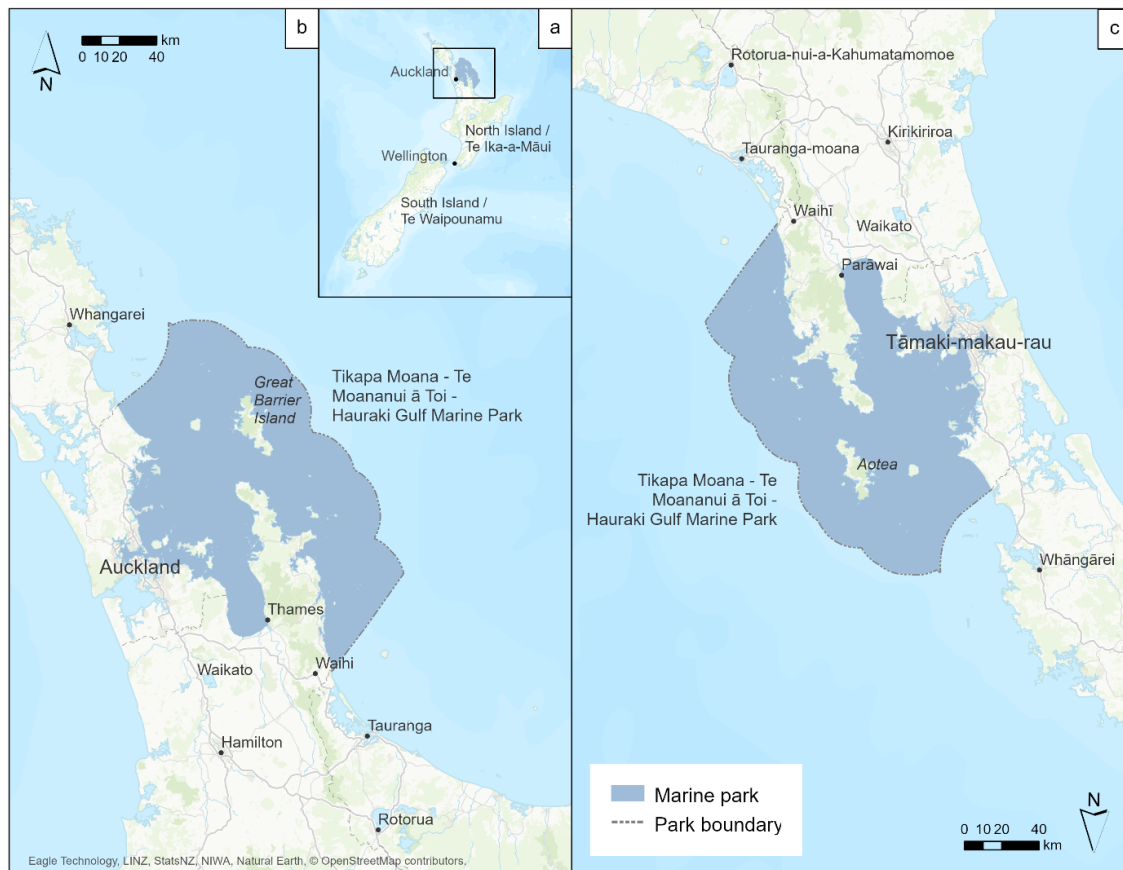
Timmerman and Tavory (2012) assign an important role to the theoretical sensitivity and embeddedness of the researcher in the process of analysis and theory building. My formal involvement in the urban ethics research group, my in-depth knowledge of their discussions and interdisciplinary work and their relatively open approach to analysing, understanding, and conceptualising ethics helped to guide my analysis. To untangle the multiple, tangled truths, narratives, and imaginaries emerging from SCTTTP, the analysis started from problematisations of SCTTTP: what is narrated as the “problem in need of intervention” (Flannery & McAteer 2020, p. 271) to which SCTTTP (MSP), and more specific project elements, were highlighted and constructed as answers? A special focus was given to ethics as forms of problematisation, so explicit and implicit articulations of (un)ethical ways of living/conduct. Ethics could be either subject of a problematisation or (part of) answers that were constructed. To analytically capture urban ethics, the research followed Dürr et al. (2019), according to whom “urban ethics [...] express, practically and theoretically, answers to [the] rather general question: How should one live in the city” (p. 2)? This question guided the analysis looking for claims and articulations of this kind. From there, underlying rationalities, in the form of naturalcultural and ethical imaginaries and claims, were explored. Finally, interest was on the entanglements of these rationalities and problematisations, and in how they (help to) define “who and what should be governed and how and by whom it should be done” (Flannery & McAteer 2020, p. 271).

Theory building was processual and took place (to some extent) in the research group's collaborative space, where texts and theories were discussed. Empirical material and working papers were exchanged and discussed in workshop formats, also with external scholars who repeatedly attended workshops as guest reviewers. The specific conceptualisation of urban ethics in this chapter resulted not least from the fractions and tensions that I experienced when discussing empirical materials and findings which did not fit with a dominant Western philosophy and key concepts of ethics, subjectivity, agency, or equality/justice (see also Timmermans & Tavory 2012). An alternative theoretical framework had to be found to understand the multi-layered use and problematisations of urban ethics in Auckland. I still do not claim that this framework is the only or necessarily *right* one. I acknowledge that theorisation, like knowledge, "is inextricable from context and the people who [...] create it" (Artelle et al. 2021, p. 289; Okun 2021). Thus, I would like this chapter to be understood as a contribution or argument in a theoretical debate that should be agonistic and ongoing.

#### 4.4 Emergence of Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari in a discursive, urban ethical field

##### 4.4.1 The shifting and contested governmental land/seascape of the Hauraki Gulf Tīkapa Moana

The city of Auckland is surrounded by three natural harbours. The Waitematā Harbour adjoins and encompasses Auckland's CBD, waterfront, and main port, and connects the Tāmaki isthmus by way of the Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana with the Pacific Ocean (see Fig. 4.1a-c). The Tāmaki isthmus was first settled by Māori in the fourteenth century. European colonisation and its desire for land has radically and violently disrupted, devalued, and obscured the distinct geographies, ways of knowing, relational, and humanly-decentred systems and ethicalities in the Tāmaki area (Smith 2012; Tadaki et al. 2022). Following the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi – "the key document upon which the authority to govern [ANZ] rests" (Tadaki et al. 2022, p. 40) – by Māori kin group leaders and the British Crown in 1840, William Hobson purchased the land on the Tāmaki isthmus to build Auckland. Today ANZ's most populous city boasts a population of 1.6 million (Stone 2013, p. 33; Fischer 2020b).



**Fig. 4.1** a The location of the Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana in Aotearoa New Zealand and more specifically, on the North Island / Te Ika-a-Māui (according to a Western worldview). b The area and location of Tikapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi / the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park in more detail (also according to a Western worldview). c The same detailed view of Tikapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi / the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park according to a Māori perspective (Map: M. Aschenbrenner after DOC 2022; HGF et al. 2016).

Several iwi and hapū (tribes, subtribes) have later sought compensation for, and reclaimed the unfair alienation of their Tāmaki lands and waters. Many claims still remain unsettled. They increasingly involve challenges against settler-colonial framings of relations among land, water(ways), and people, and possessive individualism (Pawson & Brooking 2002; Salmond et al. 2019; Rowe 2021). Approaches to claims settlement and of redresses vary in ANZ. Settlements under the Treaty include statutory acknowledgments and property vesting, co-management arrangements, or the granting of legal personality to more-than-human entities. Since the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act passed in 2011, iwi and hapū can make claims to customary use and ownership of the foreshore and seabed. This question of customary title has proved to be “a contentious issue between Māori and the NZ government and Māori and non-Māori” (Sullivan 2017, p. 39). As Sullivan (2017) shows, arguments of public property and access were played out politically against redress and customary rights in the beginning of the 2000s, making apparent existing

discriminatory structures, differing cultural values, understandings, and political ideas of citizenship, nation, and justice. Since 2011, settlement claims for at least 19 iwi and hapū of the Gulf region were made, and still were being negotiated when this article [on which this chapter is based] was drafted. These settlements will significantly remap the land/sea-scape (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016).

The management of the Gulf today is regulated by diverse legislation with responsibility divided between institutions. At times, these differing “agendas [...] struggle to converge” (Forster 2016, p. 321). The Resource Management Act (RMA) 1991 provides a broad national framework, and delegates operational functions to regional/local authorities (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2009). The national discourse was coined in “a time when neoliberalism was gaining prominence as a political project [and when] regulation of the environment was expected to reflect neoliberal imperatives” (Forster 2016, p. 323).

Forster sees this reflected in a resource governmentality that fosters efficiencies, government-at-a-distance, and increased public participation. Public engagement has been “adopted as key mechanisms for creating environmental subjectivities” (Forster 2016, p. 323). Other relevant national frameworks that regulate the management of the Gulf are the conservation agenda of the Department of Conservation (DOC), most popularly put into practice by establishing marine protected areas (MPAs), and the Ministry for Primary Industries’ (MPI) fisheries management. The national agenda simultaneously supports recognition of Māori authority and environmental interests, and sustainable development.

In 2000, the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act was passed into law. Its objective was the integration and hence improvement of the environmental management of the Gulf. The act is regarded more holistic than, for example, the RMA, also in terms of articulating the holistic relationships of Māori with the Gulf. It established the HGF, which consists of representatives of the Gulf’s responsible and adjoining national and local authorities, and iwi and hapū (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2009; Peart 2017; DOC 2022).

National government agendas and imperatives at times clash with Auckland’s political goals, which as a ‘super city’ located on the Gulf not only takes on a powerful political and administrative role but also affects the Gulf through infrastructure, developments, or pollution levels. National government’s “desire to position Auckland as a globally competitive city that acts as a dynamo for the [ANZ] economy” (Lewis & Murphy 2015, p. 100) contradicts local political projects, imaginaries, and ethics (of e.g. sustainability or social inclu-

sion). Lewis and Murphy (2015) view the guiding spatial imaginary and governmentality of *liveability* as the middle road between national and local interests. Auckland's spatial plan, which follows the narration of making Auckland the *world's most liveable city*, frames the Gulf area both as an asset and a competitive advantage, while it pronounces the need to ensure its integrated and sustainable management (Auckland Council 2012). Neoliberal imperatives and governmentality prevail in specific urban projects assembled around the Gulf. Waterfront development, negotiations of the port's future, attempts to protect Bryde's whales from ship collisions (Aschenbrenner & Winder 2023) as well as Auckland's broader water management (Acosta García et al. 2022) have evoked efficiency, collaboration, public-private-partnerships, participation, and the formation of environmental subjectivities. Aspects of capitalist settler structures and neoliberal dynamics also manifest in today's demographic structure around the Gulf: Representatives of a *white* affluent middle class settle in many districts at the inner Gulf, waterfront, and the Waitematā (Murphy 2008; Fischer 2020b; Stats NZ 2022; Aschenbrenner 2023a).

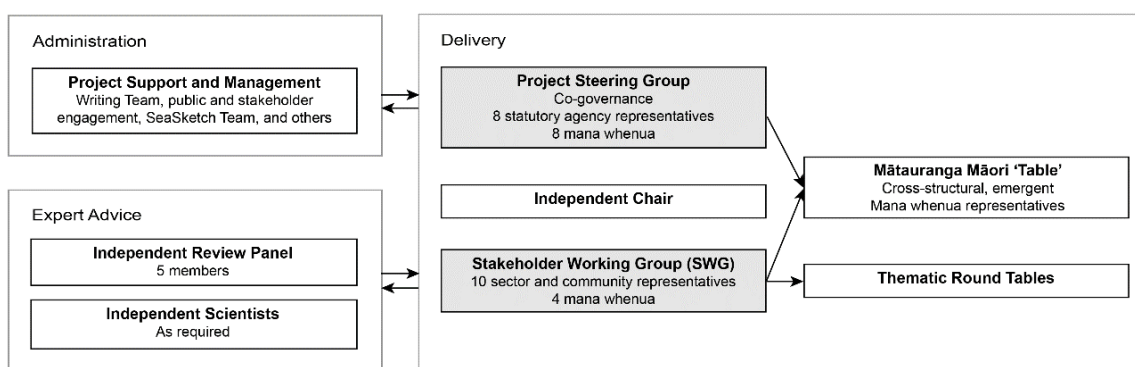
The field of ethical negotiation in Auckland can therefore be identified as *urban* (see Dürr et al. 2019). Not only do ethical negotiations take place *in* the city and *in* urban coastal environments (e.g. regarding its infrastructure, pollution levels, or the number of users and interests), but ethical negotiations take place *under Auckland's urban conditions* through its neoliberal urban governmentality and politics, specific demographic structures, and juxtaposition of institutions, projects, and interests. Māori ethical systems are distinctively *urban* as “traditional relationships to the environment, whakapapa [genealogical relations] and the practice of kaitiakitanga [a reciprocal ethicality of guardianship]” (Walker et al. 2019, p. 2) have been challenged through urbanisation, limited opportunities to connect with nature, and the state of Auckland's ecosystems. At the same time, an ethics of *urban* coastal living is negotiated, claiming new urban practices and ways of connecting to and caring for the urban coastal space.

#### 4.4.2 Emergence of Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari as an urban ethical project

SCTTTP emerged at a time when MSP was gaining momentum worldwide. The Auckland Plan 2012 held a directive to implement MSP in the city's marine areas (Auckland Council 2012). The HGF published a series of reports reviewing the Gulf's management and governance (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2009, 2010a, 2010b), as well as an environmental state report in 2011 with the intention to disrupt and lobby for change (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2011b; Int15). The HGF's report *Spatial planning for the Gulf* (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2011a) assem-

bled MSP as an approach to counteract utilisation pressures, and to reach integrated, conservation and sustainability-focused resource management. Local iwi/hapū co-initiated SCTTTP as members of the HGF, while they, carrying out kaitiakitanga, have long had aspirations to reinstate the Gulf's mauri (life force) and enact Māori values and principles (Int4).

The bargaining initiative was joined by statutory agencies – in particular Auckland Council, Waikato Regional Council, DOC, and MPI. A joint narrative of integrating competing interests and aspirations was established ('many values, one story'), and assembled with principles of consensus, collaboration, participation, balancing different (recreational, cultural, economic, and environmental) spheres, and treaty justice and co-governance into an ethical project (Campbell-Reid 2013). They mirrored a participatory project design which involved a co-governed *project steering group* and a *stakeholder working group* (SWG), in which individuals, iwi/hapū, and interest holders were commissioned to develop the MSP (see Fig. 4.2). Interestingly, use of geospatial data and formal mapping, otherwise dominant MSP elements, was limited in the process. A web-based mapping software (SeaSketch) was developed for the process, but not used due to high complexity, key gaps in information, lack of resources, and legal uncertainties (Peart 2019). Participants noticed the bargaining and shifts of *values* as a major element and outcome of the process, and as considerably more important than spatial zoning (Int7, Int23).



**Fig. 4.2** The project structure of Sea Change Tai Time Tai Pari including the three spaces: administration, expert advice and delivery. A co-governed project steering group and stakeholder working group were responsible for the delivery of the plan. For this, thematic roundtables were established from the stakeholder working group. At the same time, a Mātauranga Māori group formed, bringing together Māori members of the stakeholder working group and the project steering group (Figure: M. Aschenbrenner after Campbell-Reid 2013; Peart 2019).

## 4.5 Results

The subsequent section analyses interviewees' narrations of SCTTTP and disentangles the different discursive strands that each interweave specific problematisations, naturalcultural imaginaries, and governmentalities. The interest is in how ethical imperatives are embedded in these strands. The research findings indicate not *one story* or overall narrative emerging from SCTTTP, but rather many imaginaries, discursive strands, and *values*. Some are more linked to established planning views and assumptions, while others might hold greater transformative potential in terms of remapping hegemonic power, socio-natural relations, and naturalcultural imaginaries. The following points identify the different discursive strands by their contradictions with each other as well as the roles that interviewees attributed to ethics/ethicalities as forms of problematisation and modes of intervention. Different discursive strands were interwoven in interviews, and not necessarily distinct to one interview or particular characteristics of interviewees. The role an interviewee had in SCTTTP was in many cases reflected in their narration.

### 4.5.1 Conventional, formal planning discourse

A conventional and formal planning discourse was identified from the critical voices on SCTTTP of mainly institutional representatives (local councils, DOC, and MPI) (Int10, Int11, Int13). Institutional representatives framed MSP as an instrument to find consensual resolutions to user-user and user-environment conflicts, whereby conflicts were understood to result from a large number of users, diverse interests, and strong conceptions of marine/coastal space as common space. Responsibility for the tense environmental situation in the Gulf was also seen in the national government's growth agenda for Auckland (Int13, Int20), and, more generally, urban and population growth (Int7, Int10, Int15, Int21).

From a conventional planning view, SCTTTP was regarded rather critically. The main critique focused on a lack of legitimacy, and representational problems in the SWG. Interviewees criticised the lack of inclusiveness of the SWG, whose members were selected as self-responsible *individuals* over a large group of public and private sector representatives. They were regarded as neither democratically elected, nor having the required role of *spokespersons* for interest groups, thus lacking the mandate of civil society as well as private sectors. Members were said to have failed to report back to and connect with the private sector and the public (Int10, Int13, Int22). Interviewees also criticised limited and



selective engagement with expert and scientific knowledge, and little application of mapping tools, resulting in few tangible process outcomes (Int10, Int11).

On the one hand, agencies regarded themselves solely as partners and facilitators in this governmental logic. The planning was meant to be conducted in the SWG, a networked, flexible, and experimental space of *stakeholders* and treaty partners (Swyngedouw 2005; Haughton et al. 2013). I found neoliberal planning ideas and ethics of consensus, agreement, (cost-)efficiency, and the necessity of getting a social mandate for future (infrastructure) development and spending invoked by interview partners. On the other hand, interviewees stressed formal planning requirements, in particular electoral accountability. As a result, interviewees criticised SWG members for their ‘solo run’. I interpret this as internal contradiction in planning logics in a neoliberal urban context. Interviewees wished for an ‘empowerment’ of SWG participants asking them to become active participants in the planning (Int4), while their acting outside of the intended participatory framework seemed to be regarded as problematic. Interviewees also referred to *empowerment* in relation to the role of Auckland community groups (Int1, Int10, Int13, Int15, Int21). Also in this case, *empowerment* rather took the meaning of nudging “urban dwellers’ involvement in [desired] courses of action” (Foucault 2008 cited in Acosta García et al. 2020, p. 5). Int10, for example, commended the work of community groups working to create pest-free islands, and expressed interest to have them “going from the land into the shore of those islands”. This overall fits with observations of ethical projects being interrelated with neoliberal modes of urban governance, where collaborative engagements come to the fore and responsibilities are increasingly transferred to non-state actors resulting in a changed role of civil society, an obfuscation of conflicts of interest, and difficulties to contest local government (Ege & Moser 2020; Fischer 2020a, b).

#### 4.5.2 Marine conservation discourse

Marine conservation interests, in particular an increase in the number of MPAs, were, according to Peart (2019), an important initial impetus for SCTTTP. In this context, interviewees with links to marine conservation interests (Int7, Int14) stressed the need for spatial zoning. Int7 juxtaposed scientifically evidenced spatial zoning solutions, and “people [who] emotionally hated [...] the idea” of MPAs. I observed a binary opposition being constructed between objectivity/rationality/sciences and subjectivity/affects/emotions, while opposition to MPAs was delegitimised by locating it in the second realm (Int7, Int14).

Responsibility for change was ascribed to agencies/decision-makers (“you need regulation”, Int7), while a logic of consent politics and ‘buy in’ was expressed: “you need [...] public support for the politicians to regulate things that work” (Int7). Particularly Int7, who had a marine conservation background, framed civil society as a transition initiator, and collaborative participatory processes as spaces of disruption and “new elements” (see also Int20). Besides supporting a conventional framing of collaborative planning spaces and the role of civil society as working with and supporting local government, interviewees also ascribed collaborative planning spaces the role to get “people to act on the good stuff” (Int7). This supports theorisations of ethical projects being intertwined with techniques of governance that create spaces for ethical reflection, creating affects, and encouraging certain ‘good’ behaviour – in this case acting as rational subjects that understand and act on scientifically proven marine conservation measurements, primarily MPAs.

Furthermore, human-Gulf interactions, in particular diving and snorkelling, especially when carried out in MPAs, were narrated as immersive, attachment building, educational, and thus being crucial for the building of good, pro-environmental behaviour (Int7, Int20). The imaginary of a “deeper understanding of the Gulf” (Int7, Int15) was central, and can be identified as a guiding ethico-moral principle assembling personal passion, emotional attachment, consternation, awareness, and comprehension of degradation processes. This also shows how ethical pro-environmental behaviour and the rational understanding and support of conservation measures are deeply intertwined in a marine conservation discourse. Overall, the question of a formation of urban dwellers as conservation-oriented subjects can be understood as central to this discourse. This self-formation is partly ascribed to an individual self, while it seems relational in that it emerges in relational spaces and from human and human-environment relations.

#### 4.5.3 A new ethics for the Gulf

Several interviewees pointed out that much of the value of SCTTTP was in informal changes – shifts in peoples’ understandings and behaviours, and in the narratives and principles that lead resource valuations and assumptions (Int1, Int17, Int20, Int21). SWG members, non-institutional process facilitators, and support staff primarily held this view. Interviewees problematised political leadership, unethical user behaviour, and generally a multiplicity of users, interests, and (one-sided) viewpoints. While the multiplicity of users, interests, and viewpoints was framed as problematic in terms of overuse, they were also regarded as threatening consensus and harmonic integration among people and groups –

mostly unchallenged imperatives (Int6, Int7, Int8, Int10, Int18, Int22). Both, political leaders' ethics and peoples' ethical behaviour were problematised in terms of the state of the Gulf. Decision-makers and agencies were ascribed self-interested, sectoral behaviour ("Often their [HGF members'] own values conflict with those that are supposed to be the champion for the Gulf [...] they tend to cancel each other out", Int20). Private market actors (esp. farmers / fishing industry) and urban recreational users (esp. recreational fishers) were said to, often intentionally, perform irresponsible, ecologically degrading behaviour: "Boats [...] are [...] plundering the shoreline" (Int3) / farmers "choos[e] not to recognise that what they do has impacts at the coast and the sea" (Int8) / fishing industry's "untrue behaviour, [...] fraudulent [and] thieving" (Int19).

Changes in peoples' behaviour, and a new ethical relationship to the Gulf, voiced as care, kaitiakitanga, guardianship, championship / acting as a 'voice for the Gulf', were proposed by interviewees as the main outcome of SCTTTP, and key measures of change (Int4, Int5, Int7, Int15, Int20). I see, thus, the problematisation as well as construction of *new* urban ethics of the Gulf in the centre of this discursive strand. The emphasis on care, interrelationships, and a collective responsibility as champions or guardians of the Gulf point, from a perspective of ontological diversity, to a divergence from an understanding or use of Ethics (or an ethicisation), working as a further individualisation and shift of problems into the domain of personal lifestyle or choice (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Still, the emphasis by interviewees on techniques of governance that create spaces for a reflective process of ethical understanding in which one becomes a caring voice of the Gulf, by some described as a moment of personal enlightenment (Int5, Int7, Int19, Int20), rather follow than challenge ideas and subjectivities of an Ethics hegemonic.

Interviewees highlighted multiple governmental techniques (report writing, a common project vision, exemplary stories of degradation and success, participatory planning, round tables, informal planning spaces) for building consensus around the common, ethical narrative of *caring for the Gulf's health*. Guardianship/kaitiakitanga, health of the Gulf / mauri, championship/acting as 'voice of the Gulf', 'gift and gain' (compromise agreement) were further noticed to create common concepts and ground for good behaviour, thus *ethical* ground. Many can be read as 'boundary concepts' – they largely adopt Māori concepts and principles, and link them to a Western equivalent (Int13, Int14, Int17, Int20). Change was expected to take the form of "ripples" (Int20): spreading from the SWG to individuals,

groups, businesses, and philanthropic funds, who then would take *responsible* actions and induce change (Int6, Int17).

There are similarities to conventional planning and conservation logics regarding ideas of environmental subjectivities, and an individual and collective responsabilisation in this discursive strand. There are also contradictions – particularly with a conventional planning perspective, regarding their ideas of who is legitimate to participate, and what is the scope and form of participation. The imaginary of SCTTTP as a space for an ethical transition comes with claims that it should be individuals, who participate, decide, and speak for the Gulf. Their legitimacy is justified by an active, intergenerational, affective Gulf relationship, by knowledge, environmental awareness, the willingness and ability to conduct collaborative behaviour (Int2, Int20). Instead of acting as *stake*-holders, participants (and officials) should “take off [their] mandated spokesperson hat” (Int12), and act as champions for the Gulf. The main scope of participation is seen in the creation of a mutual understanding, collective, and individual ethical formation, for which trust and a certain isolation from *outside* influences is needed (Int4). This conflicts with a logic of stakeholder and public engagement and appears to be a main reason for officials criticising the SWG’s work (Int13).

#### 4.5.4 Emergent ethicality and claiming non-normative naturalcultural relations

Interviewees highlighted informal shifts in the context of both anormative or not-yet-normative (while Indigenous) naturalcultural imaginaries and ethicalities. Mostly Māori interviewees called attention to persistent, post-colonial injustices (Int16: “The inequity that goes on between Māori and Non-Māori, that’s a huge one”). Injustices result from colonial land occupations, repression of Te Ao Māori and the enforcement of colonialist world-views, property constructs, and governmental systems and frameworks (Int4, Int12). Treaty rights (consultation, representation) were noticed to be regularly violated, particularly when Western management systems like MPAs are enforced. Burdens and costs for the fair enforcement of treaty rights have, to a great extent, been carried by the colonised (Int4, Int15, Int16, Int23). Interviewees problematised the Gulf’s *mauri* (life force and vitality) as being in need of restoration. This was observed to not be the *responsibility* and agency of autonomous individuals or groups, but responsibility and care arise from and exist in a complex, relational system of genealogy, reciprocity, *rohe* (tribal homelands), and the agency of the more-than-human:

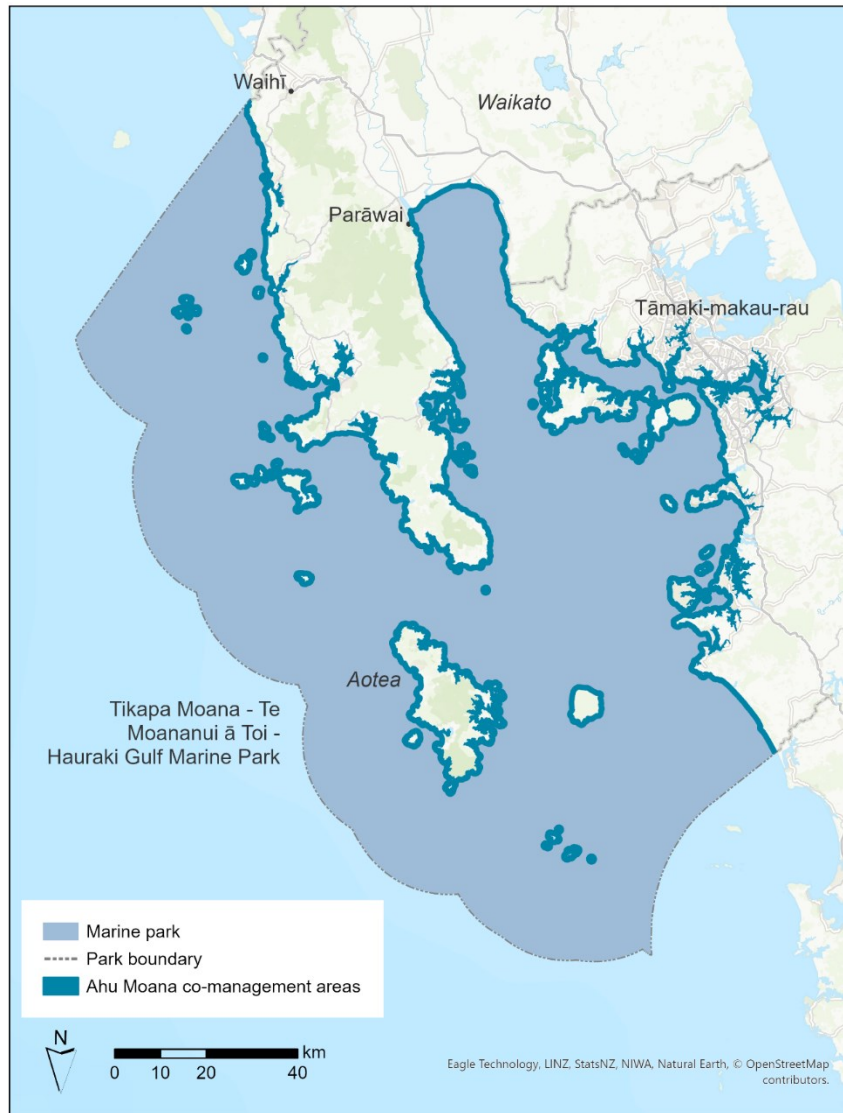
“I describe it as an obligation or like a responsibility that’s handed down through generations of Kaitiaki [trustee, minder, guardian, caregiver] or Māori that live on their land, proper to an area and to certain resources. So it’s a responsibility of those people to care for their land the way it cares for them, so I guess it’s a reciprocal relationship between the land and the people [...] Well it’s not just a caring person, it’s the actual responsibility that they have. And so if you’re not doing your job, then you’re not really being a good person, yeah, you’re not taking on the responsibility as coming from that land” (Int16).

An ethicality, divergent from a hegemonic, anthropocentric, and neoliberal understanding, is apparent. It was and is affected by the consequences of colonisation which involve constructed boundaries that interrupt relationships, governance norms that rely on framings where “the environment exists to serve the human” (Int12), and a decrease of mauri.

SCTTTP is, in this context, understood as a ‘journey’ – emergent, maturing, an “evolving, living process” (Int12, Int16, Int23). It is here that interviewees highlight informal/semi-formal shifts. Int12 expressed happiness that “one of [SCTTTP’s] aspirations was restoring the mauri [...] to the Hauraki Gulf”. Int23 stressed “the importance of us being able to see ourselves in the plan [and] the process”. A shift towards greater acknowledgment of Te Ao Māori, and “getting better” (Int23) at treaty partnership issues – thus equity – was appreciated. Int23 expressed the aim to “get to a place of harmony” (Int23), a balance, between worlds/worldviews. Interviewees still stressed the need to differentiate between Māori and non-Māori concepts, and the different responsibilities and rights (under the treaty) coming with them. The concept/term of *kaitiaki* was particularly identified as important in terms of Māori environmental autonomy, self-determination, and consultation rights, and thus is, and needs to be, differentiated from non-Māori perceptions of environmental guardianship (Int16, Int23, see also Forster 2016).

Narratives of how rights were claimed in SCTTTP indicate the oppositional role of Māori in a colonial governing system (Forster 2016). Māori interviewees recounted how they built up relationships and connections beyond formal process structures, and thus managed to put an initially unfair process on hold, which significantly improved SCTTTP’s outcomes (Int4, Int16). The idea of *Ahu Moana* – near-shore, nurture areas co-managed by local iwi/hapū and communities – arose from these spaces and was inscribed into the final plan (see Fig. 4.3). *Ahu Moana* can be interpreted as creating (experimental) spaces for Māori ethicality and practices. They remap the Gulf’s coast according to place-based, reciprocal, and genealogical care relationships, principles of self-determination, and treaty partnership. Such spaces are meant to “empower coastal marae [meeting houses] to be

self-determining in terms of what actually goes on [...] in their harbour” (Int23) and offer an alternative to MPAs, non-Māori concepts which are considered exclusive to Māori needs and practices: “it was an idea that's born out of Māori philosophy and practice, and yet brings in the idea of marine protected areas or semi protected” (Int12).



**Fig. 4.3** A map of Tikapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi / the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park depicting the near-shore ahu moana (ocean nurture) areas planned to be co-managed by local iwi/hapū and communities (according to a Māori worldview; Map: M. Aschenbrenner after Department of Conservation 2022; Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016).

Restorative justice and decolonising settler-colonial hegemony, property constructs, and governance stand out as key imperatives, and significant aspects in environmental bargaining (Affolderbach et al. 2012). While, in the strands already discussed, problematisations and claims are made *inside* a hegemonic settler-colonial worldview, this strand prob-

lematises and challenges that worldview's very hegemony, instead favouring ontological pluralism and autonomy (Parsons et al. 2021). Living well (of humans and more-than-humans) is problematised not (primarily) as an issue or responsibility of individual subjects (or groups) but fundamentally linked to decolonisation, self-determination, and a *healthy* ethical system (ethicality). Ethical claims-making and problematisations that focus on individual responsibility and ethical subject formation can be contradictory to these claims, if not allowing for ontological pluralism. Contradictions occur in the case of remapping the marine area according to conservation logics, with MPAs spatially excluding alternative ethicalities. Adopting Māori *ethical* concepts, while framing them within Western logics and/or governmental systems, indicates cultural appropriation. In its design, SCTTTP endorsed a bicultural approach, having for instance separate meeting spaces according to Western customs and Tikanga Māori. In the process, interviewees saw this being watered down, where conflicts with a conventional, neoliberal planning logic and principles such as efficiency became apparent (Int23; Forster 2016). Ahu Moana remaps the Gulf according to an alternative ethicality, also for non-Māori communities. What this means in terms of urban power relations and social justice needs further exploration and is yet to be seen in practice (see also Aschenbrenner 2023a). Finally, dismantling colonial power structures involves redress, territorial sovereignty, and autonomy. One needs to be aware of the risk of shifting these discussions to an *Ethical* dimension. The SCTTTP plan acknowledges accordingly that it “must not dilute or otherwise affect Treaty settlements” (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016, p. 34).

#### 4.6 Discussion and conclusion

The need for change and socionatural transformation is pervasive in times of urgent social problems and ecological crises, including in marine and coastal areas and not least in Auckland, ANZ. Many scholars identified the predominance of neoliberal capitalist beliefs and practices as a/the central problem in terms of today's unequal power distribution, and a hindrance to socionatural change (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016; Tafon 2018; Schulz et al. 2022). Post-political theorists discuss the absence of alternatives and agonistic positions as a major factor hindering change and draw a relation to “de-politicised imaginaries of pluralist consensus” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 5), and a conjuncture of ethicised and moralised discourse. This chapter was motivated by recent debates about MSP and BE, which are pushed worldwide as instruments leading to a marine and coastal transition, but discussed by critical researchers as, in practice, often facilitating a neoliberalisation of the seas and

post-political state / depoliticisation of marine and coastal planning and management. My objective was to bring together theorisations of ethics and MSP/BE debates to further explore questions of normativity, socionatural transformation, and empowerment in marine and coastal spaces. For this, I utilised and thought through *urban ethics*.

The focus on urban ethics helped to understand SCTTTP, an MSP project initiated to bargain for socionatural change in the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana (Auckland), as an ethical project. SCTTTP was initiated as a formal environmental bargaining process, and it assembled various ethico-moral principles of project design, realisation, and outcomes. SCTTTP's designers acknowledged different worldviews, values, and knowledges within the project's framework, which emphasised integration, collaboration, and consensus agreement. This distinguishes the process from other post-political MSPs, where a diversity of actor perceptions was neglected and/or unconsciously aligned within a hegemonic agenda (Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019). It also indicates differences to forms of environmental bargaining, where environmental ethics, values, and interests were claimed to be, in large part, in conflict with those of oppositional groups (Affolderbach 2011; Affolderbach et al. 2012). In SCTTTP, bargaining took place in an urban ethical field. A shared and accepted socionatural transition ethics prevailed over conflict and antagonism, and urban environmental ethics appeared to be a means to facilitate a coastal transition. From this perspective, SCTTTP *can* be read as a process of neoliberal ethicisation, in which difference is acknowledged but conflict is replaced by participatory, *soft* planning spaces, where civil society takes the role of co-initiator, participant, and even plan developers. Politics are moved into an ethical field, where a neoliberal governmentality characterised by environmental subject formation and responsabilisation prevails.

However, the urban ethics agenda that the chapter promotes makes aware how a “rationalist ethics discourse and the governmentality with which it is associated often obscure actual ethical antagonisms, complexity, and subaltern critique” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 2). The chapter's objective was to disrupt this potentially colonising framing. Thus, reading for difference in the form of non-normative/anormative ethicalities was an essential part of the chapter's theoretical and research approach. Taking a retrospective point of view, I disentangled the different discursive strands that emerged from SCTTTP, and analysed them for their (ethical) problematisations, naturalcultural imaginaries, and governmentalities. The results reveal ethical antagonisms and contestation. They show how fundamentally different discourses and worldviews underlie peoples' narratives of SCTTTP, and



that not *one* narrative evolved. Ethics are, in the case of the first three strands (conventional, formal planning / marine conservation / an ethics for the Gulf), problematised and emphasised as a mode of intervention for change – framed in terms of individual ‘ethical’ conduct and responsibility. In the lines of the third discursive strand, ethics and the constitution of a common ethics for the Gulf build the rationale for SCTTTP, a legitimacy for participation, and thus play a role in claiming alternative governance and decision-making structures, and in remapping power relations in the Gulf. This *ethicisation* of the governance of the Gulf conflicts with conventional planning logics of electoral accountability, and third sector *stakeholder* engagement. Still, all three strands link to a Euro-Western ethicality and neoliberal form of government.

The fourth discursive strand disrupts the hegemonic ethics discourse. In this case, the chapter speaks of a Māori ethicality or ethical system to make visible the ontological difference and politics of environmental ethical problematisations and claims-making. Making claims for ‘living in the right way’ in terms of a Māori ethicality entails claims for and the necessity of decolonisation, self-determination, and holistic (human and more-than-human) well-being. (Re) claiming an alternative, Indigenous ethicality and natural-cultural relations shows the greatest potential to disrupt existing power relations and remap the Gulf with respect to alternative/non-normative ‘resource’ valuations. Norms and hegemonic naturalcultural imaginaries – and their *mapped out manifestations* – are contested, while Ahu Moana makes visible alternative land/seascapes, management, and governmental practices.

The final SCTTTP plan takes up the idea of reframing peoples’ naturalcultural imaginaries of and relations with the Gulf as a transformative element. It creates a bicultural framing and assigns a Māori ethicality to *Gulf communities*. While this means asking people to live in a ‘better’ way, the plan utilises *ethics* not as code of conduct (such as in the case of an *ethics for the Gulf*) but assembles notions of land/seascapes as legal personalities, the need to adjust human/more-than-human relationships, and for reciprocal responsibilities (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016, p. 35). This points to a remapping of the ethical co-ordinates in the Gulf area, and an intervention in the neoliberalisation of the seas. At the same time, one should be aware of the actual post-planning discourse in Auckland as shown in the chapter. Taking an urban ethics viewpoint makes clear the risks of translating this emergent ethics of the Gulf in ways of an ethicisation (thus reinforcing neoliberal, depo-

liticising dynamics) and/or culturally appropriating and watering down Māori ethicality (thus reinforcing colonising dynamics).

The implementation of the non-statutory SCTTTP process was brought ahead with the publication of the government action plan *Revitalising the Gulf* in June 2021. While it put into action some of the ‘harder’ (technical-managerial) actions recommended in SCTTTP, the contribution of ‘softer’ (informal) changes and ethics to a socionatural transformation is still for the most part uncertain. Further research, especially on the practical implications of *ethics*, is thus needed. A focus on ordinary ethics in the Gulf and Auckland, and on Ahu Moana – as mapped realities of an emergent Gulf ethicality, and formally acknowledged pilot projects for “effective kaitiakitanga and guardianship in the Gulf” (DOC et al. 2021) – would be potential, valuable starting points for such explorations.

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, the wording *natureculture* (*naturalcultural*) is used as it draws attention to the plurality of ontologies (or world-makings), also those within and beyond Western philosophical traditions. The closely related concept of *socionature* (or *social nature*), often used in geographical contexts, directs the focus rather on the *production* of hybrid processes and relations. Both concepts draw on the critique of a nature/culture dualism as it is embedded in more *modern*, Eurocentric thinking, and aim to draw attention to the hybridity of processes/objects (Gesing et al. 2019).

<sup>2</sup> The author is aware that “environmental” (*the environment*) is a term often used in a Western philosophical tradition implying a human/nature divide. In the context of SCTTTP, multiple worldviews and knowledges were acknowledged and emphasized. Environmental bargaining in this sense is seen as ontologically more open and integrating different imperatives that aim for a “well-being” of the Gulf.

<sup>3</sup> Both texts emerged from the work of an interdisciplinary research group on urban ethics funded by the German Research Foundation (2015–2022, see DFG research group on Urban Ethics 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Drawing on Foucault (1985) and Collier and Lakoff (2005), Dürr et al. (2019) and Ege and Moser (2020) further conceptualise urban ethics as answers expressed, “practically and theoretically [...] to [the] rather general question: How should one live in the city” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 2)? Urban ethics can be understood fourfold, as (1) ethics in the city, (2) when the urban (for example, housing, traffic, pollution, or wider questions of a good and just city) appears as an object of ethical negotiation and reflection, (3) as ethical negotiations that take place under urban conditions, or (4) when ethical postulations are linked to views of what it means to be emphatically urban, so ethics of the urban, of urbanism, urbanity or Urbanität (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 3).

<sup>5</sup> Rose (2000) theorized ethopower, and the dynamics of neoliberal forms of governing and subjectivation in his writings on Third way politics in Western Europe. Urban ethics takes into

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account Rose's considerations in its perspectivisation of techniques of governing. Urban ethics discourses can, from this perspective, be understood as being intertwined with, and part of, a neoliberal governmentality in which governance is understood in positive means (and not as an exercise of repressive rule). Working through the framework of ethical discourses and in spaces created for ethical reflection, urban dwellers are, then, guided and encouraged to conduct themselves as self-reliant and responsible subjects. Social creativity helps in turn to frame and understand new forms of self-management and subjectivation "from below" (DFG research group on Urban Ethics 2015; Dürr et al. 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Puig de la Bellacasa uses a capital E to denote the hegemonic position of Western, anthropocentric Ethics.

<sup>7</sup> Ege and Moser (2020) conceptualise campaigns and projects in cities, which aim for or promise "better or more just cities and a better urban life" (p. 8), as ethical projects. Ethical projects are future-oriented, hold a "certain amount of pre-planning, self-awareness and intentional communication [and assemble] policy, technology, buildings, aesthetics and institutions, and [...] an ethico-moral sense of 'something better'" (pp. 7–8). They often involve academic research, "be it affirmatively or critically" (p. 9). Accordingly, coastal transition initiatives that assemble principles of "ecological ('green') sustainability, social and cultural inclusivity and openness, participation, collaboration, conviviality, consensus- and community-building, [and/or] transparency" (p. 7) can be framed ethical projects.

<sup>8</sup> The research was conducted in the context of the interdisciplinary DFG research group on Urban Ethics, and was aligned, among other things, with its research schedule.

<sup>9</sup> Timmermans and Tavory (2012) argue in their paper *Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis* for "abduction, rather than induction [as a] guiding principle of empirically based theory construction" (p. 167). Coming from critique of grounded theory's principle to have new theory emerge from empirical data without theoretical preconceptions, they suggest *abductive analysis* is a "creative inferential process aimed at producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence" (Timmermans & Tavory 2012, p. 167). In this process, they attribute an important role to an actor's social and intellectual position (in-depth knowledge of multiple theorisations, theoretical sensitivity) to be able to identify unanticipated and surprising observations, and to recognise when findings do not fit in existing theoretical frameworks. Timmermans and Tavory (2012) still acknowledge grounded theory's methodological guidelines (memo writing, coding) to "facilitate theory construction through processes of revisiting, defamiliarizing, and alternative casing" (p. 169).

## 4.7 References

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## Part III: Urban environmental ethics in negotiating and governing urban coastal futures

Chapter 5 is based on the published peer-reviewed article

Acosta García, R., Aschenbrenner, M., Dürr, E., and Winder, G. 2022. Re-imagining cities as ecosystems: Environmental subject formation in Auckland and Mexico City. *Urban Research & Practice*, 15 (3): 350-365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2020.1811886> © 2022. Reprinted by permission of Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Taylor & Francis Group.

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## 5 Re-imagining cities as ecosystems: Environmental subject formation in Auckland and Mexico City

This chapter is based on the published peer-reviewed article by Acosta García, R., Aschenbrenner, M., Dürr, E., and Winder, G. 2022. Re-imagining cities as ecosystems: Environmental subject formation in Auckland and Mexico City. *Urban Research & Practice*, 15 (3): 350-365. For the original article see also Appendix A.3.

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**Raúl Acosta García:** Conceptualisation (lead); Writing: original draft (Introduction, Re-imagining human-environmental relations, The Mexico Basin, Conclusions); Resources and analysis (The Mexico Basin); **Marie Aschenbrenner:** Conceptualisation (supporting); Writing: original draft (Auckland's blue backyard); Writing: review and editing; Resources and analysis (Auckland's blue backyard); **Eveline Dürr:** Conceptualisation (supporting); Writing: review and editing; **Gordon M Winder:** Conceptualisation (supporting); Writing: review and editing

### 5.1 Introduction

Governments and civil society organisations have over the last decades made increasing efforts to address urban environmental problems. More often than not, this is done through a series of measures in line with neoliberal urbanisation. In many cases, this agenda stresses the importance of a 'healthy' environment not only for 'healthy' citizens, but for improving economic competitiveness and the quality of life to attract valuable talent or fight poverty (Brand 2007, p. 6). Thus, recent discourses in favour of sustainability have become incorporated in neoliberal urbanisation strategies to find solutions to ecological challenges in order to improve economic outcomes and competitiveness (Tretter 2013). However, as this paper shows, the incorporation of environmental concerns in neoliberal urbanism has also spurred new forms of governmentalities to discipline urban dwellers' everyday practices. We argue that such efforts signify a production of environmental subjects with a particular understanding of cities as ecosystems. This entails a process of subjectivation in which urban dwellers are disciplined into assuming their personal practices regarding environmental care as their individual obligations (Leffers & Ballamingie 2013). We claim that the tools used to produce environmental subjects generate a social imaginary of cities as ecosystems. In the cases we use to analyse these processes, Auckland and Mexico City, this is done by exhorting urban dwellers to change their

behaviour and stop dumping waste on drains or start harvesting rainwater in their own home in order to help improve the city's water management.

The view of cities as ecosystems fits in with a global trend in which the “earlier views of cities as destroyers of nature and harmonious rural life” are being displaced by “a new regard for managed urban nature and cities as ecosystems” (Rademacher & Sivaramakrishnan 2013, p. 2). In urban areas, for example, current natural scientific approaches have switched from studying ecology *in* cities to ecology *of* cities (Pickett et al. 2016).

Our main focus, however, is on the technique of government through which authorities promote a process of subjectivation as a way to discipline urban dwellers into a desired mode of “docile” behaviour (Foucault 1991a, p. 138) in the form of environmental subjects (Brand 2007). We analyse the techniques to create such environmental subjects as part of neo-liberalised processes of urban transformation (Hursh et al. 2015). What takes place, therefore, is a form of neoliberal governmentality regarding urban environments. Governmentality is a useful concept here because it refers to the manner in which states have historically been able to use their political sovereignty by disciplining their populations into a collective form of government (Foucault 1991b, p. 102). Foucault explained his concept as a technique through which government exercises “micro-powers” (Foucault 2008, p. 186) through which subjects are not only ‘governable’ but actually engage in the government of their own behaviour and that of others (Foucault 2010). Numerous scholars have worked with the concept of environmentality to analyse such process regarding environmentalism (Luke 1999; Agrawal 2005). Agrawal used the concept to analyse the manner in which local populations in Kumaon, in the western Indian Himalaya region, were disciplined into changing their relation to the forests they inhabited or used. In his view, the environmental subjects constituted by a change in policies were “people who have come to think and act in new ways in relation to the domain being governed – forests” (Agrawal 2005, p. 4). This approach also has provided frameworks to explore the manner in which urban populations are guided towards better care of ecologies in cities, such as parks (Gabriel 2011). The infrastructures and campaigns we analyse in Auckland and Mexico City can thus be considered within a framework of environmentality in neoliberal cities (Mawdsley 2009).

In both cases, we present, the governments and civil society organisations in charge of the analysed projects do not mention ecosystems but their campaigns point to them, as their

aim appears to be promoting awareness of ecological interconnections between individual acts of urban dwellers and the biophysical landscapes they collectively inhabit. Their stated purpose is to improve the balance between life forms, built environments, and objects, that may translate into better quality of life for all urban dwellers. Behind their efforts, however, lies an alignment with neoliberal urban environmental management, especially in transferring responsibility for collective states of affairs to individuals (Brand 2005). Although the city as ecosystem idea is behind both campaigns, the stress seems to be rather on atomising responsibilities and awareness. By linking individual acts to a broader idea of the city, government and civil society appeal to an environmental imagination of the urban. This approach resonates with recent scholarship in various disciplines, which points to the role of imaginaries in the experience of the urban. As Bridge and Watson point out, “cities are not simply material or lived spaces – they are also spaces of the imagination and spaces of representation” (Bridge & Watson 2000, p. 7).

The cases analysed here have contrasting social and geographical situations. Auckland is part of the affluent global north (while being located in the southern hemisphere), while Mexico City is in the global south (while located in the northern hemisphere). The two cities are in countries that have been led over the last few decades by neoliberal governments, albeit through contrasting institutional systems. In both cases, the legacy of colonialism looms large, with strong movements for Indigenous causes. Both cities have been used to freshwater abundance but now face scarcity, though to different extents. While Auckland is coastal and surrounded by salt water, Mexico City lies at an altitude of 2240 m in a high valley and on top of what used to be a system of interconnected lakes. Interactions between water flows, buildings, objects, and various life forms can be diverse with a variety of repercussions, which may be key to the wellbeing of the city and its inhabitants. Because Auckland nestles around many bays and volcanoes, its sewage, waste, and climate systems have direct repercussions on water quality and wave patterns. For Mexico City, the soft terrain of the lake beds intensifies tremors from earthquakes and produces sinking in various corners of the city. In both cases, therefore, careful management of water systems is required. Such management, however, not only relies on sewage and canal infrastructures, but also on how people interact with these infrastructures and with the built environment as a whole. In order to ensure that populations contribute to functional systems, local governments and civil society organisations have resorted to campaigns promoting a personal involvement in the use of water resources and infrastructures. This is achieved partly through public messages in streets and through electronic means, but also

for example, in the promotion of individual household rainwater harvesting. These measures thus seek to stimulate reflections and motivate ‘improved’ and ‘adequate’ behaviour among city dwellers regarding water in the city.

This article stems from a collaborative research project undertaken in the context of a DFG-funded research group investigating urban ethics in 12 cities around the world (Dürr et al. 2019). Our two projects draw on longitudinal qualitative research, conducted during multiple periods of fieldwork from 2018 to 2020. Our research includes: interviews with government officials, activists, and other stakeholders; document analyses; participant observations; photographic registry; as well as sensorial explorations of each city. The fieldwork was conducted in part by individual project members, and in part through team-based research in each city. It was during ethnographic walks, or explorations of urban spaces (Kusenbach 2003), that we noticed the signs in Auckland and the project called *Ecoducto* in Mexico City (see below). In a comparative analysis, we identified the thread that binds both cases together and that provides the backbone of this article’s argument. The campaigns to promote paying attention to water quality at the coast in Auckland and to rainwater harvesting in Mexico City, furthermore, emphasise individual responsibility and interest in contributing to the whole water ecosystem in the city.

The chapter’s arguments are presented in four parts. First, we situate our argument in the context of the literature evidencing subjectivation processes in the context of neoliberal environmental management. We add to this literature by pointing to the ways in which governments and civil society organisations seek to constitute environmental subjects. The second and third parts consist of our case studies: Auckland and Mexico City. We consider these as prime examples of cities where government officials and civil society activists have sought to change urban dwellers’ practices by drawing attention to the repercussions of their actions on the city itself. In both cities, human-nature relations are enriched by combinations of Indigenous, (post-)colonial governance and expert perspectives. The last part is our conclusion on the efforts analysed here, especially considering the attempts to make environmental subjects out of urban dwellers in a context of neoliberal urbanisation.

## 5.2 Re-imagining human-environment relations in neo-liberalised cities

It has only been since the 1970s, as environmental concerns have gained ground in political agendas, that cities as ecologies in themselves have been seriously considered in order to improve urban planning (Niemelä 1999). The timing coincides with the rise of neoliberal policies for urban development in cities and city-regions around the world (Harvey 2005), bringing to the urban level “the belief that open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development” (Brenner & Theodore 2003, p. 2). For cities, this has meant a heightened sense of competition between urban centres for transnational flows (Swyngedouw 1992; Brenner & Theodore 2003, p. 20), as well as the incorporation of such neoliberal principles as deregulation, reregulation, privatisation, neoliberalisation, and enhanced fiscal austerity into their policy regimes. Some argue that “cities have become strategic targets and proving grounds for an increasingly broad range of neoliberal policy experiments, institutional innovations, and political projects” (Peck et al. 2009, p. 65). In this context, new environmental concerns are being addressed within neoliberal agendas, for example, through emphases on insistence on public-private partnerships, and adherence to new market rules and performance criteria (Bakker 2010).

On one hand, ‘green space’ is – alongside ‘walkability’ – valued as part of a street-level vitality that may attract affluent individuals in a process of gentrification (Schlichtman et al. 2017, p. 177). On the other hand, the effects of industrial production, motorised mobility, construction, and other technology-based activities, have generated a series of risks that require interventions by governments and civil society organisations. To reduce atmospheric pollution, for example, local authorities may design and implement new policies and also require urban dwellers to alter their behaviour to contribute in the effort. As they use neoliberal instruments and rework urban planning to address both climate change concerns and the interests of investors, governments are bringing about a new urban *dispositif*, that is, “a heterogeneous set of discourses, practices, architectural forms, regulations, laws, and knowledge connected together into an apparatus of government” (Braun 2014, p. 49). Each such *dispositif* may be framed around concerns for “sustainable development”, a concept the United Nations has advocated for in order to bring environmental thinking into urban planning. The declaration of Habitat III, the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III 2017),

set out a vision for urban development with sustainability and resilience at its core (Meerow et al. 2016). For some critics, however, the efforts to achieve a consensus across widely differing interests, has neutralised them, meaning that the concept of sustainability “has lost much of its transformative potential” (Rosol et al. 2017, p. 1710). Instead, it tends to be harnessed to specific interests, and especially specific forms of infrastructure investments.

In their governance, local authorities do not limit their incorporation of environmental concerns to an apparatus of government, but also actively seek to constitute environmental subjects. They do so by engaging shared imaginaries of the urban, or the manner in which urban dwellers experience the city through “affectively laden patterns/images/forms” (Lennon 2015, p. 1). Life in cities is a constant negotiation with a high density of human interactions, which implies navigating built and biological environments (Sennett 2018). The stimulation of city inhabitants’ imaginations, therefore, addresses their creative capacities to experience the world and enrolls them as active citizens in making the urban (built) environments (Lennon 2015, p. 2). There is a change from previous perspectives that considered cities as different from ecosystems to current understandings of cities as ecosystems (Rademacher & Sivaramakrishnan 2013). The significance in promoting such a change of view or re-imagining of the city is directly related to how people experience the city.

This process is defined by a governmentality approach specifically addressed to environmental matters, that is, environmentality (Fletcher 2017). For urban dwellers, this means an addition of new layers of control and discipline they are expected to follow. These in turn entail a series of discursive, material, and regulatory nudges to promote urban dwellers’ involvement in courses of action (Foucault 2008). It is these prompts that interest us, as they represent the steps with which governments and civil society organisations carry out the formation of environmental subjects. Brand considers that “[t]he political significance of urban environmentalism has [...] to be explored not within the confines of the ‘environment’ itself but in its relation to the socio-spatial transformations of neoliberal urbanisation” (Brand 2007, p. 620).

In everyday situations, urban dwellers navigate the cities they inhabit disciplined via “institutions, discourses, and practices” (Dawney 2013, p. 631). These “methods of punishment, supervision, and restraint” (Foucault 1991a, p. 29) shape their bodily responses to situations and objects. In both Auckland and Mexico City, local governments and civil

society organisations have installed a series of infrastructures, including signposts, and practices regarding the management of water in the city, that promote individuals to modify their daily life. In doing so, they are affecting alterations in urban dwellers' subjectivities regarding the urban in order to improve hydrosocial relations (Cousins 2017). Water is "simultaneously political and biopolitical [...] essential to the health of the population as well as that of the individual" (Bakker 2013, p. 282). By going beyond regulations and reaching into urban dwellers' quotidian relations with water, local governments and civil society organisations in Auckland and Mexico City effectively seek to shape a specific type of environmentality related to water, what Rattu and Véron have called hydromentality (Rattu & Véron 2015).

While the cases we analyse below can be read as further evidence of the need to better understand the way in which urban built environments function as ecosystems in order to promote improvements for life forms in them (Alberti 2008; Ahern 2016), our interest is in the way such framings of human-environment relations in the city (Gandy 2006) operate as governmentality. We focus on the efforts to establish particular governmentalities (Elden 2007) in the context of constructing/understanding/framing cities as ecosystems, and not on an evaluation of the resulting practices.

### 5.3 Auckland's blue backyard

Auckland, located on the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ), once was fittingly dubbed the "Water City of the South Pacific" (Toy 1977). The port city has over 3,700 km of coastline and a large part of its administrative area is oceanic. Built on a quite narrow isthmus, the urban centre of Auckland is closely embraced by – or intertwined with – three large harbours, the Kaipara Harbour in the North-West, the Manukau Harbour in the South-West, and the Waitematā Harbour and Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi in the East. The 1.6 million inhabitants of Auckland have a long and rich relation to the sea (Winder 2006). While Auckland's city government stressed the value of the marine environments to Auckland's people and identity in its last strategic plan (Auckland Council 2018), awareness of ongoing pollution and degradation of the marine areas coupled with efforts to improve their environmental state are of long-standing. During the late 1980s and early 1990s calls were raised for the establishment of a marine park in the Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana, which was passed into law with the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act in 2000. The park embraces public conservation land, island and coastal reserves, the foreshore, seabed, and sea, and is mapped out as one large area (including

parts of Auckland) with a seaward boundary and shaded catchment areas in the act of 2000. While the legislation does not put into place any explicit restrictions (Peart 2017), and a boundary between land and sea remains in place, it encourages a geographical imagination of a single management entity defined by its hydrological connectivities, in which people and communities are framed as “constituent parts” (NZ government 2000, p. 6) of the environment and ecosystems. Curiously, this new imaginary splits the Auckland region, since that part of the city draining towards the Tasman Sea in the West is not part of the park. With the park, the Hauraki Gulf Forum was founded, an integrated body bringing together the different authorities in the area and tangata whenua (people of the land, local Māori communities). In regular reports, the Forum identifies and raises awareness for the state of the environment in the Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana. Some of the main issues identified are land-based pollutions coming from “stormwater, wastewater, litter, sediment, and heavy metals all eventually end[ing] up in the harbours, and impact[ing] on their ecology” (Auckland Council 2018, p. 169). In large part, they derive from urban development, and (historic) land use and infrastructure decisions (such as combined wastewater and stormwater networks which overflow into the harbours), and are likely to worsen as Auckland’s population is expected to reach 2.1 million by 2033 (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2011; Auckland Council 2018).

The problem of land-based pollution on water quality and marine ecosystems is not a new realisation in ANZ, but was already recognised in ANZ’s Resource Management Act, enacted in 1991. The Resource Management Act puts integrated natural resource management in the hands of regional councils, whose “territorial jurisdiction [...] was purposely defined on the basis of groups of large water catchments (including groundwater aquifers) to facilitate [...] integrated management of water allocation, water quality, and related land management” (Memon et al. 2010, p. 36). But as Memon et al. (2010) notice, integration of water planning has been rather poor so far. The establishment of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park and Forum were attempts to better integrate (water) management, and can be said to “remap” (Affolderbach et al. 2012) the area from the sea up to its catchments.

In 2013, the HGF’s 2011 *State of Our Gulf* report led to the initiation of a semi-official marine spatial planning exercise, called *Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari*. The plan focused on terrestrial freshwater as well as marine ecosystems and their components, and aimed at countering the effects coming from city, land, and people. In its imagination it takes up earlier Pākehā (New Zealander of European descendant) efforts to contain urban sprawl,



establish a mosaic of marine reserves, preserve landscape features, and establish watershed-based planning units. While the term ‘ecosystem(s)’ used in the resulting plan refers to natural ecosystems, a further imaginary of the park as interrelated community of people, tangata whenua, natural ecosystems, their living and non-living components, as well as other polluting entities is drawn (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016). Thus, the plan promotes a more integrated and holistic conception of human-environment relationships in the park and does so by employing an ecosystem-based management framework.

An integrated and holistic approach is also represented by taking up *Ki Uta Ki Tai* as one of the “four overarching concepts that underpin the plan” along with other Māori concepts (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2017, p. 5). Harmsworth and Awatere (2013) describe *Ki Uta Ki Tai* as a key Māori environmental concept. Translated in the plan as *Ridge to Reef or Mountains to Sea*, the concept implies a “whole-of-landscape approach [or] the Māori concept of integrated catchment management” (Harmsworth & Awatere 2013). According to a whakapapa relationship (having a genealogical relationship of humans and ecosystems, and all flora and fauna, see Harmsworth and Awatere 2013), the plan also refers to the position of people as not just being part of but being related with the natural world, which obliges them to maintain “the lands and waters to which they whakapapa” (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016, p. 30). Inherent to the concept of whakapapa, is kaitiakitanga – “the ethic and practice of protection and conservation of the natural environment and the resources within it on which people depend” (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016, p. 30). Interestingly, in this sense the two lines of thinking, an ecosystem-based management view and whakapapa framing and imaginary, seem complimentary and bring together regional planning, watershed-based infrastructure planning, ecoregion concepts, and bioregionalism, with Māori Indigenous concepts. The framing also connects in the plan with the emphasis on shared but individual responsibilities and an ethics of environmental care, especially as the plan emphasises kaitiakitanga and guardianship as another overarching principle. This goes hand in hand with techniques of government in the plan, such as the (visual) display of groups doing rubbish clean-ups or promoting rock fishing safety and promoted as both “kaitiaki and guardianship in action” (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016, p. 57), and desired forms of human-environment interrelations.

We contend that in Auckland imagining the urban as ‘ecosystem’ appears in different forms. It connects to the communication and stimulation of a certain, improved behaviour – such as environmental care or risk awareness – among its urban dwellers, through re-

flection and a sense of individual responsibility and ownership. Such connections are already known from studies of environmental mobilisations in Auckland (Fischer 2020) but this is also emphasised in the Water Strategy's aim of "empowering Aucklanders to take care of our waters and ensuring we all take responsibility for our impact" (Auckland Council 2019a). As Penny Hulse, Chair of Auckland's Environment and Community Committee says:

"It's no good looking out at the glistening waters of the Waitematā. You need to ask, 'What's going on? What am I doing to that water? What's my position in this as an individual? What am I doing to keep that for future generations [...] Everyone needs to contribute to a collective response'" (Donnell 2019, p. 23).

As a second aspect of this neoliberal tendency in urban planning, the imaginary of the city as integrated and interconnected (eco)system (with humans as ecosystem components) links to creating consensus and achieving collaboration, and the legitimisation of a new water strategy involving both large infrastructure investments and transformations of natural ecosystems, whether in the sea or catchments.

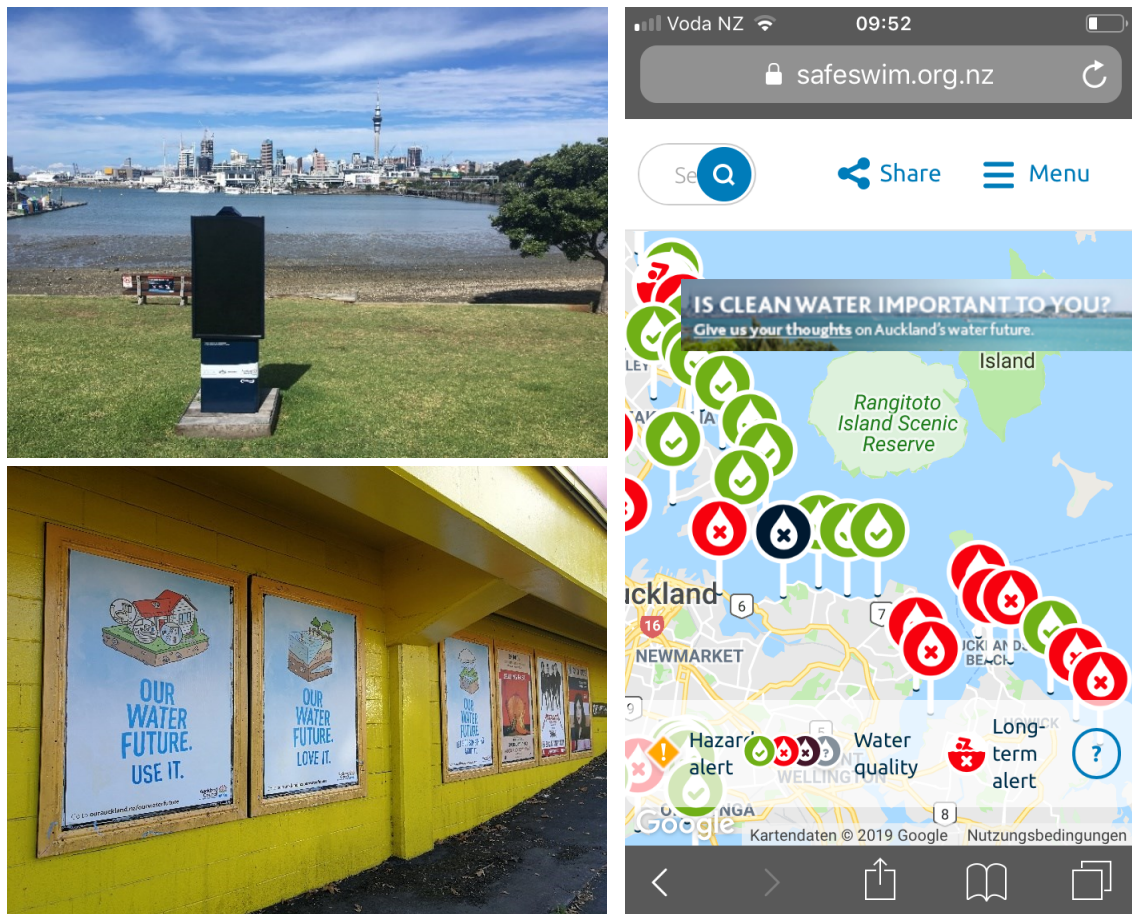
References to the interconnectedness of human activity and marine (and freshwater) ecosystems can today also be detected in the urban landscape of Auckland, often connected to land-based pollution. Drains are provided with the indication "dump no waste – flows to sea" (Fig. 5.1), evoking even in areas further from the sea an ecosystem imaginary connected to a call for responsible conduct. By the sea, signs warn of "potential health risks" when swimming, and with a reference to heightened risk after heavy rain events. Under Auckland Council's 'Safeswim' programme, the signs were supplemented by digital displays at many city beaches showing water quality forecasts and automatically updating every 15 minutes in response to observed rainfall (Auckland Council 2019b; Fig. 5.2a). An App was launched, informing on marine water quality and, while making health risks from pollution a matter of personal responsibility, it brought the relation between marine water quality, rain events, urban infrastructure, overflows, and run-offs further into public attention. In March 2019, a banner appeared on the app asking its user: "Is clean water important to you? Give us your thoughts on Auckland's water future" (Fig. 5.2b). Thus, Auckland Council promoted its public consultation process on 'Our Water Future', the development of a new water strategy for Auckland. The accompanying posters, simultaneously displayed around the city, showed different parts of an 'urban water cycle', from

rainfall, to mountain rivers, household water use, outdoor pools, sewage treatment plants, beaches, and the open sea (Donnell 2019; Fig. 5.2c).



**Fig. 5.1** Drains provided with the indication “dump no waste – flows to sea” can be found in several places in the urban centre of Auckland, evoking an ecosystem imaginary connected to a call for responsible conduct (Photo: M. Aschenbrenner, 2019).

In the described cases in Auckland, the imagination of an interconnected urban human-environmental system seems to be mainly mediated by experts and park planners. Collaborative planning, public displays in the forms of posters, signs, and electronic indicators, as well as mobile applications work to generate an imaginary of Auckland as ecosystem in a process of environmentality. This was certainly the case in Auckland’s Water Strategy, which featured council-controlled organisations, city planners, and agencies putting up signs, information boards, and posters in the urban landscape. While they do not use the wording of *the urban* as ‘ecosystem’, they create this imagination by framing the Gulf, waterways, people, and other living and non-living entities as an interconnected socio-natural system or from an Indigenous perspective. It becomes a means to meet environmental problems particularly marine/water pollution with the help of urban dwellers, while putting principles of ‘good’ environmental management such as a holistic, ecosystem-based approach and integration of Māori world view into practice.



**Fig. 5 (clockwise)** a Digital signs displaying water quality forecasts in Auckland were put up at several beaches in context of Auckland Council's Safeswim programme. b The online forecast of Safeswim gives live information on water qualities and swim alerts for Auckland. In March 2019 a banner asked users to participate in the public consultation process for a new water strategy for Auckland. c The posters found in an inner-city suburb of Auckland communicate "Our Water Future", the consultation process for a new water strategy for Auckland, to its inhabitants. They each show a part of an overall "urban water cycle" (Photos: M. Aschenbrenner, 2019).

## 5.4 The Mexico City basin

Large swaths of Mexico City are built on what used to be a lake (Vitz 2018). The metropolis often suffers from both floods and water scarcity (Romero Lankao 2010). The rapid growth of its population has led to an overuse of the aquifers that lie beneath it, which in turn causes a sinking of certain areas of the city (Mendez et al. 2013) and leaves it more vulnerable to earthquakes (Flores-Estrella et al. 2007). While government projects to address these issues have tended to focus on preventing floods due to excessive rainfall during the rainy season and managing water shortages during the warm months, organised civil society has pushed for more strategic thinking. Two key issues stand out: rainwater harvesting and urban river restoration. "We need to imagine a city we want for our future, even if



it sounds undoable at the moment”, a renowned mobility activist mentioned during a meeting of activists from around the world headed by a Dutch organisation in Mexico City in October 2018. She said this as she presented her idea of restored rivers in the Mexican capital as part of a strategic exercise designed to (re)envision their city for 2050.

As the city grew exponentially in the twentieth century, many of its rivers were channelled through sewage pipelines, and the remaining water systems were drained. One such river was the Piedad, which in the 1940s became part of the sewage piping below a 12 lane avenue, called Viaducto Miguel Alemán, one of Mexico City’s urban freeways, which was opened in 1950. “Since then, the stream has been running in tubes inside a massive concrete median, collecting rainwater (80%) and sewage (20%) from the nearby areas” (Sliwa 2014, p. 8). Rainwater harvesting and urban river restoration would, according to civil society groups, help reduce both floods and water shortages. In both cases, however, a key ingredient is changing mindsets among urban dwellers so that they incorporate the care of water in their daily practices. We argue that the efforts by civil society organisations – with the support from government authorities – promote the view of the city as ecosystem.

In 2009, a group of activists set up a first system of rainwater harvesting in the Cultura Maya barrio, a poor neighbourhood in the south of Mexico City. Their work was part of a local NGO, the International Institute for Renewable Resources (IRRI 2020) that sought to develop sustainable solutions to environmental challenges. Those involved developed a unique system, named Tlaloque, which separates the dirtiest water from the first rains so that it does not reach the tank. The activists founded a social enterprise, called Isla Urbana (urban island), to commercialise and promote the system (Isla\_Urbana 2020). Like other social enterprises dedicated to environmental issues (Vickers 2010), Isla Urbana works with a model that combines three fronts: a business, a charity, and a consultancy. With the first, it sells its system to wealthier clients – either businesses or households – who seek to reduce their reliance or expenditure on the public water supply. The second consists on designing and implementing projects to provide their systems to poor communities or neighbourhoods with the help of donations. The third serves as an advocacy front to provide advice and knowledge to local governments and to liaise with other NGOs or social enterprises. Since its foundation, Isla Urbana has installed numerous systems in remote areas in the country, especially in Indigenous areas in the north and west, but also crucially in poor neighbourhoods in Mexico City. In every house with around 60 square meters of roof, the system can collect up to 40 thousand litres of rainwater, or enough

water for a family for between five and eight months of the year. In 2019, the Mexico City government installed ten thousand rainwater harvesting systems from Isla Urbana in areas particularly affected by water shortages (Sedema 2019).

Rainwater harvesting is a good example of neo-liberalised urbanisation, as it is up to private entrepreneurial efforts to address problems that would be best addressed by government policymaking. At first sight, by promoting individualised measures for a shared problem (water shortages), the widened imaginary of the city as ecosystem does not come to the fore, but they do feature complementary advocacy activities. For example, participating in discussions about environmental policies and water management in Mexico City, Isla Urbana seeks to make people link their own situations with that of the urban environment. In 2014, the Mexico City government announced tax breaks for those who installed rainwater harvesting systems, and that all new buildings in the city were now obliged to install rainwater harvesting systems (Sosa 2014). In 2018, the director of Isla Urbana took part in a public meeting with specialists and other NGOs to discuss the potential of green areas in the city to capture rainwater to replenish depleting groundwater (Juárez 2018). This fits in with what Gordon thought were Foucault's concerns about "the development of government in Western societies to tend toward a form of political sovereignty which would be a government of all of each and whose concerns would be at once to 'totalise' and to 'individualise'" (Gordon 1991, p. 3). But we should not lose sight of the environmentality at work here. Not only were small-scale water harvesting projects realised in the city but also these initiatives combined with the urban river restoration project called Ecoducto to announce a broader view of the ecology of water in the city.

In 2012, a few activists started jumping over a pedestrian bridge that ran above the avenue, in order to reach a small patch of grass that lay in the middle. This patch is at street level, while the six central lanes of the avenue (three per direction) are a few metres below. Another six lanes (three per direction) are on the sides at street level. The activists held picnics on Sundays in order to demand the restoration of the river. The organisers, from the same milieu as Isla Urbana, advocated a vision that was put forth by a group of local architects, urbanists, and landscape architects to recover the lakes and rivers in the city (González de León & Cruz 1998). The idea behind this move was to deal with recurrent socio-environmental challenges like floods, droughts, pollution, and the sinking of the city (Cherem et al. 2011). In 2017, a coalition of 30 organisations organised a massive picnic in which they set out four foci of concern as crucial for Mexico City: water, mobility, public

space, and ethical consumerism. In that event, they called for a restoration of 45 rivers in the city. In the views of activists, if the city would regain these spaces, an overall improvement of the quality of life would follow, with cleaner air, more green spaces, less noise, and other benefits. Their vision was of Mexico City as an ecosystem in need of repair and care.

In response to that activism, the government of Mexico City decided in 2018 to implement what is considered a first step towards the restoration of the river. Along 1.6 km, the area that had been used for the picnics has been transformed into a linear park, known as Ecoducto (Ecoducto 2019). On its sides are 4,800 square metres of vegetation that are watered by the water from the pipeline that mixes sewage and rainwater. At one edge of the park is an area equipped with various filters including natural filters made of plants and rocks, designed to ensure that the water that is used for irrigation arrives as clean as possible. Throughout the park, plantings of trees and scented plants (like lavender) reduce both the noise of the traffic (by 10 decibels) and the pollution. Walking through the park, one could forget that one is in the middle of a large 12 lane avenue. A few rest areas with benches and shade offer respite from the buzzing city around. Crucially, it is also an educational space with placards along the route that provides illustrations, graphs, and information about the various plants and life forms that inhabit the park. While some focus on technical aspects of natural filters or plant characteristics, others explain the importance of healthy ecosystems for wider areas. The last one is entitled “We are water” and shows an illustration of the basin in the valley where Mexico City lies. It explains that the region’s name in náhuatl (the language of the Aztecs or Mexicas), Anáhuac, means “entre las aguas”, or “close to the water”. It also has a list of environmental benefits from urban lakes and rivers, which include: reduction of heat, carbon capture, oxygen production, improved water quality control, help for biodiversity, climate event regulation (floods and droughts), and absorption of air pollutants. In contrast to Auckland, such reference is the only trace of the Indigenous character of the region. To date the city’s high proportion of Indigenous population with its strongly nature-centred belief systems has not translated into any sort of influence in policymaking or wider political imagination.

What pervades along the Ecoducto park is a modern narrative, expressly natural-scientific and evidence-based. With a series of numbers and graphs, numerous placards stress the situation regarding water usage in Mexico City. One of the central signs shows an aerial view of the Viaducto divided in three. The first includes cars and the picnic which was the

start of this movement. The second shows a small stream with plants around and less space for cars on the sides, as well as a cycleway on the edge of the avenue. The third and last shows the whole area dedicated to the river and vegetation, with only the cycleway remaining as a space for mobility. The Ecoducto is therefore itself an exercise of imagination of what the city could be if only its river ecosystems were restored.

Both Isla Urbana and Ecoducto are examples of a style of entrepreneurial urbanism through which activists seek to bring about their view of environmental care. While Isla Urbana works with an individualised model that may respond to self-interest (by saving on water bills), the cumulative effect helps improve water management in the city. The Ecoducto park, on the other hand, offers a long-term perspective to understand the city as a broad and complex ecosystem. The activists' agenda is only partially evident from the signs, as it is more clearly stated in the various publications some of the participants have posted in various webpages and online forums (Ecoducto 2019). Their constant references to birds and other life forms, to the surrounding mountains and weather patterns, and to urban dwellers' health and wellbeing reveals the extent to which their agenda is shaped by a view of ecosystem interactions. In seeking to draw urban dwellers to experience anew an area that, for the last few decades, has been taken over by automotive traffic, activists seek to show the potential for ecosystem restoration. The first author walked along the 1.6 km of linear park and was surprised that he could inhale and not notice the pollution that is so evident when crossing a pedestrian bridge. The vegetation in the middle of an avenue made a big difference to how one can experience urban space. The desire to restore ecosystems is thus geared in this case to helping urban dwellers to sense how the city could be: by smelling, hearing, and seeing the difference.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The cases we have presented offer contrasting campaigns through which city governments and civil society organisations seek to make environmental subjects out of their urban dwellers. They do this through the promotion of specific forms of governmentality regarding water management – or hydromentalities. In Auckland, water is ever present in the horizon and can thus easily be linked to city inhabitants' everyday practices. In Mexico City, on the other hand, water is either only present by its absence in the shortages that take place every dry season, or in its overabundance during the rainy season. In both cases, however, the campaigns we have selected promote that urban dwellers not only adopt appropriate (urban) environmental ethics including an ethics of care but that they engage



differently with their city in order to improve its water management. By insisting on changes in private practices, governments, and civil society organisations seek to create environmental subjects. A key element of achieving such aims is promoting an egocentric motivation because in certain situations, as Agrawal et al. (2005) described, “self-interest comes to be cognised and realised in terms of the environment” (p. 162).

The atomisation of practices, however, is only part of the picture. Another of the tools city governments and civil society organisations use to promote the creation of environmental subjects, we argue, is to re-imagine the city as an ecosystem. As we have shown, in the case of Auckland, it is not simply a matter of prohibiting rubbish being thrown into the street, but an invitation to think that any waste dumped there would flow out to the sea. In the case of Mexico City, it is not merely a matter of ensuring one’s own water supply, but of helping the city improve its water management for the benefit of all urban dwellers and all life in the city. In arguing that small actions have an effect on the whole, the patterns of ecological interactions are laid bare. In a similar vein to Benedict Anderson, who pointed to the role of ‘imagined communities’ in making the modern nation state (Anderson 2006), in our cases, we point to the ‘imagined communities’ being produced in the urban, but note that they are not simply political entities that require identity-based rituals and discourses related to nationalism, but rather involve narratives, discourses, and rituals that entangle a broader set of entities and identities in complex interrelations between species, materialities, and objects.

Urban environmental governance reveals divides “of the collective good – within and across generations, and at different scales” (Mawdsley 2009, p. 249). Governments are often guided by political timescales, which has direct effects in their planning and policy-making. For this reason, the participation of civil society organisations provides at least a claim to a long-term agenda that seeks to generate water commons (Bruns 2015). The purpose appears to be to promote an imaginary of the city as ecosystem with a deeper understanding of the relations among life forms, materials, and topographies in cities and beyond. Thus, governments and civil society organisations educate the population as living *with nature, as being part of it*, or, in other words, to consider the city as an ecosystem of which they are one of the constitutive elements.

Our focus has remained on the effort of governments and civil society organisations to promote a type of governmentality of water management. We did not set out to examine the actual practices among the population to evaluate if such efforts indeed succeeded. In

our view, a focus on attempts to achieve a re-imagining of cities as ecosystems sheds light on a specific development in a context of neoliberal urbanism. Although it is a change in line with recent adjustments, it nevertheless signifies a break with centuries of distorted perceptions where the urban and nature were considered as separate entities. It is worth noting that a clear contrast now exists. The previous conception of ecosystems *in* cities sought to contain certain areas for vegetation or other life forms, like in parks or private gardens. The current perception of cities *as* ecosystems has helped understand the complex interconnections that exist among the various life forms, objects, and the built environment. It remains to be seen if the promotion of environmental subjects does indeed produce a new urban environmental imagination.

## 5.6 References

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## 6 Deciding port futures: Ports of Auckland, marine spatial planning and contested ethics in blue economy plan making

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### 6.1 Introduction

Public debate has swirled in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ), over the future of the city's port as expectations concerning the performance of the city's Waitematā Harbour (the Harbour) and Hauraki Gulf Tīkapa Moana (the Gulf) change. The port's presence on Auckland's inner-city waterfront and its continued use of shipping lanes in the Waitematā Harbour and Gulf, are being increasingly challenged. Diverse actors raise the following questions: should port activities be relocated, freeing the waterfront and channel approaches for other, more profitable, more environmentally compatible, and less industrial uses; what is the 'right' decision concerning the port's future; and what constitutes 'good' decision making on this contested issue?

Analysing how decisions are made and negotiated in this issue, with a focus on governance, helps to gain further understanding of coastal transitions – here energised by new expectations arising from blue economy (BE) accounting and marine spatial planning (MSP). In 2013-2016, MSP was introduced in the Gulf in an effort to “implement an ecosystem-based approach to the marine environment” (Peart 2019, p. 1). From 2014, BE received increasing attention due to the national science initiative on Sustainable Seas (SSNSC 2020). In this research, the economic value creation potential of the Harbour and

Gulf are highlighted due to their “prominence in the national marine economy” (Envirostrat 2019, p. 23). Local government and business are increasingly interested in investing in sea-dependent and related value chains (Winder & Le Heron 2017; Envirostrat 2019). Efforts to generate greater value from the Gulf’s BE while planning for healthier marine ecosystems are inevitably entangled with further expectations, most notably Māori rights and entitlements. Thus, in Auckland, BE and MSP must be seen as part of rapidly changing and competing agendas. In a buzz of excited engagement, economic-environment projects and relations are being reimagined, reworked, and renegotiated. The way bargaining and decision-making takes place – leading to a transformation of the overall socio-natural assemblage and, from a political ecology point of view, to certain beneficiaries and losers – is an important aspect of the human dimensions in ocean governance and management, and thus for the marine social sciences (Bennett 2019b; Heidkamp & Morrissey 2019).

This chapter analyses the role of ethics in decision-making. Detecting ethical claims-making and a vocabulary of ethics in the contested port issue, the question of an ‘ethicisation of the conflict’ is raised, and how this connects to framing and decision-making in BE projects. The analysis draws on 27 semi-structured and narrative interviews conducted with actors in and around the Gulf between late 2018 and July 2020 (Table 6.1). Interview partners were experts in an MSP process (Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari) and for the Gulf’s overall BE. Eight of them were directly involved in port-related issues and struggles through their work for respective organisations (Key Informants 11, 16, 17, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27). The interviews focused on different fields of expertise and topics, namely, MSP, BE, marine conservation, port-related issues, and struggles as well as experts’ perceptions and imaginations of the Gulf and Harbour. This chapter also makes use of analysis of reports, associated material, and media coverage. This research is supported by a DFG (German Research Foundation) grant and is a project within the DFG-funded Research group ‘Urban Ethics.’ A special focus is on the ethics of “scientific knowledge and expertise [produced in the process] to increase moral authority, credibility, or legitimacy” (Bennett 2019a, p. 72), techniques of governing, and the creation (and challenging) of appropriate subject positions, both having their part in urban ethical negotiations (Foucault 1987; Dürr et al. 2019).

This chapter first provides a review of developments in port industry, urban port and waterfront areas, and their analysis in geography literature. Connections are made between

Political Ecology and an Urban Ethics viewpoint. The following sections set current tensions around the Gulf, port of Auckland, and the port's narratives and perspectives in context. On that basis, struggle over BE decision-making over Auckland port futures is explored with a special focus on the role of ethical claims making. The main findings indicate the important and multi-layered role of ethics in BE thinking, legitimising specific rationalities, resource uses, subject positions, and sorting out winners and losers.

**Table 6.1** Expert interviews conducted during the research period, 2018-2020 (Table: M. Aschenbrenner).

Interview		Fields of Expertise*	Research Phase**
1	Key Informant 1	SCTTTP***, Social Sciences	1
2	Key Informant 2	SCTTTP, Planning Consultant	1
3	Key Informant 3	SCTTTP, Auckland Council	1
4	Key Informant 4	Planning consultant	1
5	Key Informant 5	SCTTTP, Environmental Conservation	1
6	Key Informant 6	SCTTTP, Social Sciences	1
6	Key Informant 7	SCTTTP, Social Sciences	1
		Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari (SCTTTP), Waikato Regional	
7	Key Informant 8	Council	2
8	Key Informant 9	SCTTTP, Marine Biology, and GIS	2
9	Key Informant 10	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	2
10	Key Informant 11	Auckland Council, SCTTTP	2
11	Key Informant 12	SCTTTP, Department of Conservation	2
12	Key Informant 13	Media, Environmental Conservation	2
13	Key Informant 14	SCTTTP, Hauraki Gulf Forum	2
14	Key Informant 15	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	2
15	Key Informant 16	Urban Development, SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	2
16	Key Informant 17	Waterfront Development, Auckland Council	2
17	Key Informant 18	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	2
18	Key Informant 19	SCTTTP, Recreational Fisheries	2
19	Key Informant 20	SCTTTP, Hauraki Gulf Forum	2
20	Key Informant 21	Department of Conservation, SCTTTP	3
20	Key Informant 22	Ministry for Primary Industries, SCTTTP	3
21	Key Informant 23	Cruise Ship Industry and Port Issues	3
22	Key Informant 24	Ports of Auckland Ltd., SCTTTP	3
23	Key Informant 25	Protests in the Context of POAL extensions	3
24	Key Informant 26	Protests in the Context of POAL extensions	3
25	Key Informant 27	Planning consultant, Blue Economy, SCTTTP	2, 3

\*Listed according to the key focus in the interview

\*\*Research phases: Oct-Dec 2018 (1), Feb-Apr 2019 (2), Jan-July 2020 (3)

\*\*\* SCTTTP stands for Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari, the marine spatial planning process in the Gulf

## 6.2 Port relocation and waterfront development

Port relocation with subsequent redevelopment of urban waterfronts is not a topic new to the urban development, planning, or human geography literatures (see Ng & Ducruet 2014 for a recent review of port geography literature). At the end of the last century, containerisation and mechanisation facilitated growing port productivity as increasing vessel sizes combined with improved intermodal freight handling, transforming seaports worldwide (Olivier & Slack 2006; Frémont 2013). These changes had a “profound effect on port structure, port operation [and] traditional port functions” (Hayuth 1981, p. 160) as well as the “long-standing spatial and functional ties between ports and cities” (Hayuth 1982, p. 219).

As privatisation and commercialisation proceeded, transnational corporations and public-private partnerships ousted public authorities from port-operating and owning (Heaver 2002; Brooks 2004). “Industrial and shipping agencies have reformulated their positions with non-port-related interests [such as] in the struggles to determine primary land uses on the waterfront” (Bunce & Desfor 2007, p. 252). New “patterns of economic activities and [...] technological developments [were regarded in the literature as] primary forces” (Bunce & Desfor 2007, p. 252) in the closing down and outward migration of terminals and port related industry, leaving behind vast inner-city areas often treated as “urban areas of discard” until developed in waterfront renewal projects (Slack 1980; Hilling 1988; Hoyle 1989; Slack 1989; Suykens 1989). More recent work on waterfronts has criticised these narratives and models for failing to “recognis[e] the complexity and dynamics of waterfront regeneration” (Desfor et al. 2011; Brownill 2013, p. 50). Instead, authors of a 2007 special issue of *Cities* understand urban waterfronts as “contested arenas” with numerous actors involved, embedded in different social and ecological processes, networks of power, and connected to contradictory meanings, identities, desires, urban imaginaries, discourses, and modes of governance (Bunce & Desfor 2007; Dodman 2007; Hagerman 2007; Kear 2007; Laidley 2007; O’Callaghan & Linehan 2007; Wakefield 2007).

While covering very different cities, contexts, and projects, much research still focuses on transformation after a port’s waterfront footprint is reduced through relocation or truncated activity (for an exception see e.g. Ou and Ma 2017). In Auckland, the usual changes in port operations and structures can be observed, but, interestingly, the main port facilities remain located at the waterfront while debate over the port’s future continues. Especially in a time when BE accounting receives growing attention in urban contexts (UN-Habitat 2018), contestation over port relocation presents an intriguing research topic. Po-

tentially, classic port related activities, ‘waterfront restoration’, and up-coming services such as carbon offsetting are all BE sectors and meet here. They connect to different local and global discourses, urban imaginaries, and developments, but collide with a ‘classic’ redevelopment process. In this context, no single way of decision-making, accounting, and argumentation is accepted or normative. Instead, the grounds on which the future of the port (and waterfront) are decided are fiercely contested. This text aims not at working out the ‘right’ decision in this struggle but the dynamics and grounds on which actors claim ‘right’ (or efficient/effective/etc.) decision-making. How do actors legitimise their positions, how do they build credibility, and contest others in a field where planning and decision-making practices seem subjective, open, and in the making?

Adopting a political ecology approach, this chapter frames the Harbour and Gulf as a ‘multi-faceted conflict zone’ in which different groups negotiate access to natural resources (Robbins 2012). This helps to question the “rationalist paradigm” (Flannery & Ellis 2016, p. 123) of planning and decision-making practices, and prevalent scientific and moral discourses of appropriate and legitimate resource use (Boucquey 2017). Geographers researching MSP, fisheries management, and marine conservation have identified how certain techniques of government – participatory processes, peer review, and expert panels – are used to claim neutrality for the apparatus of decision-making, thus depoliticising decisions while marginalising opposition and obscuring winners and losers (Ellis & Flannery 2016; Tafon 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019; Bennett 2019a).

However, this chapter goes one step further by conceptualising the debates around the relocation of Auckland’s port as a ‘field of Urban Ethics’ (Dürr et al. 2019). To date, ethics – as discursive fields in which different views, interests, problematisations, guiding principles, and ideals of the good are being negotiated – have received little attention in this context (Fischer 2020). While technological, socio-economic, and political logics are all present in Auckland, they appear to be embedded in a field where ‘good’ political behaviour, ‘right’ economic assessment or ‘sustainable’ technologies and practices are negotiated. Ethical claims seem to be ‘the oil in the machinery of decision making,’ the means with which actors interact, negotiate, and claim certain practices, knowledge, and urban futures. Here, the way in which actors refer to moral imperatives or principles are in the centre of the analysis. Due to space constraints, the focus is on power holders rather than urban dwellers’, port workers’, and others’ ‘ordinary ethics’ which are essential aspects for further research (Lambek 2010). In turn, this approach allows a focus on how ethical prob-

lematisations and claims-making function to (de)legitimise positions and speakers in debates or to create credibility and support for apparatuses of decision making.

### 6.3 Context: Harbour and Gulf as multifaceted conflict zone

When seen through a political ecology lens, the Harbour and Gulf are not a ‘natural’, politically inert system. In the historical transformation of the Gulf and Harbour, one finds “myriad ‘social-natural’ productions” (Bunce & Desfor 2007) each having its own set of narratives and socio-natural relations. Today, different knowledge, ideas, and agendas on how socio-natural relations of the Gulf, Harbour, and coast should be used and managed come together and overlap (Le Heron et al. 2019).

On a formalised governance level, several local institutions (and their rules and agendas) are involved, together with multiple national authorities. In 2000, national government established both a marine park with authority for the Gulf and its catchments, and the Hauraki Gulf Forum, with its own agenda of integrating management of the area among different governmental agencies and *tangata whenua* (‘people of the land’) (Peart 2017).

The rights of Māori as *tangata whenua*, Māori knowledge systems, interests, and associations to land and sea have rarely been recognised on a government level (Le Heron et al. 2019). A settlement process for grievances related to government failures to adhere to the Treaty of Waitangi, an agreement made in 1840 between representatives of the British crown and Māori iwi/hapū (‘tribes’/sub-tribes’), remains incomplete. While fisheries claims were settled in the 1990s, multiple claims to the foreshore and seabed of the area remain unsettled (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016). Recent government initiatives to ensure Māori rights and participation and the representation of Māori ontology in (environmental) management and governance have been made but are often met with political resistance (Le Heron et al. 2019). While iwi/hapū share common themes, nuances of opinion and different views persist.

In addition, Sea Change, a non-statutory, collaborative MSP exercise, aimed at a consensual agreement between Treaty partners, governmental agencies, and other actors in and around the Gulf for its better use and environmental protection – an attempt to reimagine and rework socio-natural relations. The Gulf’s environmental state is reported as degraded (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2020). MSP planning followed an ecosystem approach while integrating Māori worldviews and values (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016). The process re-

vealed multifaceted tensions between different socio-natural relations, discourses, and ethical perspectives (key informants 1-3, 5-16, 18-22, 24, 27).

Controversies and competing agendas are evident in tensions around specific projects and initiatives, whether marina developments (SKP 2017) or wastewater management (Acosta García et al. 2022). Thus, the ‘port case’ is only one of many foci where questions around urban, socio-natural relations are contested, negotiated, and (re)produced.

#### 6.4 The port in the Hauraki Gulf Tīkapa Moana

The port has long been a major player in the Gulf. It was imposed at what is now Auckland’s isthmus on Māori traditional land and waters. Back then Auckland was “rather a port city than a city with a port” (Winder 2006, p. 56): the city grew around the wharves. Until 1988, over 122 hectares of land were reclaimed for the port “dramatically expanding the city’s high value commercial real estate” (Winder 2006, p. 55) and heavily influencing the material forms of the Harbour (Bunce & Desfor 2007). The waterfront was assembled as a site of functioning port operations, according to principles of efficiency, use orientation, and exclusion for reasons of safety.

In 1988, Auckland Harbour Board (AHB) was turned into Ports of Auckland Limited (POAL) with ANZ’s government aiming for a change towards greater commercialisation, efficiency, and productivity – “every port [was] to operate as successful business” (NZ government 2014, p. 8; Pyvis & Tull 2017). POAL became 100% council owned in 2010, when, in a further reorganisation, the government amalgamated all of the local councils in Auckland region to form one unitary governing body. While public in function, POAL is not directly council controlled. An independent board of directors appointed by but not comprising members of Auckland Council works towards maximising the values of Auckland Council as shareholder and reports back to it. POAL has a major economic role in the city (Lewis & Murphy 2015; POAL, 2022). With their control of vital sections of the city’s extensive waterfront, POAL and AHB, their engineers and logistics experts, have long dominated the landscapes, seascapes, and environments of the harbour and Gulf (Winder 2006).

## 6.5 Challenges to Ports of Auckland

In the mid-2010s, POAL found its established, legitimated, and approved port management logic and position being challenged by alternative assessments of land development on Auckland's waterfront. In part, this owed to changes in the built environment, public discourses, and urban imaginary of the waterfront (Lewis & Murphy 2015). Beginning with hosted America's Cup events in 2000 and 2003, redundant port space was remediated and developed through public-private investments, with the Viaduct Harbour as a first, "powerfully evocative position" (Murphy 2008, p. 2537) in an ongoing redevelopment process. In the City's new rhetoric, a "liveable" urban waterfront environment is imagined – and supported by public opinion (Key Informants 17, 25, 26, NZ Herald 2011). The waterfront should be a dense, diverse, vital, and mixed-use space where sea views, Pacific and maritime cultural heritage come together to build a competitive asset for quality of life and to attract visitors, investment, and economic development (Auckland Council 2012; Panuku Development 2014).

In 2015, contradictions between the new imaginary and port use became obvious when POAL's proposal to further extend Bledisloe Wharf, met with defeat. Urban Auckland, a group of architects and urban designers, stopped POAL's plan by High Court decision. Another network, Stop Stealing Our Harbour (now Waterfront 2029), emerged, joining business and community actors to protest against reclamation works and advocate for a relocation of Auckland's port. Both groups connect to the global discourse on waterfront redevelopments. They challenged POAL on 'ethical terms': calling the company's public engagement "poor", its behaviour "unethical" and "arrogant" (Key Informant 25), and criticising POAL's role and decision-making power as "illegitimate" (Key Informants 25, 26).

## 6.6 Ports of Auckland's perspective and narratives

In the last two decades, POAL's performance reports reveal changed perspectives and narratives. Unsurprisingly, it boasts that it is responding to local and global expectations by adapting to global sea trade developments, introducing further port mechanisation, containerisation, and automation, and accommodating larger vessels through extensive harbour dredging (Pyvis & Tull 2017). It reports its own performance using narratives and metrics of trade, port efficiency, and capacity (Table 6.2) as well as its international connectedness. In 2010, POAL owned 76 hectares of land on the city's waterfront and man-



aged numerous assets and operations, from port shares in Whangarei and at Marsden Point to logistics and other (port) services' companies.

**Table 6.2** Performance Indicators for the Ports of Auckland, 2006-2019 (POAL 2009-2019). Notes: passenger numbers are not given for 2006-2010; total ship calls are not given for 2011-2015 and 2017-2019; EBIT is short for Earnings Before Interest and Tax (Table: G. M. Winder).

Year	TEU Number	Cargo m tonnes	Vehicles Number	Passenger Number	Cruise Ship Calls	Total Ship Calls	Revenue NZ\$m	Earnings EBIT NZ\$m	Ordinary Dividend NZ\$m
2006	688,077	4.6	185,159	nd	49	1736	159.3	62.3	31.8
2007	773,993	4.1	168,200	nd	49	1743	163.1	51.6	19.9
2008	840,993	3.6	173,373	nd	70	1738	169.4	52.8	22.8
2009	843,590	2.7	110,560	nd	69	1620	163.4	46.0	7.2
2010	867,368	2.8	129,811	nd	62	1426	165.0	52.0	22.0
2011	894,383	3.5	123,362	150,289	79	nd	175.4	54.7	18.0
2012	808,654	3.8	147,221	188,694	97	nd	175.4	49.0	20.1
2013	818,819	4.4	170,835	200,000	100	nd	186.6	55.4	29.5
2014	968,741	5.6	207,591	195,944	89	nd	219.9	84.5	66.6
2015	972,434	5.9	243,801	199,250	90	nd	217.3	77.8	41.7
2016	907,099	5.8	248,065	259,758	101	1588	211.1	84.0	54.8
2017	952,331	6.5	297,383	230,571	100	nd	224.4	60.3	51.3
2018	973,722	6.8	297,678	272,060	108	nd	243.2	76.8	51.1
2019	939,680	6.5	255,252	330,088	127	nd	248.1	53.9	18.6

While POAL's core performance indicators have remained the same, its narrative has changed. Already in 2010, it reported significant reductions to its carbon footprint. It now aims for zero emissions by 2040. Its purchase of the world's first full-size electric ship-handling tug and installation of the world's largest soil-based vertical garden on a car-handling building can be interpreted as further signs of a new narrative of (ecological) sustainability and responsibility (POAL 2020a, 2020b). POAL also boasted diverse public interaction opportunities including a quarterly magazine, Community Reference Group, and events like SeePort Festival or Tāmaki Herenga Waka Festival taking place in otherwise not publicly accessible port areas. In 2013, POAL was involved in a collaborative process to save the population of Bryde's whales in the Gulf from deaths through ship collisions (Key Informant 24). POAL participated in the MSP. This further emphasised POAL's role and location in the Gulf and connected POAL to key actors, such as the Hauraki Gulf Forum. It constituted POAL as collaborative, engaged, self-governed, and self-responsible

– as an ‘ethical’ subject, a caring part of the city (Dürr et al. 2019). These are signs that POAL is responding to new ethical standards and expectations.

## 6.7 Ethics as ‘oil in the machinery of decision making’

When, in 2015, opposition to port development activities became obvious, then mayor Len Brown initiated the *Port Future Study*, which soon became a point of reference for discussions around the port’s (and waterfront’s) future. It assessed future port options and should establish a “reliable and authoritative [process] on which Aucklanders agree that their council can base decision making on” (Auckland Council 2015a). The moral authority, credibility, and legitimacy of the study as decision-making technology were connected to ethical claims-making by (1) claiming an independent and transparent proceeding; (2) taking up global and local urban ethical discourses of participatory/collaborative decision-making by establishing mechanisms with two groups consisting, in varying parts, of members of ‘stakeholder organisations’ and *Mana Whenua* (Māori iwi/hapū with authority over land and resources) (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016; Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017; Le Heron et al. 2019, see also Key Informants 7, 14, 21, 22, 24); and (3) following consensual values in the production of scientific knowledge and expertise. As a result of the process, the diverse members of the Auckland community, represented by the stakeholders, would become constituted as “well-informed” citizens – as Council hoped (Collier & Lakoff 2005; Auckland Council 2015b).

While the assessment framework was established consensually, the private consultancy EY led the assessment as experts. Following the participants’ propositions, EY considered options including an expansion of the ports’ current footprint, a relocation of trade task, and waterfront redevelopment. It was by no means the first or last reassessment of Auckland’s port location choices (NZIER 2017; EY 2019; Smellie 2019), and, like its predecessors, it reaffirmed the current port location as best choice in the short to medium term on the basis of the logic of port management and economic analysis. In the long term, EY recommended to establish a port relocation option for freight outside the Gulf but to retain cruise functions on the Waitematā. An expansion beyond its existing position at the waterfront was not recommended because of *Mana Whenua* and community opposition. Urban Auckland’s reactions to the process were positive. They acknowledged that it complied with their desires: it had an “environmental, social and cultural perspective” and discussion by stakeholders, “and this is what we were asking for. The mayor [...] bless him” (Key Informant 25).

However, as new construction and reclamation plans became public, both critique of Auckland Council and POAL, and public debates around the port's future intensified (NZ Herald 2019a). Much of the ensuing struggle for a decision among the different (power holding) actors occurred within the set 'reporting framework'. A peer review of the original study commissioned by the City of Auckland contended that measurement, indicators, and evidence were wrong. Claims about back room influence in the 2016 Port Study decision to retain the port where it is, arose (NZ Herald 2019b, 2019c), and were countered by POAL with further publications and projects that demonstrated transparency and defended planning 'ethics' (POAL 2018, 2019).

In 2019, ANZ government hired EY and the consulting firm Sapere to conduct the *Economic Analysis of Upper North Island Supply Chain Scenarios* (MoT 2020). The reports "recommended the managed closure of the [port] and the development of Northport as the best way forward" (Fox 2019). Auckland's then mayor Phil Goff challenged the study for being biased by the political interests of the leader of the NZ First political party and Deputy Prime Minister, Winston Peters, who sought to transfer port business to Northport: "Predetermination is wrong. They need to do the study properly and what we're doing is trying to help them produce a credible report" (NZ Herald 2018).

POAL eventually 'answered' with two subsequent reviews conducted by two consulting firms to demonstrate a "completely unbiased view" (POAL 2019). POAL as well as the two reviewing companies claimed EY's study "flawed," and the decision arbitrary (not-fact based) (POAL 2019). Further, one of the reviewers called it "concerning" that EY's report proposed "a fundamental reorientation of Auckland's economic geography [while not identifying] the impacts on people, public infrastructure, housing and businesses" (NZ Institute of Economic Research (NZIER) 2017). The ethics thus claimed functioned not only to gain further moral authority and credibility and delegitimise the agency and socio-natural imaginaries of others, but they also reinforced reports, accounting, participation, and expert knowledge as technologies to decide and claim urban 'blue' economic-environmental relations as certain. Opposition moved in the same framing, challenging decisions based on faults in comparative accounting between the port's return and actual land value and negative values of environmental impacts (Key Informant 26).

Of course, debates around waterfront use involve further actors and fields. These cannot all be reported here. However, an analysis of *NZ Herald* articles from 2015 to 2020 in context of the port future study reveals only few actors, little Mana Whenua presence, and

only a few opinions expressed in public debate. Lately, public debate seems to be changing. A very recent twist in the discourse challenges the ethics of report creation and consultancy. Media as well as Waterfront 2029 criticised expert planning, with the *NZ Herald* stating:

“the new report is the twentysomethingth in about the same number of years and basically it says: let's not do anything, and in case you don't agree, here's a really stupid option to waste your time and money deciding not to do [...] When you don't like one report, you get another. And another. You bury the whole thing under a deep pile of sludge” (NZ Herald 2020).

## 6.8 Conclusion

As port activities and organisation have changed, there are different options opening up for urban waterfronts. Auckland's case shows how waterfronts are spaces where different urban blue economic-environment relations are contested and in the making. As political ecology studies of marine planning issues show, there is not one, 'right' predetermined way to decide on and between waterfront futures. The analysis further indicates how apparently depoliticised planning techniques – notably BE accounting – proved subject to bargaining and politics and to be uncertain, unreliable, and easily challenged assessment practices.

Urban ethics appear as a discursive field in which a common decision-making basis in port issues (related to economic assessment logics) is established and legitimised. Ethical claims are advanced by all (power holding) participants in the struggle over Auckland port futures. Accusations flew concerning the ethics of assessment practices, (faulty) assumptions, and political influence. People, groups, narratives, imaginaries, even objects gained or lost moral authority, legitimacy, credibility, and agency in this field. This, as well as emerging hierarchies, exclusions, and marginalisation due to constituted ethical subjectivities and ethical claims-making shows an “ethical violence” (Butler 2005) and suggests winners and losers to the process. Those who have the means, including the ethics, to connect to the process gain. They can claim credibility and legitimise their rationalities and imaginaries or delegitimise others. Those, such as Mana Whenua, with alternative framings, worldviews, and assessments, or missing the (financial) means, risk to be marginalised or must adjust to the framing. Port workers and marginalised communities were absent from port relocation debates. Thus, ethical framing has a role in legitimising a certain 'appropriate' resource use, one which is closely connected to economic and port man-

agement logics. Further, ethics shapes political contest by reinforcing a hegemonic framing for decision-making and foreclosing debates about other metrics or the very purpose of the planning process (Flannery et al. 2018). Ethical framing of the decision-making process helps to transfer contest away from legitimised fields of expert knowledge, participation, and moral negotiations, but it does not remove contestation. Instead, the ethics of expertise, participation, and negotiation become foci for challenges. Ethics are crucial for opening up a new political field (Mouffe 2005; Dürr et al. 2019). Aiming at a socially equitable and ecologically sustainable BE, involves taking transformative decisions and thus normativity as well as ethics. To be inclusive, reflection is needed on the (urban ethical) discursive fields where decisions are constituted. In governance processes organised around BE accounting (and MSP) ethics must be worked out in advance of the deliberation process. Shared ethics, agreed in advance, establish, and sustain a common decision-making framework, logics, and technologies.

Auckland's inner-city waterfront is a unique context for examining BE accounting at work. This section of ANZ's coast is among the most expensive pieces of real estate in the country, yet it is dominated by a working port handling the largest single share of the country's import trade. It is for this reason that assessment of the values and issues of port relocation are such a special test of the capacity of BE accounting as a planning tool. In this case, its capacity was found to be wanting: the official planning process ran into competition among experts using separate metrics for assessing economic outcomes; the process was critiqued for its lack of attention to environmental outcomes; social outcomes were ignored; and Māori interests and voices were strangely silent in public discussions. Far from depoliticising coastal planning, BE practices could not, in this case, deliver a legitimising narrative that would drive through a re-imagined city waterfront in the highly conflicted terrain of Auckland's urban ethics.

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## Part IV: Urban environmental ethics and community care of oceans and coasts

Chapter 7 is based on the peer-reviewed article

Aschenbrenner, M. 2025. Translating ahu moana into the local community: Marine care and the realisation of near-shore co-management on Waiheke Island. *New Zealand Geographer*, 0: 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nzg.70001> © 2025. Reproduced by permission of John Wiley & Sons Australia. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> CC-BY-NC-ND



## 7 Translating ahu moana into the local community:

### Marine care and the realisation of near-shore co-management on Waiheke Island

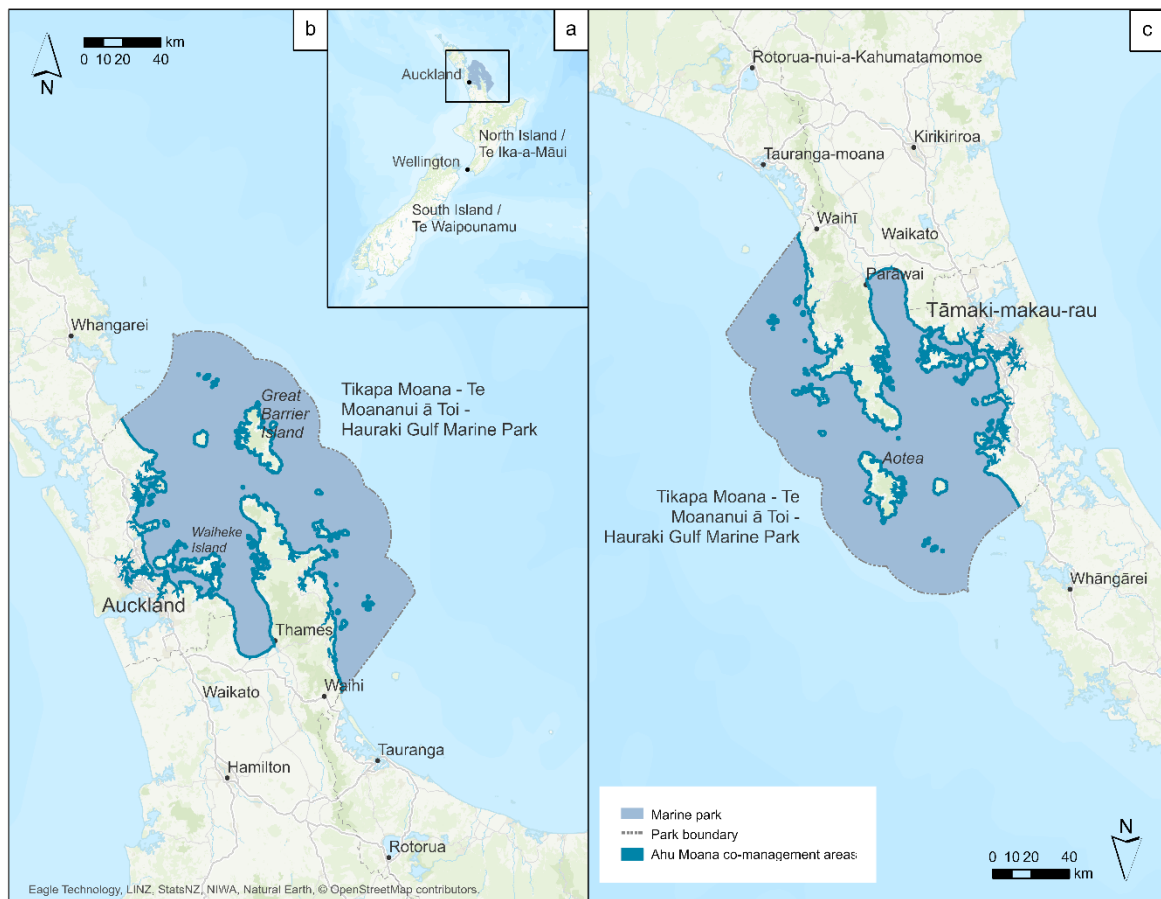
This chapter is based on the peer-reviewed article by Aschenbrenner, M. 2025. Translating ahu moana into the local community: Marine care and the realisation of near-shore co-management on Waiheke Island. *New Zealand Geographer*, 0: 1-12. For the original article see also Appendix A.4.

#### 7.1 Introduction

Place is a complex matter. It has, in many popular and academic contexts, been defined by space and scale, and “understood as more localised enactments of social and material practice” (Tuck & McKenzie 2016, 30). In this sense, place – the *local scale* – has gained prominence in bringing about socio-ecological transition/transformation (Hölscher et al. 2018; Köhler et al. 2021). Consequently, different forms of localism have emerged as a global trend in spatial planning and governance (Wills 2016; Brownill 2017). However, the *container* as which place is often seen, has been dissolved by theorisations of place as open and unbounded (Massey et al. 2009), and Indigenous, decolonising conceptualisations of place/land<sup>1</sup> (Tuck & McKenzie 2016; Larsen & Johnson 2017).

The chapter examines a case of localised, community-based management of near-shore coastal areas in Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ), where conventional and alternative understandings of place and localism are entangled. It explores how a relational perspective on community, place, and localism has emerged linked to ideas and practices of marine guardianship. Ethics of kaitiakitanga/guardianship<sup>2</sup> were integral to the marine spatial planning process and plan, *Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari* (SCTTTP), which was developed 2013-2016 in the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana (the Gulf) region on ANZ’s North Island / Te Ika-a-Māui. SCTTTP assembled kaitiakitanga/guardianship as a transformative element to change dominant naturalcultural imaginaries and relations (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), and thus the disastrous state of the Gulf’s mauri/health (Aschenbrenner 2023a, 2023b). This chapter aims to further investigate the emergence of kaitiakitanga and its social and political implications for the Gulf

SCTTTP introduced localised near-shore co-management areas, called Ahu Moana (AM; Te Reo Māori; ahu = nurture, build up; moana = the ocean), to implement an ethic of kaitiakitanga/guardianship<sup>3</sup> (Figure 7.1). AM challenges the *colonised geographies* of the Gulf by highlighting and restoring the critical connection between Māori self-determination, kaitiaki responsibilities, and the land (Hauraki Gulf Forum [HGF] et al. 2016; Yates 2021; Aschenbrenner 2023b). They represent a form of *Indigenous localism* with the potential to reclaim and strengthen Māori values, practices, and authority<sup>4</sup> (Coulthard 2014; Kapoor 2024). Through their co-management framework, which sees Mana Whenua – Māori with authority from the land – and local communities in close partnership to co-manage *their* marine areas, AM translates localism into community practice.



**Fig. 7.1** The marine spatial plan Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari identifies Ahu Moana, near-shore coastal co-management areas within the Tikapa Moana Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, Aotearoa New Zealand. Waiheke Island is the second largest island in the Gulf. The map shows the Gulf according to **b**, a Western and **c**, a Māori worldview (Map: M. Aschenbrenner).

Different rationalities shape the roles of local communities and Mana Whenua in coastal management. For Mana Whenua, genealogical ties are fundamental, whereas SCTTTP implicitly bases local community management on the principle of residence (HGF et al.



2016). Māori cultural practices and values are also not easily transferred to local communities. SCTTTP delegates the implementation of Ahu Moana to “Mana Whenua and communities to find the best ways” (HGF et al. 2016, 52), creating space for the potential emergence of “well-being networks [and practices] that are grounded in [their] own places” (Yates 2021, 103).

The chapter examines how localism is conceptualised in the context of local communities. SCTTTP’s understanding of *local communities* remains ambiguous, appearing to rely “on a [conventional] spatial imaginary that sees [them] as homogeneous, persuadable and consensual, [and] assembled [as] to achieve certain ends” (Brownill 2017, 34). This raises critical questions about actual empowerment, inclusion/exclusion, and neoliberal governance practices (Rose 1996; Bradley 2017). While these questions are highly relevant and speak to current concerns about marine management and governance (Tafon 2018; Flannery et al. 2020), they risk reinforcing a view of place as bounded and static, and of thinking in dichotomies (e.g. neoliberal/alternative, political/post-political) (Brownill 2017). The chapter, however, seeks to acknowledge the complexity of establishing co-management and translating kaitiakitanga in a governmental and planning system that is radically other-to-Indigenous (Coulthard 2014; Yates 2021). The aim is to offer a differentiated, while critical, view on community-based management, which, in this context, is constructed to give effect to a partnership approach and a decolonising, place-based co-management framework. The central question is how a specific, relational form of localism emerges in the complex, ontologically diverse context of the Gulf. How is marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship assembled in the Gulf? And how does this contribute to a reimagining of community, localism, and the marine space itself? Acknowledging the potential pitfalls of *government through community* (Rose 1996, 332), the chapter will consistently address issues of inclusion/exclusion, power dynamics, and neoliberal governmental practices.

The chapter focuses on Waiheke Island, located in the Gulf and part of Auckland City. In response to SCTTTP, a group of island dwellers identified a gap in the plan concerning the protection of the Waiheke marine environment and sought to implement AM on and around the island. The *Waiheke Marine Project* (WMP) formed in 2019 and has since multiplied its relations and activities, continually refining its goals and narratives. While the WMP positions itself as facilitating community engagement to “help marine conservation and protection” (WMP 2023a), it also represents a field of ethics, where the notion of living rightly in and with the Gulf is problematised, claimed, and negotiated. This encompasses

the coexistence of human and nonhuman, Indigenous Māori and settler-descended Pākehā peoples, as well as governance, urban-island relations, and the surrounding geographies (Aschenbrenner 2023b).

After establishing the theoretical framework in the first section, the chapter outlines the situation on Waiheke Island and the emergence of the WMP. Section four describes the methodology used in the research. Sections five through seven present the findings, while sections eight and nine critically discuss the results and provide a conclusion.

## 7.2 Emergent togetherness in place

Place is often undertheorised in Western-European theorisations of ethics. The research underpinning this chapter began with an interest in examining the role of *ethics* in urban coastal, socio-ecological transformations. Adopting an urban ethics perspective (Dürr et al. 2019)<sup>5</sup>, my research focuses on how actors or groups of actors within and around the coastal environment of the Gulf in Auckland problematise and claim certain forms of *ethical* living. As demonstrated in the context of SCTTTP (Aschenbrenner 2023a), this must take into account matters of ontological pluralism in the settler-state environment of Auckland. Urban ethics thus emerges as a field of contestation, where claims for individual, *responsible* ethical conduct – rooted in a neoliberal governmentality and ideas of environmental subject formation – intersect with efforts to (re)centre Māori ethicalities<sup>6</sup> that foreground connection, genealogy, mutually embedded relationships, and a dialogical approach between humans and nonhumans. While place is addressed in conventional planning and marine conservation discourses as a site for ethical reflection, transformation, and practice, in relational Māori ethicalities, place plays a more powerful and active role (Makey 2022; Aschenbrenner 2023a, 2023b). “Guardianship [for instance] is founded within the *mana whenua*, or authority from the land, and maintained through a ‘reciprocal appropriation’ (Momaday 1976) that reinvests mana from the people into the land and back again” (Larsen & Johnson 2017, 145). As one interviewee emphasised in a different context in 2019, responsibility is inherently linked to the call of the land and the ancestral, reciprocal care between people and the land.

Reading through Larsen and Johnson (2017) and their decolonising perspectives on negotiating coexistence in liberal, democratic settler-states, AM recognise the agency of place in bringing Mana Whenua and others into dialogue, relationships, and action. They enable negotiations of coexistence: *productively agonistic* dialogue, struggle, and relationships

among “the more-than-human communities whose autonomies are entangled in place” (ibid., 5)<sup>7</sup>. In Te Ao Māori (the Māori world), “reality is generated as arrays of open-ended, continuously reproducing networks of relations” (Salmond 2012, 124). This relational perspective challenges conventional imaginaries of *local communities* as territorially bounded and with a fixed identity (Massey 2005; Bradley 2017). Thus, this chapter adopts a view of community as emergent through the dialogues, struggles, and practices of (coastal) coexistence. The focus is on the togetherness, the interrelatedness, that emerges and is negotiated as the question of “how to care for this place” (Larsen & Johnson 2017, 125) is addressed. It centres on the substance of this togetherness, specifically marine care as an “ethical and moral act that engages in the interrelated reciprocities of place” (ibid., 120; Zigon 2021). For Indigenous peoples, including Māori, communities are not limited to the human; the more-than-human transcends the human/non-human binary. This perspective recognises human and non-human entities as interconnected in an ethic of care and reciprocity, collectively “compos[ing] the livingness of this world” (Yates 2021, 102).

However, negotiations in Auckland occur within a settler-state environment, shaped by established power dynamics, hegemonic ontological assumptions, and rationalities. These factors must be considered, raising questions about inclusion, exclusion, and the possibility of open, non-oppressive collective negotiation and transformation. The term *local community* also holds significant power in conventional transition governance and planning discourse, as it can provide access to resources and relationships but may also serve as a means of governance<sup>8</sup>. From this perspective, I aim to critically assess the relationships and rights claimed when a group defines itself as the local AM community, as well as how this may contribute to community mobilisation for governmental tasks.

### 7.3 Waiheke Island and the Waiheke Marine Project

Conventional planning and conservation discourses often reinforce Western European notions of the *local*, also in ANZ, where local communities (or neighbourhoods) are primarily defined by residence, physical presence, and property (Brownill 2017). In contrast, “place and practice are inextricably linked in traditional Māori narratives; a connection [that is] constructed through [...] creation stories [...] and the concept of whakapapa (genealogy)” (Walker et al. 2019, 2). These traditional relationships to land were challenged, though not erased, by colonial dispossession of iwi (tribes) and the enforcement of settler colonial rationalities (Tuck & McKenzie 2016). While several iwi have ties to Waiheke, Ngāti Paoa

is recognised as Mana Whenua to the island. Colonial confiscations, land alienations, and the individualisation of land titles have “left Ngāti Paoa virtually landless and undermined the iwi’s economic, social, and cultural development” (New Zealand Government 2021).

The migration of people into urban areas and the urban environment itself have further challenged “traditional relationships to the environment, whakapapa, and the practice of kaitiakitanga” (Walker et al. 2019, 2). Dean Olgivie and Lucy Tukua, both descendants of Ngāti Paoa, note in a podcast how a disconnect has occurred from whenua (land) and whānau (family, extended family) as their people have left the island. However, Lucy Tukua emphasises the ongoing relationship with Waiheke (“I never left”), maintained through, for instance, the burial of tūpuna (ancestors, grandparents) on the island. Also protests, such as the successful opposition to marina development plans at Matiatia on Waiheke, continue and renew Mana Whenua relationships (Logie 2016; HGF 2021).

Waiheke Island is often described as “notoriously political and fiercely independent” (Logie 2016, 220). Many on the island support an image of an independent, alternative, politically and environmentally activist island community distinguishing themselves from Waiheke’s *outside* or *invaders* (e.g. ‘urban Auckland’, investors and new money, wealthy second home owners). However, multiple *ontological styles* – presuppositions about how the world works (or should work) – and imaginaries are present on Waiheke, and are vibrantly discussed in debates such as Matiatia (Rose Muna, Feb 2020; Salmond 2012; Logie 2016). The idea of a homogenous, autonomous island community is also challenged by the island’s connections to the mainland, such as the 35-minute ferry service, regularly commuting between Waiheke and Auckland’s CBD, political and administrative city-island connections, and the influx of international and domestic tourists to the island (Oliver et al. 2023).

Increased tourism, gentrification, infrastructure developments, and other changes have significantly impacted Waiheke, its people, and the exercise of kaitiakitanga over the past decade (Oliver et al. 2023). These developments have been reflected in struggles of coexistence, also concerning the coastal and marine environment. During the fieldwork for this chapter, interviewees repeatedly mentioned two key struggles besides Matiatia: the unsuccessful 2013 initiative to establish a marine reserve off northern Waiheke and the 2020 protests against a marina development at Pūtiki Bay / Kennedy Point. The 2013 marine reserve proposal by the conservation group *Friends of the Hauraki Gulf* (FOHG) faced opposition, particularly from a group of residents called *Keep our Beaches*, whose properties

were near the proposed reserve, highlighting the contentious issue of non-use reserves on the island. The Pūtiki Bay / Kennedy Point case not only divided islanders from developers and city planners but also revealed tensions among islander dwellers and Mana Whenua (Davis 2018; Weiss 2022).

The WMP was established in 2019 as a subgroup of the *Waiheke Collective*, an environmental stewardship network that began with land-based pest control. The Waiheke Collective describes itself as “a united network that works with Mana Whenua to activate and amplify efforts to restore and sustain a healthy and thriving natural environment on Waiheke” (Waiheke Collective 2018). The WMP was formed through the collaboration of individuals involved in the 2013 marine reserve initiative (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020), discussions around the implementation of SCTTTP, available funding opportunities and a growing awareness for the need of greater marine protection and kaitiakitanga. The WMP organised itself into three working groups. The Mana Whenua workstream aimed to ensure a strong Mātauranga Māori voice and that the WMP was genuinely co-managed (WMP 2022a). A second group focused on organising a Future Search (FS) event, designed to bring together 70-80 island voices to explore stories and future perspectives for Waiheke’s marine environment (WMP 2021a). The third group organised marine experiences and publicly informed about the FS event and the WMP.

The WMP engaged island dwellers through formats like a public meeting at Morra Hall in August 2019. Funding came from various sources such as the Waiheke Local Board, The Working Together More Fund, the Foundation North’s Gulf Innovation Fund Together, and smaller grants and donations. The Department of Conservation (DOC) played a key role as a project partner, supporting the Mana Whenua and FS workstreams through its Pou Manutataki / Partnerships Manager (WMP 2023e).

## 7.4 Methods

The chapter draws on multiple data sources: (1) interview and participant observation data collected during a three-month research stay on Waiheke Island from January to April 2020, and (2) newsletters, media, and project reports gathered on-site and remotely between February 2020 and April 2024 (Table 7.1, Figure 7.2).

**Table 7.1** The different data sources used in the analysis, sorted by the type of the data source, and giving their name date and number of pieces analysed. The table also shows the names of interview partners, as cited later in the chapter (Table: M. Aschenbrenner).

Document set	Type / name	Time / date	Pieces analysed
WMP newsletters and updates	WMP newsletters and updates	May-Nov 2020	5
	WMP newsletters and updates	Jan-Dec 2021	14
	WMP newsletters and updates	Jan-Dec 2022	15
	WMP newsletters and updates	Feb-Nov 2023	3
	WMP newsletter and updates	Jan 2024	1
Media reports	Radio Broadcast WMP	Aug 19	1
	Gulf news	Feb-Mar 2020	6
	Hauraki Gulf Forum Podcast	Mar 2021	1
Documents and reports	Waiheke Collective Charter	2018	1
	WMP Inaugural Report	2021	1
	WMP Project Plan	2022	1
	WMP Annual Report	2022	1
Interviews	Anne Jackson*	Feb 20	1
	Jack Snapper*	Feb 20	1
	Rose Muna	Feb 20	1
	Robyn Watts*	Mar 2020	1
	Sarah Gardner*	Mar 2020	1
	Andrew Williams*	Mar 2020	1
	Joshua Watson*	Mar 2020	1
	Ben Hill	Mar 2020	1
Participant Observations**		Jan-Apr 2020	6
Total			61

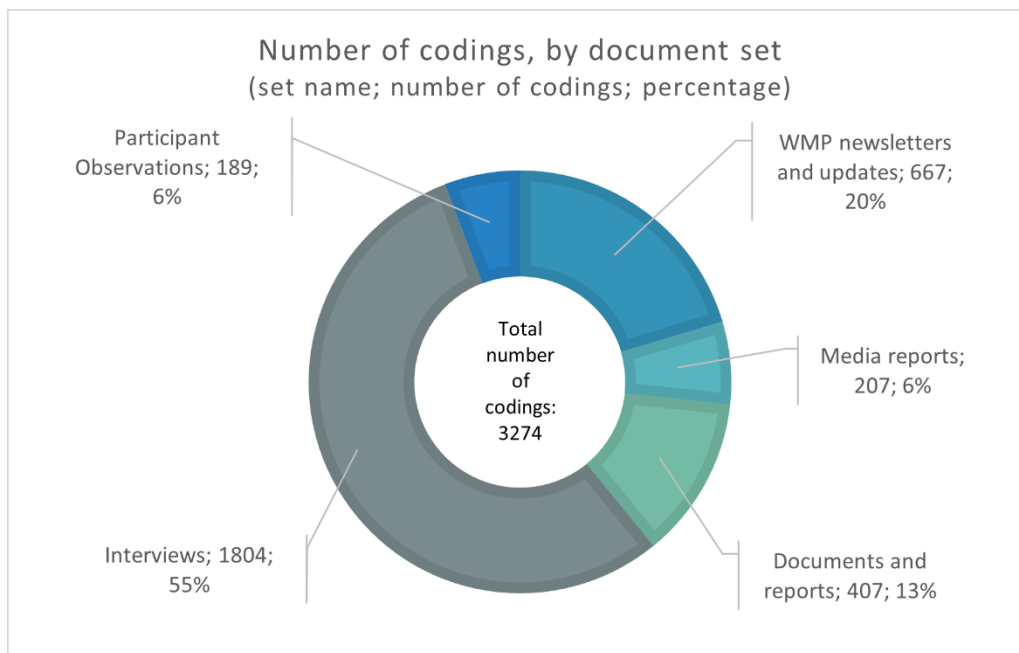
For reasons of anonymity, all information that could lead to the identification of participants or interviewees is omitted from this chapter. Interviewee names are fictitious.

\*Interviewees met at WMP meetings.

\*\* Participant observations were made at Waiheke Waitangi Day celebrations at Piritahi Marae, the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park 20th year celebrations at the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron on Auckland's waterfront, an information event at Waiheke Ostend Market organized by the WMP, an information and community event at Little Oneroa beach attended by the WMP, a coastal walk at Te Matuku Marine Reserve organized by the WMP, and an evening film presentation and discussion of *The map to paradise* at Waiheke Community Cinema organized by the film's producers.

The narrative interviews were conducted with people met at WMP meetings and those recommended by interviewees. Participants included Anne Jackson, Robyn Watts, Sarah Gardner, Andrew Williams, and Joshua Watson, who were involved in the WMP from its inception. Jack Snapper, who attended some meetings, provided a recreational fishing perspective. Rose Muna, who is Māori, attended the FS event, contrasted with others who identified as Pākehā. Ben Hill, approached by the WMP for a recreational fishing perspective, declined involvement and was interviewed for his potentially controversial views on the WMP. In addition to the main interviews, four other interviews and several informal

discussions provided valuable background information. Six participant observation protocols, recorded after events organised or attended by the WMP, were included. The interview transcripts and observation protocols offered insights into narratives surrounding coastal issues on and around Waiheke Island and the WMP. They also helped identify struggles, disagreements, and ruptures within and between these narratives and (public) discourses.

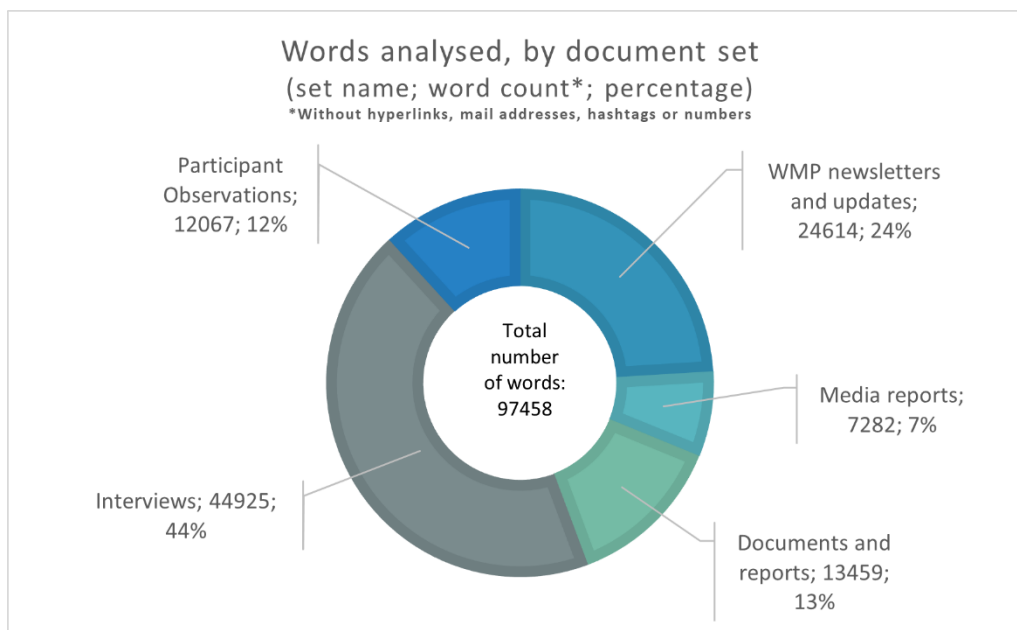


**Fig. 7.2** shows the total number of words analysed in the research, and their distribution by document sets (Figure: M. Aschenbrenner).

Newsletters, media, and project reports offered insights into the symbolic and material components of the WMP and their evolution over time. This enabled me to trace the emerging narratives, imaginaries, practices, and relationships, by creating a list of the WMP's activities and a visual overview of its relationships. While integrating the data sources expanded the dataset, careful attention was given to the epistemological and methodological differences between them. There is a tension between the dataset and a relational view of coexistence. I approached my research from a poststructuralist perspective, which led to an underrepresentation of non-human actors. Upon reflecting on the narratives of relationality, coexistence, and emergence that emerged from the findings, I recognised a tension between my analysis and a relational perspective, which would challenge such a detached viewpoint. Therefore, I see the need to develop more innovative methods in the future that extend beyond process and actant tracing. Nonetheless, post-

structuralist analysis has been valuable in assessing social realities and power structures, particularly in examining different understandings of localism in this study.

All materials were analysed using a grounded theory approach (Mey 2011), which involved an open and interpretive analysis of the texts. Using MAXQDA, the data analysis process included iterative rounds of memo writing, open coding, and selective coding (Figure 7.3). The coding process initially did not distinguish between data sources. In the first round, all text was coded by summarising paragraphs and assigning content-related headings. Codes were merged, abstracted, and reorganised in several rounds. Finally, MAXQDA's *Creative Coding* tool was used to organise the code system and create hierarchical code structures. Code memos linked the final codes. The codes and codings were interpreted in relation to the research questions. Indigenous scholars, alongside those in the constructivist research tradition, emphasise that knowledge and theorisation are “inextricable from context and the people who [...] create it” (Artelle et al. 2021, 289; Charmaz 2016). As such, the findings should be viewed as one possible interpretation, influenced by my positionality and chosen perspective.



**Fig. 7.3** depicts the total number of codings, and their distribution by document set (Figure: M. Aschenbrenner).

I became aware of several limitations during the research, analysis, and writing process, particularly related to my internalised individualism and anthropocentric worldview (Charmaz 2016). I only began to try to find the way out of the “hall of mirrors” (Larsen & Johnson 2017), facilitated by the generous, more-than-human relationships I experienced.



Limitations also stem from my *evolving* reflexivity, as I navigated the research process while adhering to a preconceived timeline. There is valuable thinking and research on Ahu Moana on Waiheke, including from the *Enabling kaitiakitanga and EBM project* of the *Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge* (Taylor & Hikuroa 2022). My intention in this chapter is to contribute to the theorisation of *urban ethics* from a Gulf perspective, while exploring how an urban ethics focus can enrich our understanding of coastal community-based management practices.

## 7.5 Marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship

Kaitiakitanga and ocean care have long been practised locally, particularly among Mana Whenua. As the WMP aims to formalise marine environmental care, ethics of kaitiakitanga/guardianship for the ocean has been (re)assembled and imagined. The following subsections highlight seven themes that emerge from the central data – either explicitly or implicitly – to the practice, work, and communication of the WMP, serving as foundational elements of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship.

### Relationality

Relationality is intrinsic to the more-than-human coexistence on Waiheke, continually emerging and being reproduced through care activities. It also features prominently at a discursive level in the WMP's conceptualisation of reality. *Relationality* is evident in both the texts produced by the WMP and the activities it (co-)organises, such as the Conscious Swim Kaukau Orangā events – guided swims aimed at “building the connection to the ocean” (WMP 2023b). In 2022, FOHG resubmitted a proposal for a marine reserve off Waiheke's coast, independently of the WMP. The WMP's response highlights relationality and connectedness as an alternative and “better way” (WMP 2022b) to frame marine conservation. This approach incorporates mechanisms like marine protected areas or *rāhui* (Māori practices that restrict access or use) (WMP 2023c). The WMP emphasises that “legal tools alone do not *reconnect* people and the moana. [Instead,] it is the actions that people take and the changes of behaviour” (WMP 2022b, emphasis added) that drive the long-term regeneration of Waiheke's marine environment.

### Collaboration and consensus

Larsen's and Johnson's (2017) understanding of coexistence, along with the struggles of Matiatia or Pūtiki Bay, highlight the ongoing presence of agonistic relationships and ne-

gotiations into which Waiheke and the Gulf call their more-than-human actors. Within the WMP, however, a narrative emphasising *consensus* and *overcoming conflict* has developed. In 2020, Anne Jackson expressed the hope that the WMP would mirror the Waiheke Collective model, where “all [are] on an equal footing with each other, and the voices all being in the room from the beginning”. The Collective’s charter defines consensus as a process of negotiating and careful consideration of diverse opinions, ideas, and concerns (Waiheke Collective 2018). However, WMP communications often frame collaboration as a unified effort for Waiheke’s marine environment, emphasising a shared commitment and slogans like “Eco over Ego” and “common ground & future NOT problems & conflict” (WMP 2022a). This framing suggests that active marine protection work should transcend differences, problems, and conflicts, as reflected in WMP reports and its partnerships with other organisations that are committed to a similar understanding of collaboration (Weave 2023; Sustainable Business Network 2024). This emphasis on common ground has faced criticism. Some FS participants observed that “focus[ing] on common ground prohibited deep exploration of contentious projects such as the Kennedy Point marina” (WMP 2021a, 2022a). Despite efforts to avoid disagreements and agonistic relationships, dissenting voices have surfaced elsewhere, as seen in the 2022 FOHG reserve proposal.

### Action

In line with the Waiheke Collective Charter, the WMP emphasised *action-based* kaitiakitanga/guardianship (Waiheke Radio 2019). *Action* was viewed as a key vehicle for relationship building, driving behaviour change, and fostering overall transformation. Initially focused on coastal experiences, education, information, and communication, the WMP has increasingly shifted toward *tangible actions* such as citizen science initiatives and stewardship practices, including beach clean-ups and kelp gardening (WMP 2022a).

### Treaty partnership

The WMP has embraced a commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi as a core ethical principle guiding its work (HGF 2021; WMP 2021a). The relationship between the WMP and Ngāti Paoa has evolved over time, reflecting diverse and complex interactions. Initially, Ngāti Paoa’s involvement was sought as part of the Mana Whenua Workstream, aiming for co-management and collaboration. Over time, Ngāti Paoa’s role as a *partner* has been solidified and became more prominent, especially during and following the FS event. With the start of the second phase of the WMP in October 2021, iwi members joined the steering

group. Additionally, workshops were organised to enhance Treaty literacy among non-Māori members, further underlining the WMP's partnership commitment (WMP newsletter, Feb 2023).

### Emergence

The WMP's communications reflect an understanding of kaitiakitanga/guardianship and its elements, including Treaty partnership, as part of an ongoing *journey* and learning process. The framing is encapsulated in the statement: "The WMP is a verb itself. It is an evolutionary process" (WMP newsletter, Feb 2022). This notion of emergence is associated with a relational framing. It also seems to relate to a broader discourse in the Gulf as the project plan suggests:

"In line with Foundation North and GIFT's commitment to system change, the WMP has leaned into the diverse energy that is already in and around Waiheke Island. Rather than take a normative approach by allocating money to pre-agreed solutions, the WMP applies an emergent and collaborative approach to the complexity that exists around marine care in Aotearoa / New Zealand" (WMP 2021b).

### Future generations

Youth/rangatahi are seen as vital voices and key agents of marine kaitiakitanga/ guardianship on Waiheke. They were included as one of the "nine categories [...] comprising the Waiheke marine environment system" (WMP 2021a) and represented in the FS. Phase one and two of the WMP explicitly aimed to build "youth capacity for sustainable environmental care" (WMP 2021b). Activities involving youth included youth meetings, school engagement, a youth snorkelling club, and beach clean-ups and citizen science events organised and led by a youth coordinator (WMP 2023d).

### Moral economies

The WMP envisioned a *moral fishing economy* focused on subsistence fishing, small-scale sustainable practices, and values like sharing, gifting, and minimising waste. Positive references were made to photo-based sport fishing competitions where fish were returned to the sea (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020; Robyn Watts, March 2020). A project to collect and up-cycle fishing gear further supported waste reduction efforts. The WMP also worked toward creating a *moral circular economy* on Waiheke, emphasising waste reduction, reusable systems, and behaviour change (WMP 2021a; 2022a; WMP newsletter, Feb 2022).

## 7.6 A relational ahu moana community

While the SCTTTP concept of AM seems to understand the local community conventionally, based on dwelling locally, the WMP fostered a relational understanding of community. This view emerged from interviews and observations (Observation, Feb 2020; Anne Jackson, Feb 2020; Joshua Watson, March 2020), where Anne Jackson, for instance, linked community to an ethics of care and the integration of “Māori ways of seeing the world” (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020). She saw community as togetherness formed through interrelationships and responsible caregiving (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020). In other instances, community was imagined as a network united by the aim to achieve ecological benefits through a particular way of caring - namely the outlined values of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship (WMP 2021a; WMP answer on MPA, Jan 2022).

Ethics, particularly marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship, appear to be understood as the substance but also boundary of the community. A relational concept of community, based on consensual ethics, becomes significant when it replaces conventional participation models in local governance and resource management. Although not yet realised on Waiheke Island, the WMP applied to be recognised as an AM prototype by the institutions implementing SCTTTP<sup>9</sup>. The WMP justified its suitability as AM prototype by its “credible way of embodying the Ahu Moana concept” (WMP 2024b), namely Treaty partnership and marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship. This demonstrates how conventional notions of localism are being challenged and negotiated in the implementation of the AM concept.

Conventional understandings of the local community were not entirely erased. The WMP’s communications differentiate between *their* community and the *wider or larger community*, which includes all residents and workers on the island (WMP 2021a). The wider community was invited to public meetings and other informational and educational activities. While conventional notions of localism often exclude non-residents or those unable to afford to live in a place, the reimagined community, based on a shared ethic of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship, raised new questions about legitimate participation, inclusion, and exclusion.

Marine reserves have been contested due to the rise of a marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship ethics. The WMP opposed the FOHG’s proposed marine reserve, arguing that it reflected exclusive Western ontological assumptions. Instead, the WMP advocated for relational and communal approaches to “caregiving”, which they believed were more effective,

aligned with Treaty partnership, and more progressive and legitimate than centralised measures of “control dominance” (both Anne Jackson, Feb 2020). The WMP argued that “contemporary communities are seeking better ways to achieve [...] ecological benefits that are more aligned with Tiriti partnership, active connection, and regeneration, and to be effective over a wider area” (WMP answer on MPA, Jan 2022). These communities committed to marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship were positioned in opposition to those holding on to reactionary marine conservation values. This argument is also situated within the broader national discourse on co-governance and Indigenous rights over natural resources, including the foreshore and seabed (Sullivan 2017).

By framing community as emerging from active marine protection work, common ground and consensus were prioritised, while protests and conflicts were delegitimised. Kaitiakitanga/guardianship was imagined as the substance of *relationship-building*, in contrast to narratives that defined Waiheke’s identity through opposition and protest. For instance, the marina conflict at Pūtiki Bay, which divided islanders, Mana Whenua, and the WMP, was deliberately excluded from the FS event. Issues of class and social justice raised in this and other protests were marginalised and largely absent from WMP discussions (Rose Muna, Feb 2020; Robyn Watts, March 2020; Ben Hill, March 2020).

Finally, new dynamics of inclusion and exclusion emerged around recreational fishing within the WMP. A moral fishing economy and *responsible* fishing practices were emphasised, with certain fishermen and groups celebrated as role models (Robyn Watts, March 2020). In contrast, some recreational fishermen were seen as “middle aged Pākehā blokes” showing dismissive and uncooperative behaviour (Andrew Williams, March 2020). While not formally excluded, some fishermen felt the WMP had a “hidden agenda and perceived it as imposing its values, leading to self-exclusion from project spaces (Ben Hill, March 2020). Participation was further complicated by concerns about being judged by their fishing community (Jack Snapper, Feb 2020).

## 7.7 The Gulf as relational care network

Although a new form of localism centred on marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship was not formalised as an AM prototype, the WMP reimagined and reshaped relationships in the Gulf, offering a renewed vision of its governance and geography (Affolderbach et al. 2012).

A vision of Waiheke Island and the wider Gulf as a relational network of marine caregivers emerged. Aligned with its relational community understanding, the WMP saw itself as “part of a bigger system in [the] context of regional (Tikapa Moana) and national marine management [...] taking a deeply relational approach that includes forming conscious allyship with other parts of the system to enable collective action” (WMP 2022a). The WMP has built diverse relationships with iwi, civil society (e.g. owners of neighbouring islands, NGOs, trusts), the private sector (e.g. dive operators, underwater ROV services), research institutions (e.g. University of Auckland, Sustainable Seas), and public agencies (e.g. Auckland Council, Biosecurity NZ). These horizontal networks address shared concerns, such as managing exotic caulerpa seaweeds, fostering new non-statutory governance arrangements that transcend formal boundaries and planning levels (Metzger & Schmitt 2012, 266; Haughton et al. 2013).

The role of civil society has changed as relationships with state and municipal agencies were reimagined within relational care networks. Civil society acted as (co-)initiator, partner, or participant in urban care projects. Active citizenship is exemplified by the WMP’s nominations for the Mayoral Conservation Awards (Collaboration and Innovation) and the Sustainable Business Network’s Outstanding Collaboration Award (Auckland Council 2022; Sustainable Business Network 2024). The WMP described itself as an “*urban island* [co-managing] its land and seascapes” (WMP 2021a, emphasis added), challenging prevalent perceptions of urban-island boundaries and relationships.

The vision of the Gulf as a relational network of care remaps its geography, shifting from a Euclidean view of bounded zones to one emphasising relationality and open, emergent space/place. Administrative boundaries, such as those of the Marine Park, were transcended by interconnections and alternative frameworks like *rāhui*. This relational approach challenges traditional territorial notions of community and localism, promoting flexible conservation ethics over rigid spatial designations. While not formally recognised, the WMP’s relationships, governance, and spatial visions change, complement, and challenge existing norms and structures.

## 7.8 Discussion

The Gulf is a contested space where diverse ontological systems, interests, and ideas about how to live (interact, behave) coexist, interact, overlap, and compete. The SCTTTP non-statutory plan proposed initiatives to restore the Gulf's "mauri, environmental quality and abundance of resources" (HGF et al. 2016). Among these measures is kaitiakitanga/guardianship, implemented through AM, coastal co-management areas led by Mana Whenua and local communities. AM, as envisioned in the plan, represents a form of localism that decentralises political power to local institutions and communities (Wills 2016, 7). They seek to decolonise the Gulf's geography by remapping its coast based on reciprocal care, self-determination, and Treaty partnership (Aschenbrenner 2023b, 13). Unlike top-down devolution of responsibility or bottom-up civic engagement (Wills 2016), AM recentres Indigenous relationships with place, challenging conventional notions of localism tied to Western concepts of place and scale (Tuck & McKenzie 2016).

The chapter examined how AM was realised and translated by Waiheke Island's *local community*. It highlighted how the WMP emerged as a group that gradually identified as an AM community. Within this framework, the local community and Mana Whenua were seen as distinct AM entities collaborating as co-managing partners, transitioning to joint leadership of the WMP steering group (WMP 2021a). The WMP also acknowledged a broader Mana Whenua whānau and a wider local community encompassing those "who over many years have called [Waiheke] home" (WMP 2024a).

At the same time, an understanding of the *local community* emerged, defined not by location but by the ethics of kaitiakitanga/guardianship. This concept was understood to encompass *relationality, action, collaboration and consensus, Treaty partnership, emergence, centring of future generations, and moral economies*. Reflecting decolonisation efforts, it integrates Māori values while also incorporating neoliberal planning imperatives and ethics of collaboration seen in SCTTTP and similar institution (Aschenbrenner 2023a, 2023b). The community is framed as relational and defined by its members' shared commitment to coastal and marine care. Marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship serves as the substance of interrelationships, forming the basis for a broader relational care network and alliances across the Gulf and ANZ.

How can these findings be understood in terms of power, inclusion/exclusion, and neoliberal governance? The call for AM reflects efforts to decolonise Gulf geographies and assert

treaty rights. Treaty partnership is central to the bicultural framework of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship assembled in the context of the WMP. Concepts like marine conservation areas were treated as tools for ecological benefit rather than norms. While Rose Muna felt like “the odd Māori person thrown in for good books [and the WMP being] fronted up by middle class Pākehā” (Feb 2020) after the first town hall meeting, partnership has since become a core focus, reflected in steering group composition and recent communications (WMP newsletter, May 2023). I therefore interpret the emergence of ethics and practices of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship as a challenge to and incipient shift in dominant power structures. At the same time, new patterns of inclusion and exclusion arose.

Wills (2016) emphasises the need for “sufficient local interest and capacity to engage” (12), such as time and skills, for liberal localism. A Gulf care network will likely be uneven, requiring further research in less active neighbourhoods than Waiheke. Ethics also influence who can engage with the WMP and be considered part of the local community. Exclusion occurred when individuals or groups did not align with marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship, Treaty partnership principles, consensus ideals, or moral economies.

The exclusion of agonistic voices enabled structural change by making Treaty partnership a baseline. However, the moralised discourse excluded *unethical* subjects and depoliticised collaboration, limiting the expression of systemic critique, also on issues like class, privatisation, and social justice (Dürr et al. 2019; Aschenbrenner 2023b). Changing relationships between agencies and civil society complicated opposition and critique, highlighting depoliticising dynamics and neoliberal governmentality. While decision-making power was not formally transferred to civil society (Rose 2000; Smits 2014), bottom-up empowerment was evident in actions like controlling exotic caulerpa seaweed spread (WMP newsletter, Nov 2023). Yet, formal decision-making power remains uncertain for the future (Brownill 2017).

Decolonising perspectives, like those of Larsen and Johnson (2017), view struggle and agonistic voices as inherent to coexistence, contrasting with the WMP’s more unified concept of togetherness. This perspective could address issues of exclusion and depoliticisation within the WMP, as well as offer a more inclusive view of collaboration, similar to the Waiheke Collective’s approach. The chapter focused on the discursive formation of care within the WMP context, and future research could explore the practical, life-sustaining aspects of care in a broader, more inclusive way.



## 7.9 Conclusion

This chapter examined a form of localism introduced by AM, which created an ontologically pluralist and decolonised map of the Gulf, incorporating Mana Whenua areas based on Māori ethical systems. On Waiheke Island, Māori perspectives were integrated into the co-managing community, envisioning local self-management rooted in an ethics of care. This new map redefines the Gulf, emphasising relational, open, and emergent understandings of place and *ethical* localism.

The chapter highlights ethics as a key dimension alongside politics, economics, and law in place-based coastal management (Dürr et al. 2019). Ethics, encompassing both hegemonic and non-hegemonic Māori ethicalities, is inseparable from politics. Non-hegemonic ethical systems challenge colonial power structures and facilitate decolonisation. Ethical claims promote contestation and legitimacy but also risk delegitimising agonistic views and causing exclusion. These dynamics are challenging and critical to consider for all institutions in the Gulf. Lastly, the chapter emphasised the importance of place in fostering ethical living, urging more nuanced attention to place and its agency in future urban ethics theories.

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<sup>1</sup> Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie (2016) provide a nuanced overview of the differences between *place* and *land*. The paper uses the term *place* in line with Larsen and Johnson (2017), while recognising ontological differences and adopting a perspective of ontological pluralism and openness.

<sup>2</sup> An *ethic of kaitiakitanga/guardianship* refers at this point to the ethical narrative developed in SCTTTP (Aschenbrenner 2023a; HGF et al. 2016, 27).

<sup>3</sup> In the text, Ahu Moana refers to the concept and areas identified in SCTTTP.

<sup>4</sup> Kapoor 2024 criticises Indigenous localism for its limited critique and inability to challenge underlying systems. Other critics warn against the risk of instrumentalising “Māori extended kin groups [as] a kind of ready-made Indigenous NGO” (McCormack 2016, 235) to which responsibility can be shifted.

<sup>5</sup> The approach focuses on “what is problematized as (un)ethical in what ways and by what means” (Dürr et al. 2019, 2). Ethics here refers to “a field of interaction in which a range of actors in cities negotiate moral and social ideals, principles and norms” (ibid.) while also addressing what is considered (un)ethical within this context. *Urban* may point to (1) the place of ethical negotiation, the city, (2) the object of ethical negotiation, e.g. housing, (3) the urban conditions under which

ethical negotiations take place, or (4) ethical postulations that are linked to views of what it means to be emphatically urban.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) uses the term *ethicalities* to capture the ontological plurality of ethics.

<sup>7</sup> Larsen and Johnson (2017) argue that conflicts and struggles are inevitable due to interdependencies of human and non-human others, as well as the “cacophony of human and nonhuman ontological styles” (9). Place teaches coexistence, not consensus or the flattening out of differences. This includes the building and emergence of alliances “motivated by mutual albeit dissimilar concerns for places” (8; see also Massey (2005) for the inevitability of negotiation and conflict when ‘throwntogether’ in place).

<sup>8</sup> Nikolas Rose (1996) describes “government through community” as strategies that create and use community ties to support regulation, reform, or mobilization. These strategies aim to promote local participation, empowerment, and decision-making, reactivating self-motivation, responsibility, and active citizenship within a self-governing community, aligning with neoliberal governmentality (335).

<sup>9</sup> Becoming an AM pilot project could offer benefits such as formal recognition, local governance involvement, and resource allocation from DOC and the Ministry of Primary Industries / Fisheries New Zealand. This may include a dedicated project team, subject matter experts, policy staff to review legislative processes, and financial support during the planning stages with Mana Whenua and local communities (DOC et al. 2021).

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## Part V: Bringing it all together



## 8 Discussing results and implications, and closing remarks

The research on which this thesis is based focused on the *ethical* dimension of negotiating urban coastal futures for Auckland's 'blue backyard' - the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana. Rather than seeking and proclaiming an 'ethical' future for this coastal and marine area, the research was interested in how a *range of actors* have claimed and negotiated different ways of urban coastal and marine living (working, planning, etc.) in Auckland in an *ethical vocabulary*. The research approached this question guided by the research agenda of *urban ethics* as discussed in the DFG research group on Urban Ethics (2022) and outlined by Dürr et al. (2019) and Ege and Moser (2020). At the same time, the research brought together this largely anthropologically informed research agenda with approaches to ethics and morality in human geography, political ecology, and urban political ecology. It has also been informed by Indigenous research and thinking, as well as by current scholarship on coastal and marine change, particularly on MSP and a BE. Thus, the research discussed a wide range of academic literature and research.

As a result, urban ethics as a conceptual framework was adjusted for researching urban environmental ethics in Auckland. The research adopted an ontologically pluralist perspective, broadening the analytical lens to include diverse *ethicalities*, urban human-non-human relations, discourses, and imaginaries. It explored urban ethics, their use, contestation, and negotiation at expert and planning levels, and their translation into the local community. It approached the operation of power and the politics of urban ethics from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. The research also highlighted the geographical aspects and implications of urban ethics. On the other hand, the research has facilitated the integration of an urban ethics perspective into the fields of human geography and (urban) political ecology. It demonstrated the value and significance of studying the frequently informal and overlooked – normative – aspects of urban and environmental planning, as well as negotiating an urban, socio-ecological transformation. It illustrated how ethics are embedded in urban environmental discourses and practices, how they are identified as causes of and part of given solutions to environmental concerns, how they are contested, and used for different ends.

In light of the multifarious objectives pursued in this research and thesis, a comprehensive discussion of the results and implications will be presented at multiple levels. These include (1) the empirical level, which addresses the role of ethics in the negotiation of diverse

urban coastal and marine futures for and in Auckland; (2) the research's implications for the research agenda of urban ethics; and (3) the research's contribution to human geography and political ecology research, particularly regarding the theme of relationality. The following subsections will explore these aspects in detail, with a final section highlighting the significance of studying the ethical dimension of coastal and environmental change – an area that has remained largely implicit, obscured, and underexplored.

### 8.1 The role of urban ethics in negotiating Auckland's coastal futures

Mapping the roles of urban ethics around the Gulf in Auckland has shown how ethics *are* an essential part of the struggles and negotiations over the future of the city's coastal and marine space. Urban ethics are important in the sense that they constitute a dimension or field in which urban life is problematised and negotiated. The research showed how different human-nonhuman relations, ways of living and doing things, ideas, interests, and worldviews are negotiated, discussed, and framed within an urban ethical field – whether in the context of participatory marine spatial planning, urban water use and management, waterfront and port development, or community care work. In these cases, what is being addressed and communicated is not only, and often not primarily, what is politically desirable, legally required, or economically viable, but (answers to) questions such as: What constitutes a 'good' relationship between people, the city of Auckland, and the Gulf? What is the role and relationship of citizens of Auckland with the Gulf? How *should* citizens of Auckland act *towards* the Gulf? Are they acting in the 'right' manner?

As such, the field of urban ethics plays an essential role in the discussion of important issues, and often constitutes a field in which fundamental questions, debates, or problems are raised. Far from being depoliticised, it is a domain in which established economic rationalities are subjected to challenge (as evidenced by the port issue), planning logics are reinterpreted (as illustrated by the case of SCTTTP), urban human-nonhuman relationships are re-imagined (as exemplified by the case of cities as ecosystems), and, most fundamentally, dominant colonialist worldviews, resource valuations and practices, and governmental systems and frameworks are opened up for contestation and renegotiation. One might argue that this latter point represents the epitome of the political, interrogating and negotiating the foundational tenets of our (co)existence.

The term 'urban ethics' denotes not only a dimension or field of negotiation, but also the "particular means with which people and institutions negotiate urban life" (Dürr et al.,

2019, p. 1). When considered in this way, urban ethics assume different functions in Auckland. They serve to communicate certain expected behaviours and discipline the everyday practices of city dwellers. They help to transfer responsibility for the 'health of the Gulf' to individuals or groups of people and facilitate the active role and concern of Aucklanders in reversing environmental decline. In this, the use of urban ethics corresponds to the framing of the Auckland Plans 2012 and 2050, both of which follow an (after-)neoliberal environmentality. This role of urban ethics as a technique of governing became evident at several points in the research, including the SCTTTP plan itself, the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park 20th year celebration, the city's communications on water use and behaviour, and the realisation of SCTTTP on Waiheke Island. At the same time, it is the latter that demonstrates the need for a more complex interpretation: while the translation of marine care into the local community implies a potential shift in the rationality and responsibility of local environmental governance, including a strong narrative of building active networks and partnerships around the Gulf, the concept of Ahu Moana has its origins in decolonial thought and opposition.

This rejects simplistic readings of urban ethics as neoliberal ethicisation and depoliticisation. It does, however, demonstrate a connection between neoliberal policies and rationalities, and the opening up of spaces for indigeneity (McCormack 2012, 2016; Howard-Wagner et al. 2018). Nevertheless, a "channel[ling] [of] Māori aspirations for self-determination into a neoliberal [] framework" (Howard-Wagner et al. 2018, p. 419) cannot be proven: there is a considerable clash with more conventional planning rationalities, and Māori aspirations sit in this case rather uncomfortably with other neoliberal ideas, such as efficiency or profit maximisation. Rather, interpreting Ahu Moana as *alternative* forms of local development and creating progressive neoliberal (or other-than-neoliberal) spaces seems constructive (Bargh & Otter 2009; Lewis et al. 2009).

Finally, the question of an instrumentalisation of "Māori extended kin groupings [as] a kind of readymade, Indigenous, NGO" (McCormack 2016, p. 235) was raised by scholars. The emergence of Ahu Moana in opposition, the reluctance of officials to recognise Waiheke Island's Ahu Moana, and the voices of Ngāti Paoa themselves all speak against this argument. Nevertheless, in the case of Waiheke Island, Ngāti Paoa is engaged in activities that could be defined as the responsibility of the state or local council, and which bear resemblance to the work of ENGOs. It is therefore essential to assess power dynamics

and the extent of actual empowerment in order to mitigate the risk of instrumentalisation as it was done in this research.

The role of urban ethics in facilitating change, contesting established norms, and advocating for new resource and management regimes is already evident within this context. The articulation of urban ethics in the form of alternative ethical systems and new models of human-nonhuman coexistence presents a challenge to established assumptions about 'nature', the purpose of 'resources', moral judgements, and societal attitudes. Consequently, conventional property and resource management regimes are called into question (Affolderbach et al. 2012). By proposing relationality and reciprocal care as underlying ethical principles for environmental management and the organisation of space, established spatial rationalities, land use designations, and zoning regimes such as non-use MPAs have been challenged. Alternative frameworks such as *rāhui*, *Ahu Moana*, and the recognition of legal personality for more-than-human entities offer new ways to conceptualise and govern coastal and marine spaces.

Rooted in struggles for rights and the recognition of Indigenous worldviews and ethical systems, these approaches hold the potential for both socio-ecological transformation and further conflict. In contrast to Affolderbach et al.'s (2012) study of British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest, where ENGOs and conservation ideals were key drivers of a far-reaching remapping of resource management regimes, this study highlights *tangata whenua* and Indigenous ethical systems as central to the remapping of resource management regimes in the specific geopolitical context of the Gulf. The actual impact and implementation of alternative ideas of environmental management remained unclear at the time of writing, partly because the Treaty of Waitangi principles as they have been interpreted since at least 1975 have recently been increasingly questioned in ANZ (Carpenter 2024), not least under the guise of claims for MPAs, as on Waiheke Island.

At the same time, urban ethics played a crucial role in fostering buy-in and establishing a common ground for consensus in the highly contested realm of coastal and marine rights, protection, and development in Auckland and ANZ more broadly. The possibility and ideal of reaching a foundational, rational moral consensus on contentious issues, which is widespread in Auckland as demonstrated, has been identified by several scholars as a feature of (neo)liberal rationalities, often pursued in participatory, non-statutory, and 'soft' spaces of governance (of which there exist many in and around the Gulf) and linked to a post-

political condition and depoliticising dynamics (Mouffe 2005; Swyngedouw 2005; Hoskins 2012; Haughton et al. 2013; Tafon 2018).

In this sense, urban ethics in general and ethics of consensus and cooperation in particular can tame conflict and keep people acting in conformist ways and towards a common goal, excluding and obscuring disputes and conflicts on the other hand. It confirms the link that Chantal Mouffe and other critics of a post-democratic liberal state see between post-political conjunctures and ethicised and moralised discourse (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 5). These dynamics need to be viewed critically, as they are potentially linked to the denial of and limited opportunities to challenge prevailing injustices and the existing social order (Hoskins 2012), as evidenced by the containment of struggles over private property and the development of marine space on Waiheke Island. They can also lead to the exclusion of disruptive ideas and transformations, which in many cases have been associated with spaces of resistance (the emergence of Ahu Moana in SCTTTP would be one such example) (Haughton et al. 2013). Finally, while some of the urban ethical narratives, such as those of citizens acting as guardians of the Gulf, draw on Māori concepts, following Hoskins (2012) and Larsen and Johnson (2017), their function of creating foundational social consensus can be seen as at odds with a Māori worldview, which sees the world as pluriverse and therefore necessarily fraught with plurality and contestation.

However, the research revealed that the drive for consensus and common ground was not solely imposed from the top down. Participants in the SCTTTP process described moments when a shared recognition of a common goal – the health and stewardship of the Gulf – helped foster mutual understanding within the SWG. In this context, certain urban ethics functioned as boundary concepts, bridging diverse worldviews and interests. Rather than erasing differences, these ethical frameworks facilitated compromise agreements, such as the final SCTTTP report, by providing a shared foundation – particularly through a *diverse* urban ethics of marine stewardship. The emergence of common ground is closely linked to participatory (planning) techniques such as the self-selection process for the SWG, the SWG itself, roundtable discussions, or the FS method. They create “spaces for ethical reflection and self-governance” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 8), which can be viewed critically from a perspective of ‘ethopower’ (Rose 2000), but also seem to hold potential for bottom-up or potentially disruptive moments and for the emergence of new modes of a diverse, ethical coexistence. The distinction between the *emergence* of urban ethics as a common ground and the top-down consensual framing of participatory (planning) spaces and base-

lines for participation thus proved important. From a perspective of ethopower and depoliticisation (Rose 2000; Mouffe 2005; Dürr et al. 2019), it seems more promising in planning processes to adhere to broader definitions of collaboration that allow and aim for the acceptance and negotiation of diverse and conflicting viewpoints, opinions, and concerns, rather than a narrow ideal of unity.

Finally, urban ethics proved to be closely linked to issues and dynamics of legitimisation and specific kinds of inclusion and exclusion in the research (Dürr et al. 2019). In the context of participatory spaces such as SCTTTP and the WMP's FS event, appropriate subject positions were produced and claimed and had to be stated and performed in order to participate in these spaces. By claiming certain subject positions, participants also co-constituted and reproduced the urban ethics discourse around the Gulf. As an imaginary of a relational care network emerged, an urban ethics of kaitiakitanga and guardianship functions to link actors together while also structuring the relationships between human and non-human elements. This potentially marginalises certain actors, non-human entities, or relationships – such as specific fishing methods, 'non-cooperative' recreational fishers, or oppositional protest movements. Constituting oneself as an ethical subject according to discourses of ecological and social responsibility helped or attempted to legitimise one's interests and position, also literally as in the case of POAL's location on the waterfront. The ability to perform and declare oneself as an ethical subject of the Gulf – as well as to relate to a Gulf care network – is closely linked to the possibility of participation and thus to the ability to engage. Other mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, such as property, time, or proximity, are in danger of being obscured by positive negotiations of participation in a field of urban ethics.

Overall, the research presents a complex picture of urban ethics as a field of negotiation and how they operate in multiple, often contradictory ways in Auckland and around the Gulf. The research is limited by its inability to draw conclusions about the actual effectiveness of urban ethics as means of improving the health of the Gulf. The HGF's most recent report (2023) strikes a hopeful undertone, stating that "while pressure on the Gulf remains high, this report suggests we may be close to starting a new chapter in the story of the Tīkapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi / Hauraki Gulf" (p. 9). The HGF attributes this forecast to upcoming changes resulting from the central government's report *Revitalising the Gulf: Government action of the Sea Change Plan* (DOC et al. 2021), in particular the development of a management plan for the Gulf's fisheries (published by Fisheries New Zealand as the



*Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan* in August 2023) and the implementation of a proposal to increase the coverage of MPAs in the Gulf (proposed as the *Hauraki Gulf Marine Protection Bill*<sup>1</sup>, still under consideration in Parliament in December 2024). The HGF recognises SCTTTP as an ‘ambitious roadmap’ for these developments. It also credits direct action by Mana Whenua and local communities, court decisions, resource consent hearings, and infrastructure improvements to Auckland’s sewer system as changes with the potential to improve outcomes in the Gulf. While a causal link between these developments and urban ethics cannot be drawn, the research showed that urban ethics was part of the negotiation and guiding force behind many of these developments.

The focus of this research was on the *political ecological dynamics* of creating urban coastal futures and transformation in Auckland (Bryant 2015) – with an emphasis on urban ethics. Rather than analysing the efficacy of urban ethics as a means of improving the health of the Gulf, it presented urban ethics as a political and negotiated field, showing how they were intimately linked to the contestation and transformation of established political ecological regimes. In Auckland, they had important implications for the rules of environmental planning and participation (‘who should decide and who should speak?’), for the organisation of space (‘how should the coastal city of Auckland and the Gulf be organised and governed?’), for dominant worldviews and justifications (‘why should it be this way?’), and potentially for new struggles in the future. Rather than being a ‘placeless void at the margins’ (Steinberg 2001; Lambert et al. 2006) – a view never shared by tangata whenua – the Gulf brought together different, often non-normative and marginalised, imaginaries and ethical systems, ways of thinking, (urban) living, governance, and change. While an emerging imaginary of the Gulf as a protected and recreational space for Auckland’s citizens – excluding certain industrial and commercial uses – and cared for by its communities invokes a metaphor of ‘Auckland’s blue backyard’, there is – and probably always will be – not one but many conceptions of what such a backyard *should* look like.

## 8.2 Implications for urban ethics as a research agenda

So, what are the implications of the research, and the complex picture of urban ethics in Auckland and around the Gulf that emerges, for the research agenda of urban ethics? By researching urban ethics in a settler society and post-colonial city, and from the specific perspectives of human geography and political ecology, several conclusions can be drawn for the analysis and evaluation of urban ethics.

First, not only are ethics “as a set of attempts to prescribe specific ways of conduct” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 2) specific to, and shaped by, the contexts, networks, and places of urban life but as the case of Auckland and ANZ has shown place has challenged and influenced the very conceptualisation of and analytical approach to urban ethics. In this specific place, a diversity of ethical systems was problematised and negotiated, challenging the general question posed by the urban ethics research agenda of ‘how should one live in the city?’ and its elements, in particular the notion or models of an ethical *subject* (and subjectivity) that can be imagined as responses to it. In order to avoid epistemic violence (Spivak 2010), the notion of what ‘counts’ as urban ethics in post-colonial research contexts should be expanded, and this potentially applies to other contexts as well, if one takes seriously scholars such as Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) who advocate for a relational understanding of environmental ethics, or rather human-nonhuman ethicalities. It is also only by broadening our understanding of urban ethics that we will be able to understand how ethics promote new relational and naturalcultural urban imaginaries, resource valuations, and assumptions, how this leads to transformation, and the conflicts it entails.

Second, the research confirmed that urban ethics involve complex, sometimes paradoxical dynamics (Dürr et al. 2019) – they can be simultaneously ‘neoliberal’ and ‘creators of progressive futures’, political as well as depoliticising. While ethicised and moralised discourses are often associated with depoliticising dynamics, they are not necessarily indicative of post-political conjunctures, at least not if different ethicalities are included in the notion of ‘ethicised and moralised discourse’ (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 5). Moreover, a separation of ‘ethical’ or ‘moral’ and ‘political’ issues, while sometimes useful, seems deceptive (Fassin 2015). This is also or especially true in the post-colonial context of settler societies, where ‘ethical’ discourse, claims, and practices are closely intertwined with ontological politics (Gesing 2016). Political ecology, with its long tradition and current approaches to exploring the operation of power in the context of ethics of human-nonhuman coexistence, proved to be a helpful and fitting amendment to urban ethics, which itself places a

particular emphasis on negotiation, contestation, and power dynamics (Dürr et al. 2019). Political ecology helped in conceptualising the operation of power in the context of urban ethics of human-nonhuman coexistence, particularly in relation to ontological politics, the processes of normalising *nature*, and a reimagining of non-normative naturecultures.

Third, the research agenda of urban ethics *relates ethics to spatial arrangements* (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 5). The perspective of human geography and Indigenous studies and research meant that this research made this connection even more explicit. It showed how different conceptualisations and valuations of space and place can be found in relation to different ethicalities. In some cases, such as in the case of Māori ethical systems, place or land is closely intertwined with ethics and cannot be thought of separately (Coulthard 2014; Daigle 2024). This connection provides a new level of understanding of the politics of urban ethics and their entanglement with issues of redress, property rights, and resource management regimes. Empirically, this thesis has shown a link between urban ethics and the remapping of coastal and marine space, as well as a fundamental reimagining of space and place. It is conceivable that such a link may be identified in other urban contexts, and this possibility merits further investigation in future urban ethics research.

Finally, and in this context, it must be emphasised that the research related *urban ethics* to a very specific spatial arrangement – the city edge. In doing so, it added an additional perspective to understanding the *urban* in urban ethics, focusing on city-hinterland inter-relations, urban-rural distinctions, and the boundaries of the urban. The research showed how the urban is (re-)imagined, framed, and discursively contested on and from the blue edge of the city. The perspective of the urban edge as a liminal or in-between space, and the particular materiality of the coast and the sea, introduced alternatives, difference, and experimentation into spaces where urban ethics were negotiated. The coastal city edge is thus reminiscent of other spaces, such as urban wastelands, which were also found to be sites of discovery and experimentation that trouble and challenge familiar notions of the cultural landscape, designed spaces, and organisational logics of modernity (Gandy 2013, pp. 1311-1312). It also suggests parallels with other research on urban ‘natural’ spaces, urban biodiversity, and, more generally, the other-than-human and their unsettling and shaping of *urbanity* and urban space (Gandy 2019; Barua 2023) – pointing to a richer understanding of the *urban* and a valuable focus for future urban ethics research.

### 8.3 Implications for human geography and political ecology

This research has demonstrated that key debates in human geography and (urban) political ecology are deeply connected to urban ethics. These debates encompass issues such as questions of place and space, the nature of the city and urban living, ontological pluralism, agency, subjectivity, power, and the political (Gandy 2022). Each of these themes presents a valuable avenue for further research in human geography and political ecology.

Ethics have been discussed in a variety of ways in human geography – ranging from transformative projects and explanatory frameworks to more descriptive approaches. In political ecology, discussions on ethics have focused on their role in conveying normative and evaluative propositions about human-nonhuman relations and forms of coexistence, shaping spatial organisations and environmental management regimes, and rethinking ethics as emergent and relational. This research positioned ethics as a key dimension of urban socio-ecological transitions and transformations, a topic of particular interest to human geographers and political ecologists worldwide. Empirically, it showed how urban ethics are part of, and a means in, the struggles, negotiations, and strategies for a ‘good’ urban coastal future, and are closely intertwined with issues of power and justice – and thus relevant to both human geography and political ecology.

The approach taken was similar to other explanatory and descriptive approaches to ethics and morality in human geography, drawing on post-structuralist thinking and analysing the role and (spatial) operation of urban ethics in the coastal field of Auckland. In doing so, the research identified ethics as a discursive dimension of urban, socio-ecological transformations, while many actors ‘in the field’ – including researchers and academics – were working on and contributing to a transformation, seeing and using altered ethics (ethicalities or ethical co-ordinates) as part and basis of creating better socio-ecological futures. This was linked to forms of natureculture and relational thinking, not least approaches to thinking space and its organisation *relationally*.

Two key observations emerge here. First, the theoretical shifts promoted in academic discourse over recent decades – specifically, the challenge to dominant (capitalist) ways of knowing the world through a redefined understanding of human-nonhuman relationships and an ethical reorganisation of our coexistence (Haraway 1997; Gibson-Graham 2008; Anderson 2012; Büscher & Fletcher 2019; Gesing et al. 2019; George & Wiebe 2020; Foggin et al. 2021; Gesing 2021; Latour & Schultz 2022; Boucquey & Fly 2024) – are, to some

extent, actively pursued and materialising in Auckland, ANZ. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the high level of education and academic background of many actors involved, the close interaction between academics and practitioners – such as through the SSNSC –, and the tradition of performative and engaged research among some scholars working in the field (see e.g. Lewis et al. 2013).

At the same time, many of the challenges to dominant epistemologies and the alternative ways of knowing articulated in Euro-Western scholarship are themselves informed by Indigenous ontologies and the critical scholarship of Indigenous thinkers, particularly regarding care and more-than-human agency (Todd 2016; Yates 2021). This relationship could therefore be viewed from the opposite perspective: as critical and progressive alternatives that emerge empirically and resonate with ongoing debates in Euro-Western scholarship, particularly in human geography and political ecology.

In either case, this highlights the deep interconnection between academic discourse and urban ethics ‘in the field’ while also opening opportunities for research into the actual and potential (spatial) implications of an ethical reorganisation of human-nonhuman relationships as suggested in the literature. While this study represents a first empirical step in that direction, further research and discussion of empirical evidence are needed.

The second crucial point that requires further attention and discussion is the politics of selecting a particular approach to ethics and morality in human geography and political ecology research. Taking an analytical approach to ethics, I distinguished between different conceptualisations of ethics and (ethical) ontologies, apparently looking at them from the ‘outside’. This approach had the advantage of being able to trace and understand the politics of ethical claims-making, how diverse ethics discourses and practices come together and into being. But ultimately, at various points, it invoked the kind of meta-ontology and essentialism that, as Blaser (2014) and Larsen and Johnson (2017) have warned, fails to take seriously “the existing multiplicity of worlds or realities” (Blaser 2014, p. 53) – and ethical systems. If the idea of a pluriverse is taken seriously – as “the partially connected unfolding of worlds” (Blaser 2014, p. 55) and not as a set of analysable ‘ontological discourses’ – there is no ‘view from the outside’, no uncovering or description of a supposedly external or prior, albeit socially constructed, reality. Privileging an analytical approach to ethics and making the multiplicity of ethical systems the *object* of my analysis, is in itself performative, actively shaping the world in particular ways (Blaser 2014; Larsen & Johnson 2017; Foggin et al. 2021; DePuy et al. 2022; Fisher et al. 2022, p. 610).

As such, the choice of a particular approach to ethics is political and carries the risk of exercising epistemic violence, particularly in a settler-colonial context. The choice of relationality and performance or enactment as an approach to the world and to guide our theorising and research has been proposed by scholars as an *ethical* way forward – one that takes ontological multiplicity seriously (Blaser 2013) and is oriented towards social and ecological transformation, decolonisation, and justice (Foggin et al. 2021; Fisher et al. 2022), and responsibility and care for others (Hoskins 2012). This recognition makes the recent shift in Euro-Western scholarship towards ethics as relational and emergent understandable, and, normatively speaking, necessary – indeed, the ethics that are underlying such a project and transformation *emerged*, in my case, in the *relational* space of this research.

What does this mean for future research and theorisation in human geography and political ecology? One implication would be to abandon approaches – in ethics and morality, but also more generally – that aim to analyse a pre-existing reality, as well as those that analyse the social construction of reality, and to take a *truly* ‘relational turn’ in our theorising and research. I doubt that this would be the only and right way forward. The use of critical, non-relational approaches such as deconstructivism and post-structuralism in the field of political ecology has greatly enhanced the understanding of power dynamics and (structural) issues of injustice, as has been demonstrated not least by this research. To *abandon* such approaches in favour of relational thinking seems to me, on the one hand, to lose sight of the basis of our (as Euro-Western scholars) critique and the origins of our own ethical rethinking (Gibson-Graham 2008; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink 2010).

On the other hand, there is a danger of abandoning the critique of power structures, discursive power, and forms of ethical violence in favour of reading for positive examples and ‘learning to be affected’ (Gibson-Graham & Roelvink 2010)<sup>2</sup>. The advocacy of relational approaches and theorising in ANZ is, for the most part, closely linked to claims for ontological and epistemic justice and Indigenous rights, and is therefore very much linked to a sensitivity to and critique of structural realities and power dynamics (see, for example, Fisher et al. 2022). However, relational thinking and approaches (‘the ontological turn’) in the ‘Euro-Western academy’ have been criticised for their descriptive nature (Martin Müller 2015) and for silencing out and reinforcing injustices (Todd 2016; Chipato & Chandler 2024). Nonetheless, there have been endeavours to bring critical post-structuralist scholarship and relational approaches into dialogue with one another (Boucquey et

al. 2016). For instance, Martin Müller (2015) has proposed a more sustained engagement with issues of language and power in relation to assemblage thinking and actor-network theory (p. 27). Subsequent research, particularly in the field of political ecology, must explore this relationship between relational thinking and systemic critique of power relations further.

## 8.4 Closing remarks

Other scholars (see, for example, Gesing 2016) have argued that coastal and marine transitions in ANZ are deeply entangled with a normative and ethical dimension. Questions of what should be done, why, by whom, and applying which methods underpin the politics, practices and ultimately the making of coastal natures (Gesing 2016, 2021). The research agenda of urban ethics highlights and addresses the dimension of normativity and ethics in cities, aiming to understand how urban life is negotiated in here (Dürr et al. 2019). However, the ethical dimension of urban coastal transformations remains implicit, obscured, and under-researched. This study has taken a first step towards changing this.

The research demonstrates that ethics is not a fixed (or changeable) property or attitude of actors coming together to negotiate and realise our urban coastal futures in times of large-scale coastal change, but that ethics can and should be considered as an important dimension in these negotiations and attempts at transition-making. Focusing our attention on the ethical dimension means understanding the issue of urban coastal change in a complexity that cannot be grasped by focusing on one dimension of economic, political, or ecological change alone. Rather, all of these dimensions intersect with and are permeated by issues and the workings of ethics – which are often contradictory, complex, and not easy to grasp. While there is no simple answer to *the* role of urban ethics in coastal change, the research has shown the importance and value of bringing the ethical dimension into focus and discussion if we are to understand and perhaps initiate change for better urban coastal futures.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana Marine Protection Bill* was introduced into Parliament on 22 August 2023, the same year the HGF positively acknowledged the bill. The draft bill was amended in October 2024, in particular to allow ring net fishing in two protected areas. Conservation Minister Tama Potaka's explanatory statement used a highly ethical vocabulary, stating that the changes were about helping low-income communities access seafood. ENGOs criticised the changes as being the result of 'backdoor lobbying' and undermining the integrity of HPAs and their

conservation benefits (Lardies 2024; “Spineless’ decision on fishing under fire” 2024). The HGF stated that the changes “threaten to set back [...] protection and restoration efforts by decades” (King 2024).

<sup>2</sup> In my eyes, this is what has happened in the course of some ‘community economies’ research (Gibson-Graham & Roelvink 2009; CERN 2024). When I attended the Community Economies Institute’s summer/winter school with Kathrine Gibson in June-July 2023 in Trondheim, Norway, I observed and recorded a narrative of doing ‘positive’ research and ‘bringing good into the world’. Questions about how to deal with structural injustices and critical aspects in a research agenda of reading for “potentially positive futures” (Gibson-Graham & Roelvink 2009, p. 342) were rejected, and the need to work towards anti-capitalist and positive imaginaries was emphasised. While the roots of the Community Economies research agenda lie in the very valuable critical and post-structuralist work of J. K. Gibson-Graham (2008), the turn to an affirmative research agenda and *ethics* seems to have led to critical research being seen as an obstacle to the realisation of positive futures and subsequently to the active marginalisation of such approaches (Gibson-Graham & Roelvink 2009). This actually reminded me of my empirical research on Waiheke Island, where consensus was sought by some in favour of a positive ethical future and ethical imagination, and voices of conflict and voices critical of structural injustices were excluded.

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## Appendix

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## A.1 Overviews of publications included as chapters in the thesis

**Table A.1** Overview of publications included as chapters in this thesis (including chapter number, publication type, research questions and objectives, methodology used and main findings) (Table: M. Aschenbrenner).

Chapter in thesis	Publication	Type	Research questions	Research objectives	Methodology	Main findings
3	Aschenbrenner, M. 2023a.	Published book chapter	(1) What kind of urban coastal ethics were imagined and claimed in and around a process of marine spatial planning in Auckland (SCTTTP)? (2) In what ways was an ethics of marine stewardship imagined and assembled in SCTTTP? (3) What role does the assembling of a specific environmental ethics play?	(1) To establish <i>ethicalities</i> as an analytical lens to understand ethical ontologies in their diversity (2) To trace ethics/ethicalities in the process of SCTTTP (3) To understand the coming-together and assembling of diverse urban environmental ethics in SCTTTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Re-tracing and mapping the process from reports, media sources, newsletter articles, and other publications</li> <li>Analysing and interpreting 27 semi-structured and narrative interviews and participant observation protocols</li> </ul>	(1) Emergence of a context-specific ethics of marine stewardship and <i>kaitiakitanga</i> that assembles diverse discourses and worldviews (2) Ethics of (individual) stewardship functioning as access criteria for non-Mana Whenua participants in SCTTTP (3) Emphasis on a vision of reconciliation, consensus, and agreement in SCTTTP (4) Ethics of stewardship/ <i>kaitiakitanga</i> functioning as common ground and reasoning for collaborative behaviour (5) Strong narrative of biculturalism and a Treaty-Crown partnership (6) Territorialisation of a bi-cultural ethics of stewardship and <i>kaitiakitanga</i> as <i>Ahu Moana</i> (ocean care areas)

4	Aschenbrenner, M. 2023b.	Published peer-reviewed article	<p>(1) What kind of natural-cultural and governmental imaginaries and narratives emerged from SCTTTP?</p> <p>(2) In what ways did SCTTTP assemble new, ethical, emancipatory, and potentially disruptive urban marine-environmental geographies?</p> <p>(3) Is there a tendency of ethicisation or of new and disruptive ethical imaginaries and narratives?</p>	<p>(1) To theorise the difference between coastal transitions and coastal transformations, and the role of normativity in each</p> <p>(2) To theoretically, as well as empirically, explore and discuss the normative and ethical dimension of urban environmental bargaining and coastal transition endeavours</p> <p>(3) To understand urban ethical claims-making between neoliberal projects of ethicisation and responsabilisation and modes of claiming alternative/non-normative and progressive coastal futures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysing and interpreting 21 semi-structured expert interviews</li> </ul>	<p>(1) Four main discursive strands identified in post-SCTTTP expert narratives connected to: <i>a.</i> a conventional, formal planning discourse, <i>b.</i> a marine conservation discourse, <i>c.</i> the emergence of a new ethics of the Gulf, <i>d.</i> the emergence and claiming of an alternative ethicality and non-normative natural-cultural relations</p> <p>(2) Interpretation of <i>a, b, and c</i> in terms of an ethicisation of the governance of Gulf conflicts and facilitating neoliberal governmentalities</p> <p>(3) Interpretation of <i>d</i> in terms of attempts of decolonisation and bearing the greatest disruptive and thus transformative potential</p> <p>(4) Reframing of hegemonic naturalcultural imaginaries and relations with the Gulf as transformative element in SCTTTP</p> <p>(5) Remapping of the Gulf according to an alternative ethicality and rationalities of co-management, local care and <i>kaitiakitanga</i> in the form of <i>Ahu Moana</i> (also for non-Māori communities)</p>
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5	Acosta García, R., Aschenbrenner, M., Dürr, E., and Winder, G. 2022.	Published peer-reviewed article	(1) How are environmental subjects (subjectivities) created by producing im- aginaries of cities as <i>eco- systems</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) To explore and under- stand the role of <i>re-im- agining cities as ecosys- tems</i> in and for urban (neoliberal) governance in Auckland and Mexico City</li> <li>(2) To analyse environmen- tality and the making of environmental subjects by creating and com- municating ecosystem imaginaries</li> <li>(3) To understand the con- nection between neolib- eral governmentality (environmentality), ur- ban environmental imag- inaries and urban ethics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysing and interpret- ing semi-structured and narrative interviews, of- ficial documents and re- ports, participant obser- vation protocols, and photographic material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Re-imagining cities as ecosystems follows a neoliberal tendency in urban planning</li> <li>(2) Education of the popula- tion as living <i>with</i> na- ture, as being <i>part of it</i>, and behaving accord- ingly</li> <li>(3) Taking up the Māori ho- listic principle of <i>Ki uta ki tai</i> (translated as <i>Ridge to reef</i> or <i>Mountains to sea</i>) in Auckland as imag- inary and framework for an integrated ecosystem management from the catchments to the sea / the Gulf</li> <li>(4) Different forms and im- plications of an urban ecosystem imaginary in Auckland: <i>a.</i> communi- cation and stimulation of a certain behaviour among urban dwellers, <i>b.</i> creating consensus, achieving collaboration and acceptance for large infrastructure invest- ments and transfor- mations of natural eco- systems, <i>c.</i> putting prin- ciples of <i>good</i> environ- mental management such as a holistic ecosys- tem-based approach and integration of Māori world views into practice</li> </ul>
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6	Aschenbrenner, M., and Winder, G. 2023.	Published book chapter	<p>(1) How are decisions made in the contested issue of Auckland's port location, and what role do urban ethics play?</p> <p>(2) What constitutes <i>good</i> decision-making in this case?</p>	<p>(1) To analyse how decisions are made and negotiated in the contested case of Auckland's waterfront and port location</p> <p>(2) To better understand the role of urban ethics in negotiating urban coastal and waterfront transitions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysing and interpreting 27 semi-structured and narrative interviews</li> <li>Analysing reports, associated materials, and media coverage</li> </ul>	<p>(1) Establishing urban waterfronts as spaces where urban blue economic-environment relations are contested and in the making</p> <p>(2) Urban ethics as discursive field in which decision-making is contested</p> <p>(3) Challenging claims of <i>right</i> (often technocratic) procedures and ways of decision-making</p> <p>(4) Urban ethics work to establish and legitimise new ways of decision-making and port futures – while delegitimising others</p> <p>(5) Transferring contest from fields of expert knowledge, participation, and moral negotiations towards the <i>ethics</i> of expertise, participation, and negotiation</p>
7	Aschenbrenner (under review)	Peer-reviewed article	<p>(1) How has a relational perspective on community, place, and localism emerged in relation to ideas and practices of marine guardianship and kaitiakitanga?</p> <p>(2) What are the social and political implications of the emergence of an ethics of kaitiakitanga/guardianship?</p>	<p>(1) To analyse the (re)negotiation and emergence of urban ethics at a community level</p> <p>(2) To explore how new ideas of marine care and environmental subjectivities are employed, approached, and realised in the coastal community of Waiheke Island</p> <p>(3) To explore and discuss conflicts and issues of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysing 12 qualitative interviews</li> <li>Analysing protocols of 6 participant observations</li> <li>Analysing project newsletters, media and project reports gathered on-site and remotely between February 2020 and April 2024</li> </ul>	<p>(1) Emergence of a specific understanding of ahu moana (ocean care) in the case of the Waiheke Marine Project on Waiheke Island</p> <p>(2) Emergence of an imaginary of a <i>local community</i> united by a specific place-based, ethics of kaitiakitanga/guardianship</p>

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	power relations, legitimacy and inclusion and exclusion	(3) Definition of kaitiakitanga/guardianship as involving seven cornerstones: relationality, action, collaboration and consensus, Treaty partnership, emergence, centring of future generations, and certain moral economies
(4)	To focus on the spatial implications of urban ethics in practice	(4) Emergence of a vision of a relational care network and relationships with other caregivers in the Gulf
		(5) Changing patterns of inclusion and exclusion related to emerging values of marine care (e.g. collaboration and consensus)

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**Table A.2** Overview of co-authored papers and book chapters and the roles and contributions of the authors (Table: M. Aschenbrenner).

Chapter in thesis	Publication	Role and contributions of the authors
5	Acosta García, R., Aschenbrenner, M., Dürr, E., and Winder, G. 2022.	<p><b>Raúl Acosta García:</b> Conceptualisation (lead); Writing – original draft (Introduction, Re-imagining human-environmental relations, The Mexico Basin, Conclusions); Resources and analysis (The Mexico Basin)</p> <p><b>Marie Aschenbrenner:</b> Conceptualisation (supporting); Writing – original draft (Auckland’s blue backyard); Writing – review and editing; Resources and analysis (Auckland’s blue backyard)</p> <p><b>Eveline Dürr:</b> Conceptualisation (supporting); Writing – review and editing</p> <p><b>Gordon M Winder:</b> Conceptualisation (supporting); Writing – review and editing</p>
6	Aschenbrenner, M., and Winder, G. 2023.	<p><b>Marie Aschenbrenner:</b> Conceptualisation (equal); Writing – original draft (lead); Writing – review and editing; Resources and analysis (qualitative data)</p> <p><b>Gordon M Winder:</b> Conceptualisation (equal); Writing – original draft (supporting); Writing – review and editing; Resources and analysis (quantitative data)</p>

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- Aschenbrenner, M. 2023a. The political ecology of a diverse urban ethics of marine stewardship in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. In *Urban ethics as research agenda: Outlooks and tensions on multidisciplinary debates*, eds. R. Acosta, E. Dürr, M. Ege, U. Prutsch, C. v. Løyen, and G. Winder, 56-78. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003346777-4> © 2023 by Routledge. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> CC-BY-NC-ND
- Aschenbrenner, M. 2023b. Urban environmental ethics and coastal transformations: Remapping the Hauraki Gulf Tīkapa Moana, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, in a process of marine spatial planning. *Maritime Studies*, 22 (3): 33. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-023-00321-5> © 2023 by SpringerNature. Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, Changes in title, spelling and formatting
- Aschenbrenner, M., and Winder, G. 2023. Deciding port futures: Ports of Auckland, marine spatial planning and contested ethics in blue economy plan making. In *Blue economy: People and regions in transitions*, eds. C. P. Heidkamp, J. E. Morrissey, and C. Germond-Duret, 159-173. Routledge. © 2023 by Routledge. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> CC-BY-NC-N
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## A.2 Reprint of Aschenbrenner 2023b

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## RESEARCH



## Urban environmental ethics and coastal transformations: remapping the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, in a process of marine spatial planning

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### Abstract

This paper is motivated by recent debates about marine spatial planning (MSP) and a blue economy, pushed worldwide for marine and coastal transitions but discussed by critical scholars as potentially facilitating a neoliberalization of the seas. It engages with an MSP project initiated in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, to formally bargain for a better socionatural state of the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana (Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari, 2013–2016). The paper is interested in the way *ethics*—proper ways of living—are being problematized and (re)claimed in MSP, and their role in remapping the land/seascape, its socionature and power relations. I employ and develop *urban ethics* as a research agenda, which draws together a diverse scope of work, in particular post-political theory, neoliberal forms of governing and ethicization, ontological pluralism and (re)centering alternative/non-hegemonic ethicalities. By disentangling the problematizations, naturalcultural imaginaries and governmentalities in 21 in-depth interviews, I identify four distinct but interwoven discursive strands in regard to the MSP. Two strands stand out as they problematize *ethics* as a means of change. The paper finds transformative potential in a mode of disruption and progressive alternatives to neoliberal beliefs and governmentality, primarily in the (re)centering of non-normative Māori ethicality and knowledge. The paper reveals ethics as a major dimension in environmental bargaining within a neoliberal urban context. Its nuanced understanding of ethics shows ethics' destabilizing role in environmental bargaining, its role in disrupting power structures and colonizing framings, and in supporting alternative imaginations of socionatural land/sea relations.

**Keywords** Urban ethics · Marine spatial planning · Neoliberal governmentality · Ethicization · Non-normative/anormative ethicalities · Auckland · Aotearoa New Zealand

### Introduction

Policy approaches like marine spatial planning (MSP) or a blue economy (BE) try to provide answers to the question of how to achieve a *better* future for marine and coastal ecosystems and people alike. Despite being shaped and promoted by international and supra-regional institutions, they are locally realized and differ in their practical implementation (Douvere & Ehler 2009; Jones et al. 2016). What they have in common is the aim to tackle increasing risks, conflicts and change by transforming ways of interacting, doing business and living with the sea—so reassembling the human and more-than-human, foremost in coastal spaces (Winder & Le Heron

2017). Projects that aim for a coastal transition and reorganization entail a normative dimension, and are not only political but in many ways “ethical projects” (Ege & Moser 2020). The question whether MSP/BE induce an actual transformation of socionatural relations and lead “towards more equity-based, democratic decision-making and a fairer distribution of our ocean wealth” (Flannery & Ellis 2016, p. 121) or rather push a neoliberalization of marine management is of concern to academics (Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019; Fairbanks et al. 2019; Clarke & Flannery 2020; Ege & Moser 2020; Flannery & McAtteer 2020). This paper engages with the question of a socionatural transformation and empowerment in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ), where an MSP project as answer to a deteriorating environmental state of the Hauraki Gulf (the Gulf) was carried out in a wider environment of marine transition endeavours. The project involved ethicized and moralized discourse in the form of normative imperatives, reflections and ideas of *good* and *right*

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living and planning for the Gulf such as claims of consensus, collaboration and marine stewardship (Ege & Moser 2020; Aschenbrenner 2023). The paper is interested in this project and its emergent naturalcultural<sup>1</sup> and governmental imaginaries and narratives with a focus on the question in what ways new, *ethical*, emancipatory and potentially disruptive urban marine-environmental geographies have been assembled. At the same time, it critically discusses *ethicization*—the tendency to frame (urban) questions (discourses, conflicts) as questions of ethics—as a form of neoliberal governmentality, by which conflicts and antagonistic positions in environmental bargaining are potentially being depoliticized and *tamed* (Dürr et al. 2019). That way it links to recent critical social scientific work, in which scholars found MSP and BE projects to be assembled around neoliberal logics and principles, and as showing signs of a neoliberal governmentality and post-political state (Tafon 2018; Flannery & McAteer 2020).

The lack of an actual transformation of urban—and marine—socio-natural and power relations is often associated with an absence of “alternative[s] to the [neoliberal] mainstream paradigm and potentially disruptive ideas” (Haughton et al. 2013, p. 231). This absence is—with reference to political philosophers Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière—regarded as a characteristic of a post-political condition, which much environmental and marine politics are said to have arrived in (Swyngedouw 2009; Haughton et al. 2013; Tafon 2018; Flannery & McAteer 2020). The *political*, understood by Mouffe as a dimension of antagonism, contestation and conflict, is being replaced in post-political arrangements by consensus-based politics and a shift to ethico-moral (instead of political) categories. Put in highly simplified terms, the ability to express antagonistic positions to question and disrupt a given order of things is being limited (Mouffe 2005; Rancière 2006; Allmendinger & Haughton 2012). Several authors observed a containment of conflict and progressive elements in MSP favouring neoliberal objectives such as economic growth, efficiency or a narrow definition of sustainable development—often by measures of technocratic-managerial forms of governance, tokenistic participation and claims of singular, objective truths (Flannery et al. 2018; Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019; Clarke & Flannery 2020).

While scholars identified (aspects of) post-political conditions in several MSP projects, some concluded that this does

not mean a general depoliticization of these spaces (Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019). Authors researching neoliberal governance and planning in other contexts described and discussed similar and somewhat complex and apparently paradoxical processes: While neoliberal modes of governance might “foreclose or displace [the] proper political dimension” (Haughton et al. 2013, p. 222), they can be accompanied by a change in state-civil society relationships attributing an increasing role to civil society, including non-governmental organizations (NGO). Greater public involvement and socially liberal identity politics can create open spaces where “everyone is treat[ed] as equal speaking beings” (Haughton et al. 2013, p. 222), and people or groups are able to freely express their political views (Swyngedouw 2005; McCormack 2012). Assessments of and opinions on these processes have been manifold and also contradictory (Speed & Sierra 2005; Kingfisher & Maskovsky 2008; Lewis et al. 2009; Swyngedouw 2009; Haughton et al. 2013; Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017; Bargh 2018). Scholars generally agree that there actually is not *one* neoliberalism or form of neoliberalization but processes and effects like those of (dis)empowerment or (de)politicization that are contextual, complex and potentially coexist (Peck & Tickell 2002; McCormack 2012; Olesen 2014). In terms of researching marine management and politics, this indicates the value, and necessity, of a general openness and “reading for difference” (Gibson-Graham 2008). In relation to this paper, it means going beyond diagnosing a potential post-political condition, by untangling the multiple, tangled truths, narratives and imaginaries and thereby paying attention to disruptions and progressive alternatives to/in (potentially) neoliberal MSP, especially when expressed in *ethical* terms (Flannery & McAteer 2020; Aschenbrenner 2023).

The paper thinks through and with a lens of *urban ethics* (Dürr et al. 2019; Ege & Moser 2020). It understands the project of MSP in Auckland, *Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari* (SCTTTP, 2013–2016), as a process of environmental bargaining (Affolderbach 2011). SCTTTP was initially championed by an environmental NGO and the Hauraki Gulf Forum (HGF), an integrative, statutory body with the purpose to enhance the conservation and sustainable management of the Gulf (New Zealand Government 2000; Peart 2019). Here, environmental bargaining is understood, drawing on Affolderbach, as “a process through which [antagonistic actors] seek to change existing decision-making processes and outcomes [...] to reflect environmental imperatives”<sup>2</sup> (2011, p. 182). The political-economic context of Auckland

<sup>1</sup> In this context, the wording *natureculture* (*naturalcultural*) is used as it draws attention to the plurality of ontologies (or world-makings), also those within and beyond Western philosophical traditions. The closely related concept of *socioculture* (*or social nature*), often used in geographical contexts, directs the focus rather on the *production* of hybrid processes and relations. Both concepts draw on the critique of a nature/culture dualism as it is embedded in more *modern*, Eurocentric thinking, and aim to draw attention to the hybridity of processes/objects (Gesing et al. 2019).

<sup>2</sup> The author is aware that “environmental” (*the environment*) is a term often used in a Western philosophical tradition implying a human/nature divide. In the context of SCTTTP, multiple worldviews and knowledges were acknowledged and emphasized. Environmental bargaining in this sense is seen as ontologically more open and integrating different imperatives that aim for a “well-being” of the Gulf.



is one of far-reaching neoliberal reform and relaxing regulatory conditions. SCTTP took the form of a formal bargaining process without being properly formalized—it was non-statutory but publicly funded, quasi-independent and broadly participatory (Lewis & Murphy 2015; Le Heron et al. 2018). This complies with ideas of, especially urban, neoliberal governance, where a greater role and responsibility is assigned to private economic actors and civil society, thus allowing the formal integration of processes like SCTTP into a greater neoliberal logic (Swyngedouw 2005; Haughton et al. 2013). The SCTTP process and its outcomes were intended to be collaborative and consensus-based, and they involved ethical claims-making and questions. A research perspective of *urban ethics* draws these aspects into focus. It brings awareness to normativity and ethics as a register in which environmental bargaining takes place, not only since, but increasingly as neoliberal forms of governing become normalized (N. Rose 2000; Muehlebach 2012; Dürr et al. 2019).

An “ethicization of discourses and conflicts” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 8) is often considered symptomatic of a neoliberal governmentality and post-political condition. Urban ethical lines of thought, as outlined by Dürr et al. (2019), bring, at the same time, awareness to ethics as antagonism to capitalist, neoliberal logics. Claiming ethics of care, collective responsibilities, commoning, interdependence or affect can provide progressive imaginaries, and be part—or the basis—of attempts to establish an alternative *better* social order, enhanced resourcefulness and to intervene into the economization of marine resources (Tronto 1999; Sevenhuijsen 2000; Amin 2006; Gibson-Graham 2006, 2008; Popke 2006, 2010; St Martin 2007; McCormack 2018; Lewis 2019). It is important to take an explicit focus on these complex, and somewhat ambiguous dynamics of an ethicization, to better understand processes and power struggles in land/sea contexts.

The paper’s objective is to theoretically, as well as empirically, explore and discuss the *informal*—normative and ethical—dimension of urban environmental bargaining, and coastal transition endeavours. Therefore, the paper centres urban ethics in its theoretical approach and research. It draws a distinction between a normative-strategic transition approach and an analytic, poststructuralist point of view on *transformations* (affected by, but not confined to, transition objectives). Its perspective is the latter. Coastal transition initiatives like MSP are said to be in many ways ethical projects—spaces for bargaining and implementing ethico-moral principles (Ege & Moser 2020). This framing facilitates a focus on ethical problematizations and claims-making, in which *good* (right, sustainable, etc.) ways of living are problematized and/or claimed, and their role in remapping urban coastal spaces. Urban ethics as a research perspective opens up a spectrum on which these can be understood—as indicators for

an ethicization linked to a neoliberal governmentality, or as providing progressive naturalcultural imaginaries, and conceptions of subjectivity and responsibility. From this stance, the paper examines Auckland’s MSP. The analysis disentangles the different narrations of SCTTP subsequent to the planning process. It identifies emergent discursive strands that each interweaves specific problematizations, naturalcultural imaginaries and governmentalities. Ethics are problematized and seen as a mode of intervention in several strands but linked to differing naturalcultural imaginaries and governmentalities. Bearing the diverse interpretations of ethics in mind (linked to a neoliberal governmentality, or as opening up diverse alternatives in neoliberal capitalism), the paper discusses the politics and transformational potential of ethics in and for the remapping of Auckland’s land/seascape.

The paper engages with different conceptualizations of ethics, aiming to acknowledge diverse worldviews and “ethicalities” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). My positionality is one of a Western European (German) author, and *outsider* to Māori viewpoints and ontology. My limited understanding of *te ao Māori* (the Māori world) needs to be mentioned at this point. My intention is to add to critical discussions of normativity and ethics in the fields of MSP, BEs and coastal transitions, while contributing to urban ethics thinking *from the Gulf* as a distinct naturalcultural territory. My own research ethics is linked to a political ecology perspective, concerns of power relations and dynamics, justice, decolonization and environmental sustainability.

## Urban ethics as an agenda for researching coastal transition projects

### Ethics and normativity in MSP and BE practice and research

Questions of a transition/transformation towards a *better* (more sustainable, more resilient, etc.) future of marine and coastal ecosystems and livelihoods have a normative dimension—as have the answers given by international organizations, state authorities, so-called experts and scholars. “Transition and transformation [as buzzwords] are often used interchangeably” (Hölscher et al. 2018, p. 1)—in a growing consensus of a need for change. Brand (2016) notices a mingling of analytic and normative (normative-strategic) dimensions in the transition-transformation debate and proposes a clearer distinction by using *transformation* as a critical-analytical concept. Transition ideas and concepts broadly express “the ambition to shift from analysing and understanding problems towards identifying pathways and solutions for desirable environmental and societal change” (Hölscher et al. 2018,

p. 1). Heidkamp and Morrissey formulate one of the central questions in terms of coastal transitions as: “how can a transition towards a sustainable and resilient but also just and equitable coastal zone be facilitated” (2019, p. 8)? Thus, *transition* holds various ideals, normative principles and assumptions.

The paper utilizes *transformation* to analytically capture the dimensions of normativity in transition endeavours, and to critically understand *emergent* patterns of changes and (unintended) outcomes. The main intention is to differentiate between a normative, problem-centred and *foretelling* transition perspective and a more retroactive, poststructuralist point of view. Emergent ethical, naturalcultural and governmental narratives and imaginaries may be transformative in a way that they break with some of the normative principles and assumptions connected to dominant (initial) transition discourses.

Publications on MSP and BE can be, and often are, understood using a distinction of normative (while normativity-denying) process-oriented and problem-oriented approaches versus *critical* scholarship which challenges and makes apparent issues of normativity (see Fairbanks et al. 2019; Garland et al. 2019 for extensive literature reviews; Flannery et al. 2020). Most often, critical approaches put normative discussions in the centre: They question the *normality* (norms) of MSP/BE arrangements while leading an ethically informed debate on issues of power relations and *what is just* (Boucquey et al. 2016; Flannery et al. 2016; Ntona & Schröder 2020). A clear distinction is hard to make, and it seems that authors are increasingly “embracing the normative” (Olson & Sayer 2009) when accounting for power dynamics in sustainability transitions (Morrissey & Heidkamp 2019), discussing concepts like environmental sustainability and equality in ocean governance (Bennett 2018; Bennett et al. 2019), or by calling for a rethinking of the BE along altered and diverse ethical co-ordinates (Lewis 2019). Nevertheless, these approaches are often relatively abstract, and the question remains in what ways ethics and normativities are discussed and enacted *on the ground*. How do people and institutions negotiate urban coastal life in normative registers? What role do ethics and normativity play in the remapping of the land/seascape? And in what ways does an ethicization lead to an urban coastal reorganization and transformation?

#### Urban ethics as a field of bargaining: coastal transitions and neoliberal ethicization

We live, according to Puig de la Bellacasa, in an “age of ethics [where] everything is ethical” (2015, pp. 130–132). Dürr et al. (2019) and Ege and Moser (2020) adopt the term *ethicization* to refer to the conjuncture of

ethics with the rise in ethicized and moralized discourses that has been identified and critically reflected on in the social science and humanities disciplines. Dürr et al. and Ege and Moser pursue and address such a shift in negotiations within cities and urban life. They notice that “questions about urban life have increasingly been raised explicitly as ethical questions” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 1). In the following, the authors describe a research agenda on *urban ethics* that brings negotiations of moral and social ideals, principles and norms in cities to the fore.<sup>3</sup> The aim is to make sense of the role of ethics in urban contexts by understanding when and how urban actors problematize—explicitly or not—*good life* and *living in the right way*.<sup>4</sup> Thus, urban ethics denotes a field of problematizations and interaction, while it also refers to what is problematized and claimed as (un)ethical in this field. Ethical problematizations, and thus urban ethics, are also part and a dimension of environmental bargaining in cities and under urban conditions (Hayter & Patchell 2015; Ege & Moser 2020), as well as of negotiations in marine contexts and over ocean space (Boucquey 2017). Urban ethics functions, in this paper, as a lens to focus on and understand such urban ethical problematizations and claims-makings.

Dürr et al. (2019) observe that “multi-layered ethical questions and rhetoric [which] come to the surface in urban conflicts are difficult to address with conventional frameworks of analysis” (p. 4). Urban ethics as a research approach, then, does not start with or aim to devise a definition of ethics. It takes in and reviews multiple and interdisciplinary theories and conceptualizations of ethics, bringing them into conversation with each other and with empirical research. The relationship between politics and ethics is a question that recurs in this context. Urban ethics approaches this relationship from various analytical perspectives or *perspectivisations*, in particular from a Foucauldian focus on (neoliberal) forms of governing and subjectivation (Rose

<sup>3</sup> Both texts emerged from the work of an interdisciplinary research group on urban ethics funded by the German Research Foundation (2015–2022, see DFG Research Unit Urban Ethics 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Drawing on Foucault (1985) and Collier and Lakoff (2005), Dürr et al. (2019) and Ege and Moser (2020) further conceptualise urban ethics as answers expressed, “practically and theoretically [...] to [the] rather general question: How should one live in the city” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 2)? *Urban ethics* can be understood fourfold, as (1) ethics in the city, (2) when the urban (for example, housing, traffic, pollution, or wider questions of a good and just city) appears as an object of ethical negotiation and reflection, (3) as ethical negotiations that take place under urban conditions, or (4) when ethical postulations are linked to views of what it means to be emphatically urban, so ethics of the urban, of urbanism, urbanity or *Urbanität* (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 3).



2000), and David Graeber's concept of social creativity (Graeber 2005).<sup>5</sup>

The broad theoretical conversation around the research agenda of urban ethics underlies the research process, and this paper. The specificities of the research context in ANZ, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are summoned into dialogue by place, require the further development of the urban ethics conversation (Timmermans & Tavory 2012; Larsen & Johnson 2017). The (attempted) understanding of urban ethical articulations and problematizations in and around the Gulf requires an understanding of ethics from a point of *ontological diversity*. The very conceptualization of ethics, and what is acknowledged as an urban ethical claim or articulation, is political. This does not mean to define ethics in a certain or different way, but to open up the understanding of urban ethics as a field of coexistence where not only moral and social ideals, principles and norms are negotiated, but the very understanding of *ethical* living in the city in its ontological pluralism (Larsen & Johnson 2017). Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) uses in *Matters of care* the concept of *ethicalities* (ethical ontologies) to capture the plurality of ethical framings/systems, emphasizing the coexistence of multiple non-normative/anormative *ethicalities* with(in) Western-anthropocentric, hegemonic *Ethics*.<sup>6</sup>

Approaching urban ethics from a perspective of ontological pluralism implicates a broadening of the understanding of the relationship of ethics and politics, too. My understanding is that *politics*—or questions of politics—represent an important dimension that links different ethicalities to each other. European colonization has incorporated ANZ in the capitalist world economy, concepts and practices of capitalist production, whereby individual freedom and private property rights have been established and normalized. Nature has been constructed as external to the individual and *culture* (Pawson & Brooking 2002; Christensen 2013; McAloon 2013). An (environmental) *Ethics*, often framed as *modern*, have become hegemonic. It invokes an individual subject, a human/nature dualism (as well as other

categorizations and demarcations) and, what is relevant to this paper, specific ideas and practices of governance (Braun & Wainwright 2001; Latta 2014; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Choi 2022).

It is within this context of a hegemonic *Ethics* that most mainstream ethical projects,<sup>7</sup> patterns and workings of an *ethicization* need to be understood. Theories and interpretation frameworks, such as the perspectivalisations of an urban ethics approach, help to make sense of empirical materials that draw on or invoke urban *Ethics* in the context of Auckland's neoliberal governing environment (Lewis & Murphy 2015). The paper focuses on the following aspects: (1) ethical projects and how they overlap with neoliberal urban governance, foregrounding consensus-oriented techniques, ethico-moral principles and networked arrangements of *governance-beyond-the-state* (Swyngedouw 2005; Ege & Moser 2020a). Ethical projects, their embedded ethico-moral principles and techniques of governing are, in this context, discussed to exclude (antagonistic) voices, systemic critique and the discussion of alternatives. Ethico-moral principles define who (what) is able/allowed to speak (*stakeholder*) and what can be said or imagined (Haughton et al. 2013). The organization of governance (decision-making) in soft planning spaces and horizontal networks of public, private and third sector actors further eliminates opposition and critique, especially as civil society "takes the role of participant and co-initiator of ethical projects" (Ege & Moser 2020, p. 10). (2) Urban *Ethics*' role is further understood as supporting neoliberalizing dynamics as political questions "become individualized, contained in the domain of personal 'choice' or lifestyle, seemingly depoliticized as custom or culture" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 133). Responsibility here is transferred to free and economically rational human subjects and their self-conduct (Rose et al. 2006)—asking individuals for an ethical self-formation—for instance, when "marine conservation [...] focuses attention on addressing individual behaviour [...] while ignoring large-scale structural issues" (Flannery & McAteer 2020, p. 271).

Both aspects link back to the question of the ontological politics of urban ethics, making apparent the "colonizing

<sup>5</sup> Rose (2000) theorized *ethopower*, and the dynamics of neoliberal forms of governing and subjectivation in his writings on Third way politics in Western Europe. Urban ethics takes into account Rose's considerations in its perspectivalisation of *techniques of governing*. Urban ethics discourses can, from this perspective, be understood as being intertwined with, and part of, a neoliberal governmentality in which governance is understood in positive means (and not as an exercise of repressive rule). Working through the framework of ethical discourses and in spaces created for ethical reflection, urban dwellers are, then, guided and encouraged to conduct themselves as self-reliant and responsible subjects. Social creativity helps in turn to frame and understand new forms of self-management and subjectivation "from below" (DFG research group on Urban Ethics 2015; Dürr et al. 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Puig de la Bellacasa uses a capital E to denote the hegemonic position of Western, anthropocentric *Ethics*.

<sup>7</sup> Ege and Moser conceptualise campaigns and projects in cities, which aim for or promise "better or more just cities and a better urban life" (2020, p. 8), as ethical projects. Ethical projects are future-oriented, hold a "certain amount of pre-planning, self-awareness and intentional communication [and assemble] policy, technology, buildings, aesthetics and institutions, and [...] an ethico-moral sense of 'something better'" (ibid., pp. 7–8). They often involve academic research, "be it affirmatively or critically" (ibid., p. 9). Accordingly, coastal transition initiatives that assemble principles of "ecological ('green') sustainability, social and cultural inclusivity and openness, participation, collaboration, conviviality, consensus- and community-building, [and/or] transparency" (ibid., p. 7) can be framed ethical projects.

use of Ethics”, as Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) termed it. As ethical projects and urban Ethics take a neoliberalizing and depoliticizing role, they reinforce colonizing framings, principles and practices. (Re-)Centring alternative/non-normative ethicalities, thus, plays an important role in decolonizing and transforming land/sea environments, and are, here, in the focus of *reading for difference*.

### (Re-)Centring progressive alternatives in a field of urban ethics

Māori are the descendants of Ranginui, the sky father, and Papatūānuku, the earth mother. Kin-based relationships connect the ancestors of forests, wild/cultivated food plants, the ocean and waterways, wind and people, and all other life forms (human and more-than-human entities) (Makey 2021, p. 7). Human beings “inherited the mana (ancestral power) to harvest the offspring [of their ancestors] but the aim is to keep these exchanges in balance, so that the life force remains strong and healthy (mauri ora)” (Salmond et al. 2019, p. 46). Māori ethicalities see relationships as mutually embedded and reciprocal, and involve both rights and responsibilities to care for other life forms. “Rights to take particular species were passed down genealogical lines and through relationships of alliance and friendship” (ibid.), and have been maintained by reciprocal care, use and occupation.

Ethics of care and alternative modes of responsibility that see humans and more-than-humans enmeshed in complex, life-sustaining relationships are also at the centre of feminist approaches that seek alternatives “to the subjects and spaces of liberal-democratic political theory” (Popke 2006, p. 506) and a better social order (Gilligan 1982; Fisher & Tronto 1990; Tronto 1999; Held 2006). Fischer (2020a, b) observed ethics of care as a specific articulation of urban ethics in the practice of urban environmental caring relationships in Auckland, ANZ. The author shows how care ethics and practices are entangled with neoliberal institutional set-ups in Auckland and cannot easily be separated from their neoliberal context. Trnka and Trundle (2017) open up a way of understanding these entanglements with their conceptualization of *competing responsibilities*. The framing points out the need to appreciate the nuances of *multiple responsibilities* in researching urban ethical projects. While Trnka and Trundle acknowledge the existence of and research on neoliberal projects of *responsibilization*—the divestiture of obligations from the state onto individuals—they stress the value of looking “beyond [this state] to examine modes of responsibility that extend, challenge, or coexist with neoliberalism’s emphasis on a particular kind of individual” (2017, p. 3) subjectivity. To read for ethical co-ordinates of care, interdependence or reciprocity can be understood as a performative act and normative stance, as well as fundamental

to the deconstruction of a capitalism that is often depicted as monolithic, rational and morally indifferent (Gibson-Graham 2008; Dürr et al. 2019; Lewis 2019).

### Research method and analytical focus

SCTTTP’s formal bargaining process lasted from September 2013 to December 2016, and the plan was published in April 2017. National government reviewed the non-statutory plan and developed the government action plan *Revitalising the Gulf*, published in June 2021. This analysis draws on 21 qualitative interviews conducted between 2018 and 2020.<sup>8</sup> Thus, data collection took place after the official process ended, while discussions around its implementation were ongoing.

The material encompasses 29 h of interviews, with the average interview lasting 1.44 h (median value: 1.19 h). The paper and research are backed by extensive desk research, document and media analysis, which went into the acquisition of interview partners as well as into the subsequent chapter of this paper. Interview partners were selected based on their knowledge of and responsibilities in SCTTTP—as diverse as possible and a large coverage of the different planning spaces—as well as by their specialized knowledge about general activities and relations in and around the Gulf (see Table 1). The in-depth interviews followed a guideline with four sections, each of which included a narrative and open-ended first question, followed by more specific follow-up questions. The sections included questions on: (1) the Hauraki Gulf, personal interrelationships with the area and its more-than-human elements, (2) a person’s activities or institutional background and their understanding of their position and work, (3) SCTTTP, one’s perception of and role in the process and (4) general urban living with, in and around the Gulf, *ethical* behaviour and one’s envisioned *Gulf future*. Interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed (exactly verbatim).

Following Timmermans and Tavory (2012), the process of data analysis and theory building can be understood as abductive analysis.<sup>9</sup> The process of data analysis was inspired by “grounded theory’s [...] methodological guidelines of iterative rounds of coding and memo writing” (ibid, p. 169). The coding process started with assigning detailed

<sup>8</sup> The research was conducted in the context of the interdisciplinary DFG research group on Urban Ethics, and was aligned, among other things, with its research schedule.

<sup>9</sup> Timmermans and Tavory argue in their paper *Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis* for “abduction, rather than induction [as a] guiding principle of empirically based theory construction” (2012, p. 167). Coming from



**Table 1** An overview of the interviews included in the paper. It differentiates between interviews and interviewees as some interviews involved more than one interview partner. The interviewees' numbers are used in the paper for citation purposes (Int1, etc.). The table also involves columns with information on interviewees' background, as well as the research period when the interview was conducted

Interview	Interviewee (Int.)	Expert knowledge on/expert background*	Research phase**
1	1	SCTTTP, Social Sciences	1
2	2	SCTTTP, Planning Consultant	1
3	3	SCTTTP, Stakeholder Working Group	1
4	4	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	1
5	5	SCTTTP, Auckland Council	1
6	6	Independent Planning Consultant	1
7	7	SCTTTP, Environmental Conservation	1
8	8	SCTTTP, Social Sciences	1
8	9	SCTTTP, Social Sciences	1
9	10	SCTTTP, Waikato Regional Council	2
10	11	SCTTTP, Marine Biology and GIS	2
11	12	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	2
12	13	SCTTTP, Auckland Council	2
13	14	SCTTTP, Department of Conservation	2
14	15	SCTTTP, Hauraki Gulf Forum	2
15	16	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	2
16	17	SCTTTP, Planning Consultant	2
17	18	SCTTTP, Auckland Council	2
18	19	SCTTTP, Recreational Fisheries	2
19	20	SCTTTP, Hauraki Gulf Forum	2
20	21	SCTTTP, Department of Conservation	3
20	22	SCTTTP, Ministry for Primary Industries	3
21	23	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	3

\*Some respondents were active participants or formally involved in SCTTTP, while others provided insights into SCTTTP through their profession or work for relevant agencies

\*\*Research phases: Oct-Dec 2018 (1), Feb-Apr 2019 (2), Jan-Apr 2020 (3)

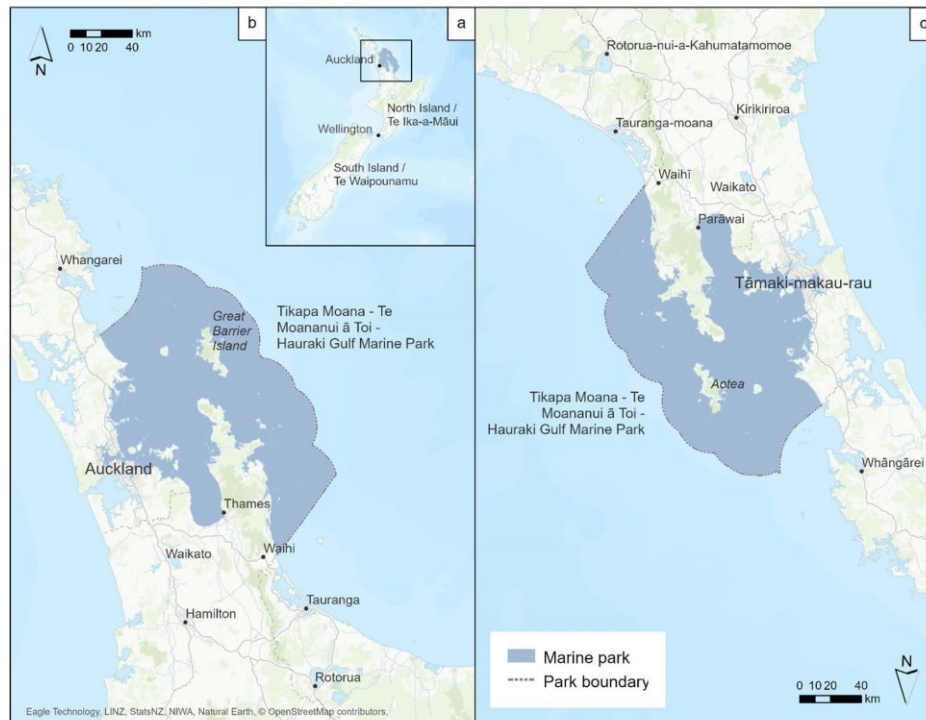
Footnote 9 (continued)

critique of grounded theory's principle to have new theory emerge from empirical data without theoretical preconceptions, they suggest *abductive analysis* is a "creative inferential process aimed at producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence" (ibid.). In this process, they attribute an important role to an actor's social and intellectual position (in-depth knowledge of multiple theorizations, theoretical sensitivity) to be able to identify unanticipated and surprising observations, and to recognise when findings do not fit in existing theoretical frameworks. Timmermans and Tavory still acknowledge grounded theory's methodological guidelines (memo writing, coding) to "facilitate theory construction through processes of revisiting, defamiliarizing, and alternative casing" (ibid., p. 169).

memos to text passages followed by open coding (Mey 2011). Memos also helped in the later process to link codes to each other, and to revisit and test concepts and thoughts in relation to findings. They, thus, facilitated my conversation with text passages (codings) and codes against the background of my theoretical knowledge and continuing theoretical readings. The software programme MAXQDA was used for the qualitative data analysis process. Besides using the memo and open coding functions of MAXQDA (resulting in over 2000 codings and over 200 memos), the built-in creative coding tool helped to visualize and organize codes and their relations, and to conceptually abstract codes by grouping and renaming them. This step was repeated throughout the process, taking care not to jump to conclusions or make later alternative interpretations impossible through premature abstraction.

Timmerman and Tavory (2012) assign an important role to the theoretical sensitivity and embeddedness of the researcher in the process of analysis and theory building. My formal involvement in the urban ethics research group, my in-depth knowledge of their discussions and interdisciplinary work and their relatively open approach to analysing, understanding and conceptualising ethics helped to guide my analysis. To untangle the multiple, tangled truths, narratives and imaginaries emerging from SCTTTP, the analysis started from problematizations of SCTTTP: what is narrated as the "problem in need of intervention" (Flannery & McAteer 2020, p. 271) to which SCTTTP (MSP), and more specific project elements, were highlighted and constructed as answers? A special focus was given to ethics as forms of problematization, so explicit and implicit articulations of (un) ethical ways of living/conduct. Ethics could be either subject of a problematization or (part of) answers that were constructed. To analytically capture urban ethics, the research followed Dürr et al., according to whom "urban ethics [...] express, practically and theoretically, answers to [the] rather general question: How should one live in the city" (2019, p. 2)? This question guided the analysis looking for claims and articulations of this kind. From there, underlying rationalities, in the form of naturalcultural and ethical imaginaries and claims, were explored. Finally, interest was on the entanglements of these rationalities and problematizations, and in how they (help to) define "who and what should be governed and how and by whom it should be done" (Flannery & McAteer 2020, p. 271).

Theory building was processual and took place (to some extent) in the research group's collaborative space, where texts and theories were discussed. Empirical material and working papers were exchanged and discussed in workshop formats, also with external scholars who repeatedly attended workshops as guest reviewers. The specific



**Fig. 1** **a** The location of the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana in Aotearoa New Zealand and more specifically, on the North Island/Te Ika-a-Māui (according to a Western worldview). **b** The area and location of Tikapa Moana/Te Moananui ā Toi/the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park

in more detail (also according to a Western worldview). **c** The same detailed view of Tikapa Moana/Te Moananui ā Toi/the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park according to a Māori perspective (own images after DOC 2022; HGF et al. 2016).

conceptualization of urban ethics in this paper resulted not least from the fractions and tensions that I experienced when discussing empirical materials and findings which did not fit with a dominant Western philosophy and key concepts of ethics, subjectivity, agency or equality/justice (see also Timmermans & Tavory 2012). An alternative theoretical framework had to be found to understand the multi-layered use and problematizations of urban ethics in Auckland. I still do not claim that this framework is the only or necessarily *right* one. I acknowledge that theorization, like knowledge, “is inextricable from context and the people who [...] create it” (Artelle et al. 2021, p. 289; Okun 2021). Thus, I would like this paper to be understood as a contribution or argument in a theoretical debate that should be agonistic and ongoing.

## Emergence of SCTTP in a discursive, urban ethical field

### The shifting and contested governmental land/seascape of the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana

The city of Auckland is surrounded by three natural harbours. The Waitematā Harbour adjoins and encompasses Auckland’s CBD, waterfront and main port, and connects the Tāmaki isthmus by way of the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana with the Pacific Ocean (see Fig. 1a-c). The Tāmaki isthmus was first settled by Māori in the fourteenth century. European colonization and its desire for land has radically and violently disrupted, devalued and obscured the distinct geographies, ways of knowing, relational and



humanly-decentred systems and ethicalities in the Tamaki area (Smith 2012; Tadaki et al. 2022). Following the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi—"the key document upon which the authority to govern [ANZ] rests" (Tadaki et al. 2022, p. 40)—by Māori kin group leaders and the British Crown in 1840, William Hobson purchased the land on the Tamaki isthmus to build Auckland. Today ANZ's most populous city boasts a population of 1.6 million (Stone 2013, p. 33; Fischer 2020b).

Several iwi and hapū (tribes, subtribes) have later sought compensation for, and reclaimed the unfair alienation of their Tamaki lands and waters. Many claims still remain unsettled. They increasingly involve challenges against settler-colonial framings of relations among land, water(ways) and people, and possessive individualism (Pawson & Brooking 2002; Salmond et al. 2019; Rowe 2021). Approaches to claims settlement and of redresses vary in ANZ. Settlements under the Treaty include statutory acknowledgments and property vesting, co-management arrangements or the granting of legal personality to more-than-human entities. Since the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act passed in 2011, iwi and hapū can make claims to customary use and ownership of the foreshore and seabed. This question of customary title has proved to be "a contentious issue between Māori and the NZ government and Māori and non-Māori" (Sullivan 2017, p. 39). As Sullivan (2017) shows, arguments of public property and access were played out politically against redress and customary rights in the beginning of the 2000s, making apparent existing discriminatory structures, differing cultural values, understandings and political ideas of citizenship, nation and justice. Since 2011, settlement claims for at least 19 iwi and hapū of the Gulf region were made, and still were being negotiated when this article was drafted. These settlements will significantly remap the land/seascape (HGF et al. 2016).

The management of the Gulf today is regulated by diverse legislation with responsibility divided between institutions. At times, these differing "agendas [...] struggle to converge" (Forster 2016, p. 321). The Resource Management Act (RMA) 1991 provides a broad national framework, and delegates operational functions to regional/local authorities (HGF 2009). The national discourse was coined in "a time when neoliberalism was gaining prominence as a political project [and when] regulation of the environment was expected to reflect neoliberal imperatives" (Forster 2016, p. 323).

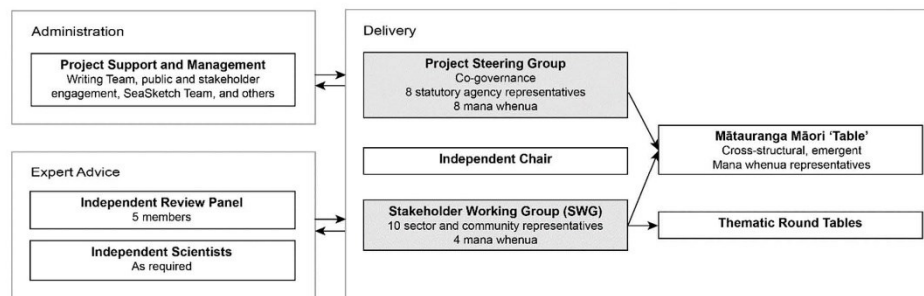
Forster sees this reflected in a resource governmentality that fosters efficiencies, government-at-a-distance and increased public participation. Public engagement has been "adopted as key mechanisms for creating environmental subjectivities" (ibid., p. 323). Other relevant national frameworks that regulate the management of the Gulf are the conservation agenda of the Department of Conservation (DOC),

most popularly put into practice by establishing marine protected areas (MPAs), and the Ministry for Primary Industries' (MPI) fisheries management. The national agenda simultaneously supports recognition of Māori authority and environmental interests, and sustainable development.

In 2000, the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act was passed into law. Its objective was the integration and hence improvement of the environmental management of the Gulf. The act is regarded more holistic than, for example, the RMA, also in terms of articulating the holistic relationships of Māori with the Gulf. It established the HGF, which consists of representatives of the Gulf's responsible and adjoining national and local authorities, and iwi and hapū (HGF 2009; Peart 2017; DOC 2022).

National government agendas and imperatives at times clash with Auckland's political goals, which as a *super city* located on the Gulf not only takes on a powerful political and administrative role but also affects the Gulf through infrastructure, developments or pollution levels. National government's "desire to position Auckland as a globally competitive city that acts as a dynamo for the [ANZ] economy" (Lewis & Murphy 2015, p. 100) contradicts local political projects, imaginaries and ethics (of e.g. sustainability or social inclusion). Lewis and Murphy (2015) view the guiding spatial imaginary and governmentality of *liveability* as the middle road between national and local interests. Auckland's spatial plan, which follows the narration of making Auckland the *world's most liveable city*, frames the Gulf area both as an asset and a competitive advantage, while it pronounces the need to ensure its integrated and sustainable management (Auckland Council 2012). Neoliberal imperatives and governmentality prevail in specific urban projects assembled around the Gulf. Waterfront development, negotiations of the port's future, attempts to protect Bryde's whales from ship collisions (Aschenbrenner & Winder 2023) as well as Auckland's broader water management (Acosta García et al. 2020) have evoked efficiency, collaboration, public-private-partnerships, participation and the formation of environmental subjectivities. Aspects of capitalist settler structures and neoliberal dynamics also manifest in today's demographic structure around the Gulf: Representatives of a *white* affluent middle class settle in many districts at the inner Gulf, waterfront and the Waitemata (Murphy 2008; Fischer 2020b; Stats NZ 2022; Aschenbrenner in press).

The field of ethical negotiation in Auckland can therefore be identified as *urban* (see Dürr et al. 2019). Not only do ethical negotiations take place *in* the city and *in* urban coastal environments (e.g. regarding its infrastructure, pollution levels, or the number of users and interests), but ethical negotiations take place *under Auckland's urban conditions* through its neoliberal urban governmentality and politics, specific demographic structures, and juxtaposition of institutions, projects, and interests. Māori ethical systems



**Fig. 2** The project structure of Sea Change Tai Time Tai Pari including the three spaces: administration, expert advice and delivery. A co-governed project steering group and stakeholder working group were responsible for the delivery of the plan. For this, thematic roundtables

were established from the stakeholder working group. At the same time, a Mātauranga Māori group formed, bringing together Māori members of the stakeholder working group and the project steering group (own image after Campbell-Reid 2013; Peart 2019)

are distinctively *urban* as “traditional relationships to the environment, whakapapa [genealogical relations] and the practice of kaitiakitanga [a reciprocal ethicality of guardianship]” (Walker et al. 2019, p. 2) have been challenged through urbanization, limited opportunities to connect with nature and the state of Auckland’s ecosystems. At the same time, an ethics of *urban* coastal living is negotiated, claiming new urban practices and ways of connecting to and caring for the urban coastal space.

### Emergence of Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari as an urban ethical project

SCTTTP emerged at a time when MSP was gaining momentum worldwide. The Auckland Plan 2012 held a directive to implement MSP in the city’s marine areas (Auckland Council 2012). The HGF published a series of reports reviewing the Gulf’s management and governance (HGF 2009, 2010a, b), as well as an environmental state report in 2011 with the intention to disrupt and lobby for change (HGF 2011b; Int15). The HGF’s report *Spatial planning for the Gulf* (HGF 2011a) assembled MSP as an approach to counteract utilization pressures, and to reach integrated, conservation and sustainability-focused resource management. Local iwi/hapū co-initiated SCTTTP as members of the HGF, while they, carrying out kaitiakitanga, have long had aspirations to reinstate the Gulf’s mauri (life force) and enact Maori values and principles (Int4).

The bargaining initiative was joined by statutory agencies—in particular Auckland Council, Waikato Regional Council, DOC and MPI. A joint narrative of integrating competing interests and aspirations was established (*many values, one story*), and assembled with principles of consensus, collaboration, participation, balancing the

different (recreational, cultural, economic and environmental) spheres, and treaty justice and co-governance into an ethical project (Campbell-Reid 2013). They mirrored a participatory project design which involved a co-governed *project steering group* and a *stakeholder working group* (SWG), in which individuals, iwi/hapū and interest holders were commissioned to develop the MSP (see Fig. 2). Interestingly, use of geospatial data and formal mapping, otherwise dominant MSP elements, was limited in the process. A web-based mapping software (SeaSketch) was developed for the process, but not used due to high complexity, key gaps in information, lack of resources and legal uncertainties (Peart 2019). Participants noticed the bargaining and shifts of *values* as a major element and outcome of the process, and as considerably more important than spatial zoning (Int7, Int23).

### Results

The subsequent chapter analyzes interviewees’ narrations of SCTTTP and disentangles the different discursive strands that each interweave specific problematizations, natural-cultural imaginaries and governmentalities. The interest is in how ethical imperatives are embedded in these strands. The research findings indicate not *one story* or overall narrative emerging from SCTTTP, but rather many imaginaries, discursive strands and *values*. Some are more linked to established planning views and assumptions, while others might hold greater transformative potential in terms of remapping hegemonic power, socionatural relations and natural-cultural imaginaries. The following points identify the different discursive strands by their contradictions with each other as well as the roles that interviewees attributed to ethics/ethicalities



as forms of problematization and modes of intervention. Different discursive strands were interwoven in interviews, and not necessarily distinct to one interview or particular characteristics of interviewees. The role an interviewee had in SCTTP was in many cases reflected in their narration.

### Conventional, formal planning discourse

A conventional and formal planning discourse was identified from the critical voices on SCTTP of mainly institutional representatives (local councils, DOC and MPI) (Int10, Int11, Int13). Institutional representatives framed MSP as an instrument to find consensual resolutions to user-user and user-environment conflicts, whereby conflicts were understood to result from a large number of users, diverse interests and strong conceptions of marine/coastal space as common space. Responsibility for the tense environmental situation in the Gulf was also seen in the national government's growth agenda for Auckland (Int13, Int20), and, more generally, urban and population growth (Int7, Int10, Int15, Int21).

From a conventional planning view, SCTTP was regarded rather critically. The main critique focused on a lack of legitimacy, and representational problems in the SWG. Interviewees criticized the lack of inclusiveness of the SWG, whose members were selected as self-responsible *individuals* over a large group of public and private sector representatives. They were regarded as neither democratically elected, nor having the required role of *spokespersons* for interest groups, thus lacking the mandate of civil society as well as private sectors. Members were said to have failed to report back to and connect with the private sector and the public (Int10, Int13, Int22). Interviewees also criticized limited and selective engagement with expert and scientific knowledge, and little application of mapping tools, resulting in few tangible process outcomes (Int10, Int11).

On the one hand, agencies regarded themselves solely as partners and facilitators in this governmental logic. The planning was meant to be conducted in the SWG, a networked, flexible and experimental space of *stakeholders* and treaty partners (Swyngedouw 2005; Haughton et al. 2013). I found neoliberal planning ideas and ethics of consensus, agreement, (cost-)efficiency, and the necessity of getting a social mandate for future (infrastructure) development and spending invoked by interview partners. On the other hand, interviewees stressed formal planning requirements, in particular electoral accountability. As a result, interviewees criticized SWG members for their *solo run*. I interpret this as internal contradiction in planning logics in a neoliberal urban context. Interviewees wished for an *empowerment* of SWG participants asking them to become active participants in the planning (Int4), while their acting outside of the intended participatory framework seemed to be regarded as problematic. Interviewees also referred to *empowerment* in

relation to the role of Auckland community groups (Int1, Int10, Int13, Int15, Int21). Also in this case, *empowerment* rather took the meaning of nudging "urban dwellers' involvement in [desired] courses of action" (Foucault 2008 cited in Acosta García et al. 2020, p. 5). Int10, for example, commended the work of community groups working to create pest-free islands, and expressed interest to have them "going from the land into the shore of those islands". This overall fits with observations of ethical projects being inter-related with neoliberal modes of urban governance, where collaborative engagements come to the fore and responsibilities are increasingly transferred to non-state actors resulting in a changed role of civil society, an obfuscation of conflicts of interest and difficulties to contest local government (Ege & Moser 2020; Fischer 2020a, b).

### Marine conservation discourse

Marine conservation interests, in particular an increase in the number of MPAs, were, according to Peart (2019), an important initial impetus for SCTTP. In this context, interviewees with links to marine conservation interests (Int7, Int14) stressed the need for spatial zoning. Int7 juxtaposed scientifically evidenced spatial zoning solutions, and "people [who] emotionally hated [...] the idea" of MPAs. I observed a binary opposition being constructed between objectivity/rationality/sciences and subjectivity/affects/emotions, while opposition to MPAs was delegitimized by locating it in the second realm (Int7, Int14).

Responsibility for change was ascribed to agencies/decision-makers ("you need regulation", Int7), while a logic of consent politics and *buy in* was expressed: "you need [...] public support for the politicians to regulate things that work" (Int7). Particularly Int7, who had a marine conservation background, framed civil society as a transition initiator, and collaborative participatory processes as spaces of disruption and "new elements" (see also Int20). Besides supporting a conventional framing of collaborative planning spaces and the role of civil society as working with and supporting local government, interviewees also ascribed collaborative planning spaces the role to get "people to act on the good stuff" (Int7). This supports theorizations of ethical projects being intertwined with techniques of governance that create spaces for ethical reflection, creating affects and encouraging certain *good* behaviour—in this case acting as rational subjects that understand and act on scientifically proven marine conservation measurements, primarily MPAs.

Furthermore, human-Gulf interactions, in particular diving and snorkelling, especially when carried out in MPAs, were narrated as immersive, attachment building, educational, and thus being crucial for the building of good, pro-environmental behaviour (Int7, Int20). The imaginary of a "deeper understanding of the Gulf" (Int7, Int15) was central,

and can be identified as a guiding ethico-moral principle assembling personal passion, emotional attachment, consternation, awareness and comprehension of degradation processes. This also shows how ethical pro-environmental behaviour and the rational understanding and support of conservation measures are deeply intertwined in a marine conservation discourse. Overall, the question of a formation of urban dwellers as conservation-oriented subjects can be understood as central to this discourse. This self-formation is partly ascribed to an individual self, while it seems relational in that it emerges in relational spaces and from human and human–environment relations.

### A new ethics for the Gulf

Several interviewees pointed out that much of the value of SCTTTP was in informal changes—shifts in peoples' understandings and behaviours, and in the narratives and principles that lead resource valuations and assumptions (Int1, Int17, Int20, Int21). SWG members, non-institutional process facilitators and support staff primarily held this view. Interviewees problematized political leadership, unethical user behaviour and generally a multiplicity of users, interests and (one-sided) viewpoints. While the multiplicity of users, interests and viewpoints was framed as problematic in terms of overuse, they were also regarded as threatening consensus and harmonic integration among people and groups—mostly unchallenged imperatives (Int6, Int7, Int8, Int10, Int18, Int22). Both, political leaders' ethics and peoples' ethical behaviour were problematized in terms of the state of the Gulf. Decision-makers and agencies were ascribed self-interested, sectoral behaviour ("Often their [HGF members'] own values conflict with those that are supposed to be the champion for the Gulf [...] they tend to cancel each other out", Int20). Private market actors (esp. farmers/fishing industry) and urban recreational users (esp. recreational fishers) were said to, often intentionally, perform irresponsible, ecologically degrading behaviour: "Boats [...] are [...] plundering the shoreline" (Int3)/farmers "choos[e] not to recognize that what they do has impacts at the coast and the sea" (Int8)/fishing industry's "untrue behaviour, [...] fraudulent [...] and thieving" (Int19).

Changes in peoples' behaviour, and a new ethical relationship to the Gulf, voiced as care, kaitiakitanga, guardianship, championship/acting as a *voice for the Gulf*, were proposed by interviewees as the main outcome of SCTTTP, and key measures of change (Int4, Int5, Int7, Int15, Int20). I see, thus, the problematization as well as construction of *new* urban ethics of the Gulf in the centre of this discursive strand. The emphasis on care, interrelationships and a collective responsibility as champions or guardians of the Gulf point, from a perspective of ontological diversity, to a divergence from an understanding or use of Ethics (or an ethicization), working

as a further individualization and shift of problems into the domain of personal lifestyle or choice (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Still, the emphasis by interviewees on techniques of governance that create spaces for a reflective process of ethical understanding in which one becomes a caring voice of the Gulf, by some described as a moment of personal enlightenment (Int5, Int7, Int19, Int20), rather follow than challenge ideas and subjectivities of an Ethics hegemonic.

Interviewees highlighted multiple governmental techniques (report writing, a common project vision, exemplary stories of degradation and success, participatory planning, round tables, informal planning spaces) for building consensus around the common, ethical narrative of *caring for the Gulf's health*. Guardianship/kaitiakitanga, health of the Gulf/mauri, championship/acting as *voice of the Gulf*, *gift and gain* (compromise agreement) were further noticed to create common concepts and ground for good behaviour, thus *ethical* ground. Many can be read as *boundary concepts*—they largely adopt Maori concepts and principles, and link them to a Western equivalent (Int13, Int14, Int17, Int20). Change was expected to take the form of "ripples" (Int20): spreading from the SWG to individuals, groups, businesses and philanthropic funds, who then would take *responsible* actions and induce change (Int6, Int17).

There are similarities to conventional planning and conservation logics regarding ideas of environmental subjectivities, and an individual and collective responsabilization in this discursive strand. There are also contradictions—particularly with a conventional planning perspective, regarding their ideas of who is legitimate to participate, and what is the scope and form of participation. The imaginary of SCTTTP as a space for an ethical transition comes with claims that it should be individuals, who participate, decide and speak for the Gulf. Their legitimacy is justified by an active, inter-generational, affective Gulf relationship, by knowledge, environmental awareness, the willingness and ability to conduct collaborative behaviour (Int2, Int20). Instead of acting as *stake-holders*, participants (and officials) should "take off [their] mandated spokesperson hat" (Int12), and act as champions for the Gulf. The main scope of participation is seen in the creation of a mutual understanding, collective and individual ethical formation, for which trust and a certain isolation from *outside* influences is needed (Int4). This conflicts with a logic of stakeholder and public engagement and appears to be a main reason for officials criticizing the SWG's work (Int13).

### Emergent ethicality and claiming non-normative naturalcultural relations

Interviewees highlighted informal shifts in the context of both anormative or not-yet-normative (while Indigenous) naturalcultural imaginaries and ethicalities. Mostly Maori



interviewees called attention to persistent, postcolonial injustices (Int16: “The inequity that goes on between Māori and Non-Māori, that’s a huge one”). Injustices result from colonial land occupations, repression of *te ao Māori* and the enforcement of colonialist worldviews, property constructs and governmental systems and frameworks (Int4, Int12). Treaty rights (consultation, representation) were noticed to be regularly violated, particularly when Western management systems like MPAs are enforced. Burdens and costs for the fair enforcement of treaty rights have, to a great extent, been carried by the colonized (Int4, Int15, Int16, Int23). Interviewees problematized the Gulf’s *mauri* (life force and vitality) as being in need of restoration. This was observed to not be the *responsibility* and agency of autonomous individuals or groups, but responsibility and care arise from and exist in a complex, relational system of genealogy, reciprocity, *rohe* (tribal homelands) and the agency of the more-than-human:

“I describe it as an obligation or like a responsibility that’s handed down through generations of Kaitiaki [trustee, minder, guardian, caregiver] or Māori that live on their land, proper to an area and to certain resources. So it’s a responsibility of those people to care for their land the way it cares for them, so I guess it’s a reciprocal relationship between the land and the people [...] Well it’s not just a caring person, it’s the actual responsibility that they have. And so if you’re not doing your job, then you’re not really being a good person, yeah, you’re not taking on the responsibility as coming from that land” (Int16).

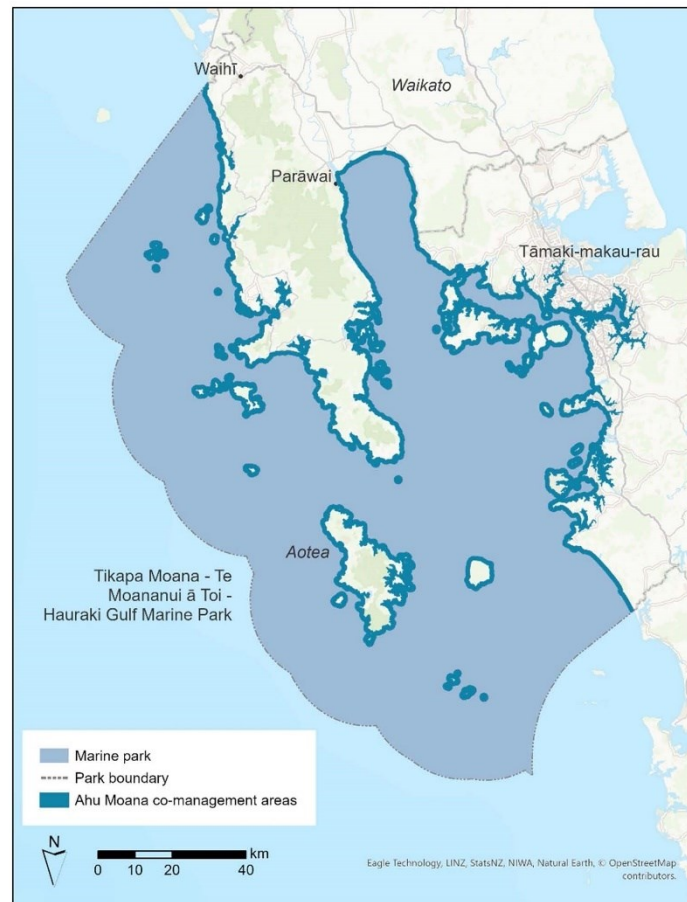
An ethicality, divergent from a hegemonic, anthropocentric and neoliberal understanding, is apparent. It was and is affected by the consequences of colonization which involve constructed boundaries that interrupt relationships, governance norms that rely on framings where “the environment exists to serve the human” (Int12), and a decrease of *mauri*.

SCTTTP is, in this context, understood as a *journey*—emergent, maturing, an “evolving, living process” (Int12, Int16, Int23). It is here that interviewees highlight informal/semi-formal shifts. Int12 expressed happiness that “one of [SCTTTP’s] aspirations was restoring the *mauri* [...] to the Hauraki Gulf”. Int23 stressed “the importance of us being able to see ourselves in the plan [and] the process”. A shift towards greater acknowledgment of *te ao Māori*, and “getting better” (Int23) at treaty partnership issues—thus equity—was appreciated. Int23 expressed the aim to “get to a place of harmony” (Int23), a balance, between worlds/worldviews. Interviewees still stressed the need to differentiate between Māori and non-Māori concepts, and the different responsibilities and rights (under the treaty) coming with them. The concept/term of *kaitiaki* was particularly identified as important in terms of Māori environmental autonomy, self-determination and consultation rights, and thus is, and needs to be, differentiated from non-Māori perceptions of environmental guardianship (Int16, Int23, see also Forster 2016).

Narratives of how rights were claimed in SCTTTP indicate the oppositional role of Māori in a colonial governing system (Forster 2016). Māori interviewees recounted how they built up relationships and connections beyond formal process structures, and thus managed to put an initially unfair process on hold, which significantly improved SCTTTP’s outcomes (Int4, Int16). The idea of *Ahu Moana*—near-shore, nurture areas co-managed by local *iwi/hapū* and communities—arose from these spaces and was inscribed into the final plan (see Fig. 3). *Ahu Moana* can be interpreted as creating (experimental) spaces for Māori ethicality and practices. They remap the Gulf’s coast according to place-based, reciprocal and genealogical care relationships, principles of self-determination and treaty partnership. Such spaces are meant to “empower coastal marae [meeting houses] to be self-determining in terms of what actually goes on [...] in their harbour” (Int23) and offer an alternative to MPAs, non-Māori concepts which are considered exclusive to Māori needs and practices: “it was an idea that’s born out of Māori philosophy and practice, and yet brings in the idea of marine protected areas or semi protected” (Int12).

Restorative justice and decolonising settler-colonial hegemony, property constructs and governance stand out as key imperatives, and significant aspects in environmental bargaining (Affolderbach et al. 2012). While, in the strands already discussed, problematizations and claims are made *inside* a hegemonic settler-colonial worldview, this strand problematizes and challenges that worldview’s very hegemony, instead favouring ontological pluralism and autonomy (Parsons et al. 2021). Living well (of humans and more-than-humans) is problematized not (primarily) as an issue or responsibility of individual subjects (or groups) but fundamentally linked to decolonization, self-determination and a *healthy* ethical system (ethicality). Ethical claims-making and problematizations that focus on individual responsibility and ethical subject formation can be contradictory to these claims, if not allowing for ontological pluralism. Contradictions occur in the case of remapping the marine area according to conservation logics, with MPAs spatially excluding alternative ethicalities. Adopting Māori *ethical* concepts, while framing them within Western logics and/or governmental systems, indicates cultural appropriation. In its design, SCTTTP endorsed a bicultural approach, having for instance separate meeting spaces according to Western customs and *Tikanga Māori*. In the process, interviewees saw this being watered down, where conflicts with a conventional, neoliberal planning logic and principles such as efficiency became apparent (Int23; Forster 2016). *Ahu Moana* remaps the Gulf according to an alternative ethicality, also for non-Māori communities. What this means in terms of urban power relations and social justice needs further exploration, and is yet to be seen in practice (see also Aschenbrenner 2023). Finally, dismantling colonial power structures involves redress, territorial sovereignty and autonomy. One needs to

**Fig. 3** A map of Tikapa Moana/ Te Moananui ā Toi/the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park depicting the near-shore ahu moana (ocean nurture) areas planned to be co-managed by local iwi/hapū and communities (according to a Māori worldview; own image after DOC 2022; HGF et al. 2016)



be aware of the risk of shifting these discussions to an *Ethical* dimension. The SCTTTP plan acknowledges accordingly that it “must not dilute or otherwise affect Treaty settlements” (HGF et al. 2016, p. 34).

### Discussion and conclusion

The need for change and socionatural transformation is pervasive in times of urgent social problems and ecological crises, including in marine and coastal areas and not least in Auckland, ANZ. Many scholars identified the predominance of neoliberal capitalist beliefs and practices as

a/the central problem in terms of today’s unequal power distribution, and a hindrance to socionatural change (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016; Tafon 2018; Schulz et al. 2022). Post-political theorists discuss the absence of alternatives and agonistic positions as a major factor hindering change, and draw a relation to “de-politicized imaginaries of pluralist consensus” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 5), and a conjuncture of ethicized and moralized discourse. This paper was motivated by recent debates about MSP and BE, which are pushed worldwide as instruments leading to a marine and coastal transition, but discussed by critical researchers as, in practice, often facilitating a neoliberalization of the seas and post-political state/depoliticization of marine and



coastal planning and management. My objective was to bring together theorizations of ethics and MSP/BE debates to further explore questions of normativity, socionatural transformation and empowerment in marine and coastal spaces. For this, I utilized and thought through *urban ethics*.

The focus on urban ethics helped to understand SCTTTP, an MSP project initiated to bargain for socionatural change in the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana (Auckland), as an ethical project. SCTTTP was initiated as a formal environmental bargaining process, and it assembled various ethico-moral principles of project design, realization and outcomes. SCTTTP's designers acknowledged different worldviews, values and knowledges within the project's framework, which emphasized integration, collaboration and consensus agreement. This distinguishes the process from other post-political MSPs, where a diversity of actor perceptions was neglected and/or unconsciously aligned within a hegemonic agenda (Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019). It also indicates differences to forms of environmental bargaining, where environmental ethics, values and interests were claimed to be, in large part, in conflict with those of oppositional groups (Affolderbach 2011; Affolderbach et al. 2012). In SCTTTP, bargaining took place in an urban ethical field. A shared and accepted socionatural transition ethics prevailed over conflict and antagonism, and urban environmental ethics appeared to be a means to facilitate a coastal transition. From this perspective, SCTTTP can be read as a process of neoliberal ethicization, in which difference is acknowledged but conflict is replaced by participatory, *soft* planning spaces, where civil society takes the role of co-initiator, participant and even plan developers. Politics are moved into an ethical field, where a neoliberal governmentality characterized by environmental subject formation and responsabilization prevails.

However, the urban ethics agenda that the paper promotes makes aware how a "rationalist ethics discourse and the governmentality with which it is associated often obscure actual ethical antagonisms, complexity and subaltern critique" (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 2). The paper's objective was to disrupt this potentially colonizing framing. Thus, reading for difference in the form of non-normative/anormative ethicalities was an essential part of the paper's theoretical and research approach. Taking a retrospective point of view, I disentangled the different discursive strands that emerged from SCTTTP, and analysed them for their (ethical) problematizations, naturalcultural imaginaries and governmentalities. The results reveal ethical antagonisms and contestation. They show how fundamentally different discourses and worldviews underlie peoples' narratives of SCTTTP, and that not *one* narrative evolved. Ethics are, in the case of the first three strands (conventional, formal planning/marine conservation/ an ethics for the Gulf), problematized and emphasized as a

mode of intervention for change—framed in terms of individual *ethical* conduct and responsibility. In the lines of the third discursive strand, ethics and the constitution of a common ethics for the Gulf build the rationale for SCTTTP, a legitimacy for participation, and thus play a role in claiming alternative governance and decision-making structures, and in remapping power relations in the Gulf. This *ethicization* of the governance of the Gulf conflicts with conventional planning logics of electoral accountability, and third sector *stakeholder* engagement. Still, all three strands link to a Euro-Western ethicality and neoliberal form of government.

The fourth discursive strand disrupts the hegemonic ethics discourse. In this case, the paper speaks of a Māori ethicality or ethical system to make visible the ontological difference and politics of environmental ethical problematizations and claims-making. Making claims for *living in the right way* in terms of a Māori ethicality entails claims for and the necessity of decolonization, self-determination and holistic (human and more-than-human) well-being. (Re) claiming an alternative, Indigenous ethicality and natural-cultural relations shows the greatest potential to disrupt existing power relations and remap the Gulf with respect to alternative/non-normative *resource* valuations. Norms and hegemonic naturalcultural imaginaries—and their *mapped out manifestations*—are contested, while Ahu Moana makes visible alternative land/seascapes, management and governmental practices.

The final SCTTTP plan takes up the idea of reframing peoples' naturalcultural imaginaries of and relations with the Gulf as a transformative element. It creates a bicultural framing and assigns a Māori ethicality to *Gulf communities*. While this means asking people to live in a *better* way, the plan utilizes *ethics* not as code of conduct (such as in the case of an *ethics for the Gulf*) but assembles notions of land/seascapes as legal personalities, the need to adjust human/more-than-human relationships, and for reciprocal responsibilities (HGF et al. 2016, p. 35). This points to a remapping of the ethical co-ordinates in the Gulf area, and an intervention in the neoliberalization of the seas. At the same time, one should be aware of the actual post-planning discourse in Auckland as shown in the paper. Taking an urban ethics viewpoint makes clear the risks of translating this emergent ethics of the Gulf in ways of an ethicization (thus reinforcing neoliberal, depoliticizing dynamics) and/or culturally appropriating and watering down Māori ethicality (thus reinforcing colonizing dynamics).

The implementation of the non-statutory SCTTTP process was brought ahead with the publication of the government action plan *Revitalising the Gulf* in June 2021. While it put into action some of the *harder* (technical-managerial) actions recommended in SCTTTP, the contribution of *softer* (informal) changes and ethics to a socionatural transformation is still for the most part uncertain. Further

research, especially on the practical implications of *ethics*, is thus needed. A focus on ordinary ethics in the Gulf and Auckland, and on Ahu Moana—as mapped realities of an emergent Gulf ethicality, and formally acknowledged pilot projects for “effective kaitiakitanga and guardianship in the Gulf” (DOC et al. 2021)—would be potential, valuable starting points for such explorations.

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## Declarations

**Competing interests** The author declares no competing interests.

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## Re-imagining cities as ecosystems: environmental subject formation in Auckland and Mexico City

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### ABSTRACT

The constitution of environmental subjects by governments and civil society organizations around the world has taken place within a framework of neoliberal urbanization. This entails promoting an individual sense of responsibility over urban environments among city dwellers. The approach used is not so much governmentality as environmentalism, because of its focus on environmental matters. We claim that the tools used in this process are designed to generate among urban dwellers an imaginary of the cities they inhabit as ecosystems. Using qualitative methods, we examine cases in Auckland and Mexico City regarding water management.

### KEYWORDS

Governmentality;  
 environmentalism; neoliberal  
 urbanization; urban  
 governance; ecosystems

### Introduction

Governments and civil society organizations have over the last decades made increasing efforts to address urban environmental problems. More often than not, this is done through a series of measures in line with neoliberal urbanization. In many cases, this agenda stresses the importance of a 'healthy' environment not only for 'healthy' citizens, but for improving economic competitiveness and the quality of life to attract valuable talent or fight poverty (Brand 2007, 6). Thus, recent discourses in favour of sustainability have become incorporated in neoliberal urbanization strategies to find solutions to ecological challenges in order to improve economic outcomes and competitiveness (Tretter 2013). However, as this paper shows, the incorporation of environmental concerns in neoliberal urbanism has also spurred new forms of governmentality to discipline urban dwellers' everyday practices. We argue that such efforts signify a production of environmental subjects with a particular understanding of cities as ecosystems. This entails a process of subjectivation in which urban dwellers are disciplined into assuming their personal practices regarding environmental care as their individual obligations (Leffers and Ballamingie 2013). We claim that the tools used to produce environmental subjects generate a social imaginary of cities as ecosystems. In the cases we use to analyse these processes, Auckland and Mexico City, this is done by exhorting urban dwellers to change their behaviour and stop dumping waste on drains or start harvesting rainwater in their own home in order to help improve the city's water management.

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The cases analysed here have contrasting social and geographical situations. Auckland is part of the affluent global north (while being located in the southern hemisphere), while Mexico City is in the global south (while located in the northern hemisphere). The two cities are in countries that have been led over the last few decades by neoliberal governments, albeit through contrasting institutional systems. In both cases, the legacy of colonialism looms large, with strong movements for indigenous causes. Both cities have been used to fresh water abundance but now face scarcity, though to different extents. While Auckland is coastal and surrounded by salt water, Mexico City lies at an altitude of 2240 m in a high valley and on top of what used to be a system of interconnected lakes. Interactions between water flows, buildings, objects, and various life forms can be diverse with a variety of repercussions, which may be key to the wellbeing of the city and its inhabitants. Because Auckland nestles around many bays and volcanoes, its sewage, waste, and climate systems have direct repercussions on water quality and wave patterns. For Mexico City, the soft terrain of the lake beds intensifies tremors from earthquakes and produces sinking in various corners of the city. In both cases, therefore, careful management of water systems is required. Such management, however, not only relies on sewage and canal infrastructures, but also on how people interact with these infrastructures and with the built environment as a whole. In order to ensure that populations contribute to functional systems, local governments and civil society organizations have resorted to campaigns promoting a personal involvement in the use of water resources and infrastructures. This is achieved partly through public messages in streets and through electronic means, but also for example, in the promotion of individual household rainwater harvesting. These measures thus seek to stimulate reflections and motivate 'improved' and 'adequate' behaviour among city dwellers regarding water in the city.

This article stems from a collaborative research project undertaken in the context of a DFG-funded research group investigating urban ethics in 12 cities around the world (Dürr, et al. 2020/2020). Our two projects draw on longitudinal qualitative research, conducted during multiple periods of fieldwork from 2018 to 2020. Our research includes: interviews with government officials, activists, and other stakeholders; document analyses; participant observations; photographic registry; as well as sensorial explorations of each city. The fieldwork was conducted in part by individual project members, and in part through team-based research in each city. It was during ethnographic walks, or explorations of urban spaces (Kusenbach 2003), that we noticed the signs in Auckland and the project called *Ecoducto* in Mexico City (see below). In a comparative analysis, we identified the thread that binds both cases together and that provides the backbone of this article's argument. The campaigns to promote paying attention to water quality at the coast in Auckland and to rainwater harvesting in Mexico City, furthermore, emphasise individual responsibility and interest in contributing to the whole water ecosystem in the city.

The paper's arguments are presented in four parts. First, we situate our argument in the context of the literature evidencing subjectivation processes in the context of neoliberal environmental management. We add to this literature by pointing to the ways in which governments and civil society organizations seek to constitute environmental subjects. The second and third parts consist of our case studies: Auckland and Mexico City. We consider these as prime examples of cities where government officials



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and civil society activists have sought to change urban dwellers' practices by drawing attention to the repercussions of their actions on the city itself. In both cities, human-nature relations are enriched by combinations of indigenous, (post)colonial governance and expert perspectives. The last part is our conclusion on the efforts analyzed here, especially considering the attempts to make environmental subjects out of urban dwellers in a context of neoliberal urbanization.

### Re-imagining human-environment relations in neoliberalized cities

It has only been since the 1970s, as environmental concerns have gained ground in political agendas, that cities as ecologies in themselves have been seriously considered in order to improve urban planning (Niemelä 1999). The timing coincides with the rise of neoliberal policies for urban development in cities and city-regions around the world (Harvey 2005), bringing to the urban level 'the belief that open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development' (Brenner and Theodore 2003, 2). For cities, this has meant a heightened sense of competition between urban centres for transnational flows (Swyngedouw 1992; Brenner and Theodore 2003, 20), as well as the incorporation of such neoliberal principles as deregulation, reregulation, privatization, neoliberalization and enhanced fiscal austerity into their policy regimes. Some argue that 'cities have become strategic targets and proving grounds for an increasingly broad range of neoliberal policy experiments, institutional innovations and political projects' (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009, 65). In this context, new environmental concerns are being addressed within neoliberal agendas, for example, through emphases on insistence on public-private partnerships, and adherence to new market rules and performance criteria (Bakker 2010).

On one hand, 'green space' is – alongside 'walkability' – valued as part of a street-level vitality that may attract affluent individuals in a process of gentrification (Schlichtman, Patch, and Hill 2017, 177). On the other hand, the effects of industrial production, motorized mobility, construction, and other technology-based activities, have generated a series of risks that require interventions by governments and civil society organizations. To reduce atmospheric pollution, for example, local authorities may design and implement new policies and also require urban dwellers to alter their behaviour to contribute in the effort. As they use neoliberal instruments and rework urban planning to address both climate change concerns and the interests of investors, governments are bringing about a new urban *dispositif*, that is, 'a heterogeneous set of discourses, practices, architectural forms, regulations, laws, and knowledge connected together into an apparatus of government' (Braun 2014, 49). Each such *dispositif* may be framed around concerns for 'sustainable development', a concept the United Nations has advocated for in order to bring environmental thinking into urban planning. The declaration of Habitat III, the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III 2017), set out a vision for urban development with sustainability and resilience at its core (Meerow et al., 2016). For some critics, however, the efforts to achieve a consensus across widely differing interests, has neutralized them, meaning that the concept of sustainability 'has lost much of its transformative potential' (Rosol, Béal, and Mössner 2017, 1710). Instead, it tends to

be harnessed to specific interests, and especially specific forms of infrastructure investments.

In their governance, local authorities do not limit their incorporation of environmental concerns to an apparatus of government, but also actively seek to constitute environmental subjects. They do so by engaging shared imaginaries of the urban, or the manner in which urban dwellers experience the city through ‘affectively laden patterns/images/forms’ (Lennon 2015, 1). Life in cities is a constant negotiation with a high density of human interactions, which implies navigating built and biological environments (Sennett 2018). The stimulation of city inhabitants’ imaginations, therefore, addresses their creative capacities to experience the world and enrolls them as active citizens in making the urban (built) environments (Lennon 2015, 2). There is a change from previous perspectives that considered cities as different from ecosystems to current understandings of cities as ecosystems (Rademacher and Sivaramakrishnan 2013). The significance in promoting such a change of view or re-imagining of the city is directly related to how people experience the city.

This process is defined by a governmentality approach specifically addressed to environmental matters, that is, environmentality (Fletcher 2017). For urban dwellers, this means an addition of new layers of control and discipline they are expected to follow. These in turn entail a series of discursive, material, and regulatory nudges to promote urban dwellers’ involvement in courses of action (Foucault 2008). It is these prompts that interest us, as they represent the steps with which governments and civil society organizations carry out the formation of environmental subjects. Brand considers that ‘[t]he political significance of urban environmentalism has ... to be explored not within the confines of the “environment” itself but in its relation to the socio-spatial transformations of neoliberal urbanization’ (Brand 2007, 620).

In everyday situations, urban dwellers navigate the cities they inhabit disciplined via ‘institutions, discourses, and practices’ (Dawney 2013, 631). These ‘methods of punishment, supervision and restraint’ (Foucault 1991a, 29) shape their bodily responses to situations and objects. In both Auckland and Mexico City, local governments and civil society organizations have installed a series of infrastructures, including signposts, and practices regarding the management of water in the city, that promote individuals to modify their daily life. In doing so, they are effecting alterations in urban dwellers’ subjectivities regarding the urban in order to improve hydrosocial relations (Cousins 2017). Water is ‘simultaneously political and biopolitical ... essential to the health of the population as well as that of the individual’ (Bakker 2013, 282). By going beyond regulations and reaching into urban dwellers’ quotidian relations with water, local governments and civil society organizations in Auckland and Mexico City effectively seek to shape a specific type of environmentality related to water, what Rattu and Véron have called hydromentality (Rattu and Véron 2015).

While the cases we analyse below can be read as further evidence of the need to better understand the way in which urban built environments function as ecosystems in order to promote improvements for life forms in them (Alberti 2008; Ahern 2016), our interest is in the way such framings of human-environment relations in the city (Gandy 2006) operate as governmentality. We focus on the efforts to establish particular governmentalities (Elden 2007) in the context of constructing/understanding/framing cities as ecosystems, and not on an evaluation of the resulting practices.



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### **Auckland's blue backyard**

Auckland, located on the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ), once was fittingly dubbed the 'Water City of the South Pacific' (Toy 1977). The port city has over 3,700 km of coastline and a large part of its administrative area is oceanic. Built on a quite narrow isthmus, the urban centre of Auckland is closely embraced by – or intertwined with – three large harbours, the Kaipara Harbour in the North-West, the Manukau Harbour in the South-West, and the Waitematā Harbour and Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana/Te Moana-nui-a-Toi in the East. The 1.6 million inhabitants of Auckland have a long and rich relation to the sea (Winder 2006). While Auckland's city government stressed the value of the marine environments to Auckland's people and identity in its last strategic plan (Auckland Council 2018), awareness of ongoing pollution and degradation of the marine areas coupled with efforts to improve their environmental state are of long-standing. During the late 1980s and early 1990s calls were raised for the establishment of a marine park in the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana, which was passed into law with the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act in 2000. The park embraces public conservation land, island and coastal reserves, the foreshore, seabed and sea, and is mapped out as one large area (including parts of Auckland) with a seaward boundary and shaded catchment areas in the act of 2000. While the legislation does not put into place any explicit restrictions (Peart 2017), and a boundary between land and sea remains in place, it encourages a geographical imagination of a single management entity defined by its hydrological connectivities, in which people and communities are framed as 'constituent parts' (NZ government 2000, 6) of the environment and ecosystems. Curiously, this new imaginary splits the Auckland region, since that part of the city draining towards the Tasman Sea in the West is not part of the park. With the park, the Hauraki Gulf Forum was founded, an integrated body bringing together the different authorities in the area and tangata whenua (people of the land, local Māori communities). In regular reports, the Forum identifies and raises awareness for the state of the environment in the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana. Some of the main issues identified are land-based pollutions coming from 'stormwater, wastewater, litter, sediment and heavy metals all eventually end[ing] up in the harbours, and impact[ing] on their ecology' (Auckland Council 2018, 169). In large part, they derive from urban development, and (historic) land use and infrastructure decisions (such as combined wastewater and stormwater networks which overflow into the harbours), and are likely to worsen as Auckland's population is expected to reach 2.1 million by 2033 (Auckland Council 2018, Hauraki Gulf Forum 2011).

The problem of land-based pollution on water quality and marine ecosystems is not a new realization in ANZ, but was already recognized in ANZ's Resource Management Act, enacted in 1991. The Resource Management Act puts integrated natural resource management in the hands of regional councils, whose 'territorial jurisdiction [...] was purposely defined on the basis of groups of large water catchments (including ground-water aquifers) to facilitate [...] integrated management of water allocation, water quality and related land management' (Memon, Painter, and Weber 2010, 36). But as Memon, Painter, and Weber (2010) notice, integration of water planning has been rather poor so far. The establishment of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park and Forum were attempts to

better integrate (water) management, and can be said to ‘remap’ (Affolderbach, Clapp, and Hayter 2012) the area from the sea up to its catchments.

In 2013, the Hauraki Gulf Forum’s 2011 *State of Our Gulf* report led to the initiation of a semi-official marine spatial planning exercise, called *Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari*. The plan focused on terrestrial freshwater as well as marine ecosystems and their components, and aimed at countering the effects coming from city, land and people. In its imagination it takes up earlier Pākehā (New Zealander of European descendant) efforts to contain urban sprawl, establish a mosaic of marine reserves, preserve landscape features, and establish watershed-based planning units. While the term ‘ecosystem(s)’ used in the resulting plan refers to natural ecosystems, a further imaginary of the park as interrelated community of people, tangata whenua, natural ecosystems, their living and non-living components, as well as other polluting entities is drawn (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2016). Thus, the plan promotes a more integrated and holistic conception of human-environment relationships in the park and does so by employing an ecosystem-based management framework.

An integrated and holistic approach is also represented by taking up *Ki Uta Ki Tai* as one of the ‘four overarching concepts that underpin the plan’ along with other Māori concepts (Hauraki Gulf Forum et al. 2017, 5). Harmsworth and Awatere (2013) describe *Ki Uta Ki Tai* as a key Māori environmental concept. Translated in the plan as *Ridge to Reef or Mountains to Sea*, the concept implies a ‘whole-of-landscape approach [or] the Māori concept of integrated catchment management’ (Harmsworth and Awatere 2013). According to a whakapapa relationship (having a genealogical relationship of humans and ecosystems, and all flora and fauna, see Harmsworth and Awatere 2013), the plan also refers to the position of people as not just being part of but being related with the natural world, which obliges them to maintain ‘the lands and waters to which they whakapapa’ (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2019a, 30). Inherent to the concept of whakapapa, is kaitiakitanga – ‘the ethic and practice of protection and conservation of the natural environment and the resources within it on which people depend’ (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2019a, 30). Interestingly, in this sense the two lines of thinking, an ecosystem-based management view and whakapapa framing and imaginary, seem complimentary and bring together regional planning, watershed-based infrastructure planning, ecoregion concepts, and bioregionalism, with Māori indigenous concepts. The framing also connects in the plan with the emphasis on shared but individual responsibilities and an ethics of environmental care, especially as the plan emphasises kaitiakitanga and guardianship as another overarching principle. This goes hand in hand with techniques of government in the plan, such as the (visual) display of groups doing rubbish clean-ups or promoting rock fishing safety and promoted as both ‘kaitiaki and guardianship in action’ (Hauraki Gulf Forum 2019a, 57), and desired forms of human-environment interrelations.

We contend that in Auckland imagining the urban as ‘ecosystem’ appears in different forms. It connects to the communication and stimulation of a certain, improved behaviour – such as environmental care or risk awareness – among its urban dwellers, through reflection and a sense of individual responsibility and ownership. Such connections are already known from studies of environmental mobilisations in Auckland (Fischer 2020) but this is also emphasised in the Water Strategy’s aim of ‘empowering Aucklanders to take care of our waters, and ensuring we all take

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responsibility for our impact' (Auckland Council 2019a). As Penny Hulse, Chair of Auckland's Environment and Community Committee says:

"It's no good looking out at the glistening waters of the Waitematā. You need to ask, 'What's going on? What am I doing to that water? What's my position in this as an individual? What am I doing to keep that for future generations [...] Everyone needs to contribute to a collective response'" (Donnell 2019, 23).

As a second aspect of this neoliberal tendency in urban planning, the imaginary of the city as integrated and interconnected (eco)system (with humans as ecosystem components) links to creating consensus and achieving collaboration, and the legitimization of a new water strategy involving both large infrastructure investments and transformations of natural ecosystems, whether in the sea or catchments.

References to the interconnectedness of human activity and marine (and freshwater) ecosystems can today also be detected in the urban landscape of Auckland, often connected to land-based pollution. Drains are provided with the indication 'dump no waste – flows to sea' (see image 4), evoking even in areas further from the sea an ecosystem imaginary connected to a call for responsible conduct. By the sea, signs warn of 'potential health risks' when swimming, and with a reference to heightened risk after heavy rain events. Under Auckland Council's 'Safeswim' programme, the signs were supplemented by digital displays at many city beaches showing water quality forecasts, and automatically updating every 15 minutes in response to observed rainfall (see image 5) (Auckland Council 2019b). An App was launched, informing on marine water quality and, while making health risks from pollution a matter of personal responsibility, it brought the relation between marine water quality, rain events, urban infrastructure, overflows and run-offs further into public attention. In March 2019, a banner appeared on the app asking its user: 'Is clean water important to you? Give us your thoughts on Auckland's water future' (see image 6). Thus, Auckland Council promoted its public consultation process on 'Our Water Future', the development of a new water strategy for Auckland. The accompanying posters, simultaneously displayed around the city, showed different parts of an 'urban water cycle', from rainfall, to mountain rivers, household water use, outdoor pools, sewage treatment plants, beaches and the open sea (see image 7 & 8) (Donnell 2019).

In the described cases in Auckland, the imagination of an interconnected urban human-environmental system seems to be mainly mediated by experts and park planners. Collaborative planning, public displays in the forms of posters, signs and electronic indicators, as well as mobile applications work to generate an imaginary of Auckland as ecosystem in a process of environmentality. This was certainly the case in Auckland's Water Strategy, which featured council-controlled organisations, city planners and agencies putting up signs, information boards and posters in the urban landscape. While they do not use the wording of *the urban* as 'ecosystem', they create this imagination by framing the Gulf, waterways, people, and other living and non-living entities as an interconnected socio-natural system or from an indigenous perspective. It becomes a means to meet environmental problems particularly marine/water pollution with the help of urban dwellers, while putting principles of 'good' environmental management such as a holistic, ecosystem-based approach and integration of Māori world view into practice.



### The Mexico City basin

Large swaths of Mexico City are built on what used to be a lake (Vitz 2018). The metropolis often suffers from both floods and water scarcity (Romero Lankao 2010). The rapid growth of its population has led to an overuse of the aquifers that lie beneath it, which in turn causes a sinking of certain areas of the city (Mendez et al. 2013) and leaves it more vulnerable to earthquakes (Flores-Estrella, Yussim, and Lomnitz 2007). While government projects to address these issues have tended to focus on preventing floods due to excessive rainfall during the rainy season and managing water shortages during the warm months, organised civil society has pushed for more strategic thinking. Two key issues stand out: rainwater harvesting and urban river restoration. ‘We need to imagine a city we want for our future, even if it sounds undoable at the moment,’ a renowned mobility activist mentioned during a meeting of activists from around the world headed by a Dutch organization in Mexico City in October 2018. She said this as she presented her idea of restored rivers in the Mexican capital as part of a strategic exercise designed to (re)envision their city for 2050.

As the city grew exponentially in the twentieth century, many of its rivers were channelled through sewage pipelines, and the remaining water systems were drained. One such river was the Piedad, which in the 1940s became part of the sewage piping below a twelve lane avenue, called Viaducto Miguel Alemán, one of Mexico City’s urban freeways, which was opened in 1950. ‘Since then, the stream has been running in tubes inside a massive concrete median, collecting rainwater (80%) and sewage (20%) from the nearby areas’ (Sliwa 2014, 8). Rainwater harvesting and urban river restoration would, according to civil society groups, help reduce both floods and water shortages. In both cases, however, a key ingredient is changing mindsets among urban dwellers so that they incorporate the care of water in their daily practices. We argue that the efforts by civil society organisations – with the support from government authorities – promote the view of the city as ecosystem.

In 2009, a group of activists set up a first system of rainwater harvesting in the Cultura Maya barrio, a poor neighbourhood in the south of Mexico City. Their work was part of a local non-governmental organization, the International Institute for Renewable Resources (IRRI 2020) that sought to develop sustainable solutions to environmental challenges. Those involved developed a unique system, named Tlaloque, which separates the dirtiest water from the first rains so that it does not reach the tank. The activists founded a social enterprise, called Isla Urbana (urban island), to commercialise and promote the system (Isla\_Urbana 2020). Like other social enterprises dedicated to environmental issues (Vickers 2010), Isla Urbana works with a model that combines three fronts: a business, a charity, and a consultancy. With the first, it sells its system to wealthier clients – either businesses or households – who seek to reduce their reliance or expenditure on the public water supply. The second consists on designing and implementing projects to provide their systems to poor communities or neighbourhoods with the help of donations. The third serves as an advocacy front to provide advice and knowledge to local governments and to liaise with other NGOs or social enterprises. Since its foundation, Isla Urbana has installed numerous systems in remote areas in the country, especially in indigenous areas in the north and west, but also crucially in poor neighbourhoods in Mexico City. In every house with around 60

square meters of roof, the system can collect up to 40 thousand litres of rainwater, or enough water for a family for between five and eight months of the year. In 2019, the Mexico City government installed ten thousand rainwater harvesting systems from Isla Urbana in areas particularly affected by water shortages (Sedema 2019).

Rainwater harvesting is a good example of neoliberalized urbanisation, as it is up to private entrepreneurial efforts to address problems that would be best addressed by government policymaking. At first sight, by promoting individualised measures for a shared problem (water shortages), the widened imaginary of the city as ecosystem does not come to the fore, but they do feature complementary advocacy activities. For example, participating in discussions about environmental policies and water management in Mexico City, Isla Urbana seeks to make people link their own situations with that of the urban environment. In 2014, the Mexico City government announced tax breaks for those who installed rainwater harvesting systems, and that all new buildings in the city were now obliged to install rainwater harvesting systems (Sosa 2014). In 2018, the director of Isla Urbana took part in a public meeting with specialists and other NGOs to discuss the potential of green areas in the city to capture rainwater to replenish depleting groundwater (Juárez 2018). This fits in with what Gordon thought were Foucault's concerns about 'the development of government in Western societies to tend toward a form of political sovereignty which would be a government of all of each and whose concerns would be at once to "totalise" and to "individualise"' (Gordon 1991, 3). But we should not lose sight of the environmentality at work here. Not only were small-scale water harvesting projects realized in the city but also these initiatives combined with the urban river restoration project called Ecoducto to announce a broader view of the ecology of water in the city.

In 2012, a few activists started jumping over a pedestrian bridge that ran above the avenue, in order to reach a small patch of grass that lay in the middle. This patch is at street level, while the six central lanes of the avenue (three per direction) are a few metres below. Another six lanes (three per direction) are on the sides at street level. The activists held picnics on Sundays in order to demand the restoration of the river. The organizers, from the same milieu as Isla Urbana, advocated a vision that was put forth by a group of local architects, urbanists and landscape architects to recover the lakes and rivers in the city (González de León and Cruz 1998). The idea behind this move was to deal with recurrent socio-environmental challenges like floods, droughts, pollution, and the sinking of the city (Cherem et al. 2011). In 2017, a coalition of 30 organizations organized a massive picnic in which they set out four foci of concern as crucial for Mexico City: water, mobility, public space, and ethical consumerism. In that event, they called for a restoration of 45 rivers in the city. In the views of activists, if the city would regain these spaces, an overall improvement of the quality of life would follow, with cleaner air, more green spaces, less noise, and other benefits. Their vision was of Mexico City as an ecosystem in need of repair and care.

In response to that activism, the government of Mexico City decided in 2018 to implement what is considered a first step towards the restoration of the river. Along 1.6 km, the area that had been used for the picnics has been transformed into a linear park, known as Ecoducto (Ecoducto 2019). On its sides are 4,800 square metres of vegetation that are watered by the water from the pipeline that mixes sewage and rainwater. At one edge of the park is an area equipped with various filters including

natural filters made of plants and rocks, designed to ensure that the water that is used for irrigation arrives as clean as possible. Throughout the park, plantings of trees and scented plants (like lavender) reduce both the noise of the traffic (by 10 decibels) and the pollution. Walking through the park, one could forget that one is in the middle of a large 12 lane avenue. A few rest areas with benches and shade offer respite from the buzzing city around. Crucially, it is also an educational space with placards along the route that provides illustrations, graphs, and information about the various plants and life forms that inhabit the park. While some focus on technical aspects of natural filters or plant characteristics, others explain the importance of healthy ecosystems for wider areas. The last one is entitled 'We are water' and shows an illustration of the basin in the valley where Mexico City lies. It explains that the region's name in náhuatl (the language of the Aztecs or Mexicas), Anáhuac, means 'entre las aguas', or 'close to the water.' It also has a list of environmental benefits from urban lakes and rivers, which include: reduction of heat, carbon capture, oxygen production, improved water quality control, help for biodiversity, climate event regulation (floods and droughts), and absorption of air pollutants. In contrast to Auckland, such reference is the only trace of the indigenous character of the region. To date the city's high proportion of indigenous population with its strongly nature-centred belief systems has not translated into any sort of influence in policymaking or wider political imagination.

What pervades along the Ecoducto park is a modern narrative, expressly natural-scientific and evidence-based. With a series of numbers and graphs, numerous placards stress the situation regarding water usage in Mexico City. One of the central signs shows an aerial view of the Viaducto divided in three. The first includes cars and the picnic which was the start of this movement. The second shows a small stream with plants around and less space for cars on the sides, as well as a cycleway on the edge of the avenue. The third and last shows the whole area dedicated to the river and vegetation, with only the cycleway remaining as a space for mobility. The Ecoducto is therefore itself an exercise of imagination of what the city could be if only its river ecosystems were restored.

Both Isla Urbana and Ecoducto are examples of a style of entrepreneurial urbanism through which activists seek to bring about their view of environmental care. While Isla Urbana works with an individualised model that may respond to self-interest (by saving on water bills), the cumulative effect helps improve water management in the city. The Ecoducto park, on the other hand, offers a long-term perspective to understand the city as a broad and complex ecosystem. The activists' agenda is only partially evident from the signs, as it is more clearly stated in the various publications some of the participants have posted in various webpages and online forums (Ecoducto 2019). Their constant references to birds and other life forms, to the surrounding mountains and weather patterns, and to urban dwellers' health and wellbeing reveals the extent to which their agenda is shaped by a view of ecosystem interactions. In seeking to draw urban dwellers to experience anew an area that, for the last few decades, has been taken over by automotive traffic, activists seek to show the potential for ecosystem restoration. The first author walked along the 1.6 km of linear park and was surprised that he could inhale and not notice the pollution that is so evident when crossing a pedestrian bridge. The vegetation in the middle of an avenue made a big difference to how one can experience urban space. The desire to restore ecosystems is thus geared in this case to



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helping urban dwellers to sense how the city could be: by smelling, hearing, and seeing the difference.

### Conclusion

The cases we have presented offer contrasting campaigns through which city governments and civil society organizations seek to make environmental subjects out of their urban dwellers. They do this through the promotion of specific forms of governmentality regarding water management – or hydromentalities. In Auckland, water is ever present in the horizon and can thus easily be linked to city inhabitants' everyday practices. In Mexico City, on the other hand, water is either only present by its absence in the shortages that take place every dry season, or in its overabundance during the rainy season. In both cases, however, the campaigns we have selected promote that urban dwellers not only adopt appropriate (urban) environmental ethics including an ethics of care but that they engage differently with their city in order to improve its water management. By insisting on changes in private practices, governments and civil society organizations seek to create environmental subjects. A key element of achieving such aims is promoting an egocentric motivation because in certain situations, as Agrawal described, 'self-interest comes to be cognized and realized in terms of the environment' (Agrawal et al. 2005, 162).

The atomization of practices, however, is only part of the picture. Another of the tools city governments and civil society organizations use to promote the creation of environmental subjects, we argue, is to re-imagine the city as an ecosystem. As we have shown, in the case of Auckland, it is not simply a matter of prohibiting rubbish being thrown into the street, but an invitation to think that any waste dumped there would flow out to the sea. In the case of Mexico City, it is not merely a matter of ensuring one's own water supply, but of helping the city improve its water management for the benefit of all urban dwellers and all life in the city. In arguing that small actions have an effect on the whole, the patterns of ecological interactions are laid bare. In a similar vein to Benedict Anderson, who pointed to the role of 'imagined communities' in making the modern nation state (Anderson 2006), in our cases, we point to the 'imagined communities' being produced in the urban, but note that they are not simply political entities that require identity-based rituals and discourses related to nationalism, but rather involve narratives, discourses and rituals that entangle a broader set of entities and identities in complex interrelations between species, materialities, and objects.

Urban environmental governance reveals divides 'of the collective good – within and across generations, and at different scales' (Mawdsley 2009, 249). Governments are often guided by political timescales, which has direct effects in their planning and policymaking. For this reason, the participation of civil society organizations provides at least a claim to a long-term agenda that seeks to generate water commons (Bruns 2015). The purpose appears to be to promote an imaginary of the city as ecosystem with a deeper understanding of the relations among life forms, materials, and topographies in cities and beyond. Thus, governments and civil society organizations educate the population as living *with* nature, *as being part of it*, or, in other words, to consider the city as an ecosystem of which they are one of the constitutive elements.

Our focus has remained on the effort of governments and civil society organizations to promote a type of governmentality of water management. We did not set out to examine the actual practices among the population to evaluate if such efforts indeed succeeded. In our view, a focus on attempts to achieve a re-imagining of cities as ecosystems sheds light on a specific development in a context of neoliberal urbanism. Although it is a change in line with recent adjustments, it nevertheless signifies a break with centuries of distorted perceptions where the urban and nature were considered as separate entities. It is worth noting that a clear contrast now exists. The previous conception of ecosystems *in* cities sought to contain certain areas for vegetation or other life forms, like in parks or private gardens. The current perception of cities as ecosystems has helped understand the complex interconnections that exist among the various life forms, objects, and the built environment. It remains to be seen if the promotion of environmental subjects does indeed produce a new urban environmental imagination.

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**Translating Ahu Moana Into the Local Community: Marine Care and Near-Shore Coastal Co-Management on Waiheke Island, Aotearoa New Zealand**Marie Aschenbrenner 

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**ABSTRACT**

This article engages with near-shore coastal co-management in the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana, Aotearoa New Zealand. I analysed various qualitative sources to demonstrate how Ahu Moana (ocean care areas) as a specific form of localism was translated on the side of the local community on Waiheke Island, Auckland. A specific assemblage of marine care emerged alongside a re-conceptualisation of the *local community* and a remapping of the Gulf as a relational care network. The article suggests that the attempt to realise Ahu Moana shows decolonising tendencies and challenges existing power structures. However, new patterns of inclusion and exclusion also emerged.

**1 | Introduction**

Place is a complex matter. It has, in many popular and academic contexts, been defined by space and scale, and “understood as more localised enactments of social and material practice” (Tuck and McKenzie 2016, p. 30). In this sense, place—the *local scale*—has gained prominence in bringing about socio-ecological transition/transformation (Hölscher et al. 2018; Köhler et al. 2021). Consequently, different forms of localism have emerged as a global trend in spatial planning and governance (Wills 2016; Brownill 2017). However, the *container* as which place is often seen has been dissolved by theorisations of place as open and unbounded (Massey et al. 2009), and Indigenous, decolonising conceptualisations of place/land<sup>1</sup> (Tuck and McKenzie 2016; Larsen and Johnson 2017).

The article examines a case of localised, community-based management of near-shore coastal areas in Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ), where conventional and alternative understandings of place and localism are entangled. It explores how a relational

perspective on community, place, and localism has emerged linked to ideas and practices of marine guardianship. Ethics of kaitiakitanga/guardianship<sup>2</sup> were integral to the marine spatial planning process and plan, *Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari* (SCTTTP), which was developed 2013–2016 in the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana (the Gulf) region on ANZ's North Island/Te Ika-a-Māui. SCTTTP assembled kaitiakitanga/guardianship as a transformative element to change dominant *natural/cultural* imaginaries and relations (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), and thus the disastrous state of the Gulf's mauri/health (Aschenbrenner 2023a, 2023b). This article aims to further investigate the emergence of kaitiakitanga/guardianship and its social and political implications for the Gulf.

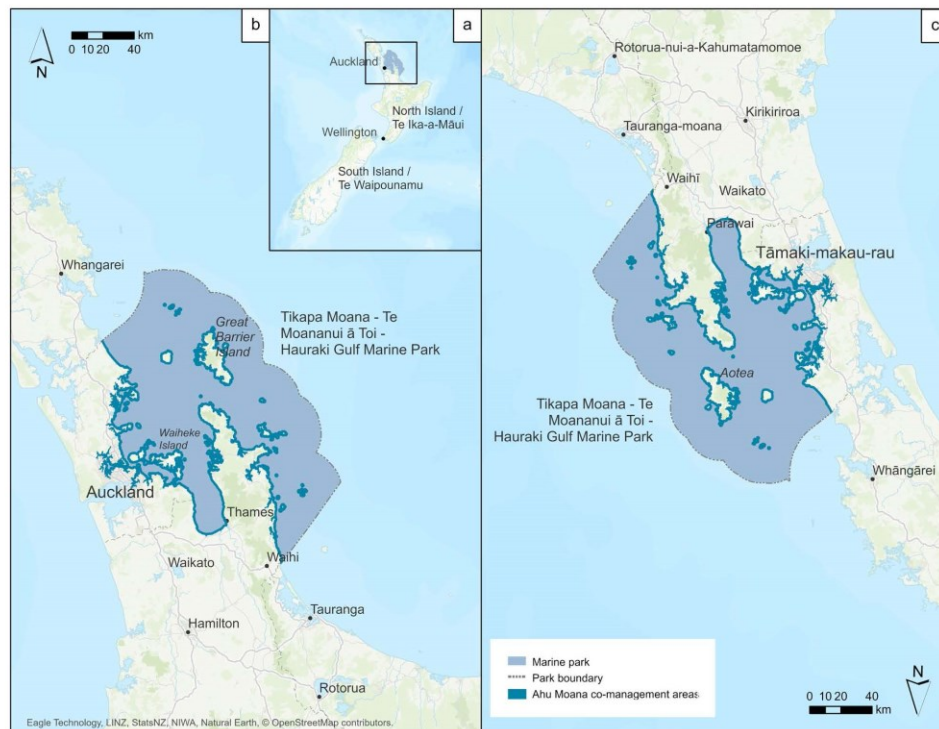
SCTTTP introduced localised near-shore co-management areas, called Ahu Moana (AM; Te Reo Māori; ahu = nurture, build up; moana = the ocean), to implement an ethic of kaitiakitanga/guardianship (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> AM challenges the *colonised geographies* of the Gulf by highlighting and restoring the critical connection between Māori self-determination, kaitiaki responsibilities,

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**FIGURE 1** | The marine spatial plan Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari identifies AM, near-shore coastal co-management areas within the Tikapa Moana Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, Aotearoa New Zealand. Waiheke Island is the second largest island in the Gulf. The map shows the Gulf according to a Western (b) and Māori worldview (c).

and the land (Hauraki Gulf Forum [HGF] et al. 2016; Yates 2021; Aschenbrenner 2023b). They represent a form of *Indigenous localism* with the potential to reclaim and strengthen Māori values, practices, and authority (Coulthard 2014; Kapoor 2024).<sup>4</sup> Through their co-management framework, which sees Mana Whenua—Māori with authority from the land—and local communities in close partnership to co-manage *their* marine areas, AM translates localism into community practice.

Different rationalities shape the roles of local communities and Mana Whenua in coastal management. For Mana Whenua, genealogical ties are fundamental, whereas SCTTTP implicitly bases local community management on the principle of residence (HGF et al. 2016). Māori cultural practices and values are also not easily transferred to local communities. SCTTTP delegates the implementation of Ahu Moana to “Mana Whenua and communities to find the best ways” (HGF et al. 2016, p. 52), creating space for the potential emergence of “well-being networks [and practices] that are grounded in [their] own places” (Yates 2021, p. 103).

The article examines how localism is conceptualised in the context of local communities. SCTTTP’s understanding of

*local communities* remains ambiguous, appearing to rely “on a [conventional] spatial imaginary that sees [them] as homogeneous, persuadable and consensual, [and] assembled [as] to achieve certain ends” (Brownill 2017, p. 34). This raises critical questions about actual empowerment, inclusion/exclusion, and neoliberal governance practices (Rose 1996; Bradley 2017). While these questions are highly relevant and speak to current concerns about marine management and governance (Tafon 2018; Flannery et al. 2020), they risk reinforcing a view of place as bounded and static, and of thinking in dichotomies (e.g., neoliberal/alternative, political/post-political) (Brownill 2017). The article, however, seeks to acknowledge the complexity of establishing co-management and translating kaitiakitanga in a governmental and planning system that is radically other-to-Indigenous (Coulthard 2014; Yates 2021). The aim is to offer a differentiated yet critical view on community-based management which, in this context, is constructed to give effect to a partnership approach and a decolonising, place-based co-management framework. The central question is how a specific, relational form of localism emerges in the complex, ontologically diverse context of the Gulf. How is marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship

assembled in the Gulf? And how does this contribute to a re-imagining of community, localism, and the marine space itself? Acknowledging the potential pitfalls of *government through community* (Rose 1996, p. 332), the article will consistently address issues of inclusion/exclusion, power dynamics, and neoliberal governmental practices.

The article focuses on Waiheke Island, located in the Gulf and part of Auckland City. In response to SCTTTP, a group of island dwellers identified a gap in the plan concerning the protection of the Waiheke marine environment and sought to implement AM on and around the island. The *Waiheke Marine Project* (WMP) was formed in 2019 and has since multiplied its relations and activities, continually refining its goals and narratives. While the WMP positions itself as facilitating community engagement to “help marine conservation and protection” (WMP 2023a), it also represents a field of ethics, where the notion of living rightly in and with the Gulf is problematised, claimed and negotiated. This encompasses the coexistence of human and non-human, Indigenous Māori and settler-descended Pākehā peoples, as well as governance, urban-island relations, and the surrounding geographies (Aschenbrenner 2023b).

After establishing the theoretical framework in the next section, the third section outlines the situation on Waiheke Island and the emergence of the WMP. Section four describes the methodology used in the research. Sections five through seven present the findings, while sections eight and nine critically discuss the results and provide a conclusion.

## 2 | Emergent Togetherness in Place

Place is often undertheorized in Western-European theorisations of ethics. The research underpinning this article began with an interest in examining the role of *ethics* in urban coastal, socio-ecological transformations. Adopting an urban ethics perspective (Dürr et al. 2020),<sup>5</sup> my research focuses on how actors or groups of actors within and around the coastal environment of the Gulf in Auckland problematise and claim certain forms of *ethical* living. As demonstrated in the context of SCTTTP, this must take into account matters of ontological pluralism in the settler-state environment of Auckland. Urban ethics thus emerges as a field of contestation, where claims for individual, *responsible* ethical conduct—rooted in a neoliberal governmentality and ideas of environmental subject formation—intersect with efforts to (re)centre Māori ethicalities<sup>6</sup> that foreground connection, genealogy, mutually embedded relationships, and a dialogical approach between humans and non-humans. While place is addressed in conventional planning and marine conservation discourses as a site for ethical reflection, transformation, and practice, in relational Māori ethicalities, place plays a more powerful and active role (Makey 2022; Aschenbrenner 2023a, 2023b). “Guardianship [for instance] is founded within the *mana whenua*, or authority from the land, and maintained through a ‘reciprocal appropriation’ (Momaday 1976) that reinvests *mana* from the people into the land and back again” (Larsen and Johnson 2017, p. 145). As one interviewee emphasised in a different context in 2019, responsibility is inherently linked to

the call of the land and the ancestral, reciprocal care between people and the land.

Reading through Larsen and Johnson (2017) and their decolonising perspectives on negotiating coexistence in liberal, democratic settler-states, AM recognise the agency of place in bringing *Mana Whenua* and others into dialogue, relationships, and action. They enable negotiations of coexistence: *productively agonistic* dialogue, struggle, and relationships among “the more-than-human communities whose autonomies are entangled in place” (ibid., p. 5).<sup>7</sup> In *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori world), “reality is generated as arrays of open-ended, continuously reproducing networks of relations” (Salmond 2012, p. 124). This relational perspective challenges conventional imaginaries of *local communities* as territorially bounded and with a fixed identity (Massey 2005; Bradley 2017). Thus, this article adopts a view of community as emergent through the dialogues, struggles, and practices of (coastal) coexistence. The focus is on the togetherness, the interrelatedness, that emerges and is negotiated as the question of “how to care for this place” (Larsen and Johnson 2017, p. 125) is addressed. It centres on the substance of this togetherness, specifically marine care as an “ethical and moral act that engages in the interrelated reciprocities of place” (ibid., p. 120; Zigon 2021). For Indigenous peoples, including Māori, communities are not limited to the human; the more-than-human transcends the human/non-human binary. This perspective recognises human and non-human entities as interconnected in an ethic of care and reciprocity, collectively “compos[ing] the livingness of this world” (Yates 2021, p. 102).

However, negotiations in Auckland occur within a settler-state environment, shaped by established power dynamics, hegemonic ontological assumptions, and rationalities. These factors must be considered, raising questions about inclusion, exclusion, and the possibility of open, non-oppressive collective negotiation and transformation. The term *local community* also holds significant power in conventional transition governance and planning discourse, as it can provide access to resources and relationships but may also serve as a means of governance.<sup>8</sup> From this perspective, I aim to critically assess the relationships and rights claimed when a group defines itself as the local AM community, as well as how this may contribute to community mobilisation for governmental tasks.

## 3 | Waiheke Island and the WMP

Conventional planning and conservation discourses often reinforce Western European notions of the *local*, also in ANZ, where local communities (or neighbourhoods) are primarily defined by residence, physical presence, and property (Brownill 2017). In contrast, “place and practice are inextricably linked in traditional Māori narratives; a connection [that is] constructed through [...] creation stories [...] and the concept of *whakapapa* (genealogy)” (Walker et al. 2019, p. 2). These traditional relationships to land were challenged, though not erased, by the colonial dispossession of *iwi* (tribes) and the enforcement of settler colonial rationalities (Tuck and McKenzie 2016). While several *iwi* have ties to Waiheke, Ngāti Paoa is recognised as *Mana Whenua* on the island. Colonial confiscations, land alienations, and the individualisation of land titles have “left Ngāti Paoa virtually



landless and undermined the iwi's economic, social, and cultural development" (New Zealand Government 2021).

The migration of people into urban areas and the urban environment itself have further challenged "traditional relationships to the environment, whakapapa, and the practice of kaitiakitanga" (Walker et al. 2019, p. 2). Dean Olgivie and Lucy Tukua, both descendants of Ngāti Paoa, note in a podcast how a disconnect has occurred between whenua (land) and whānau (family, extended family) as their people have left the island. However, Lucy Tukua emphasises the ongoing relationship with Waiheke ("I never left"), maintained through, for instance, the burial of tūpuna (ancestors, grandparents) on the island. Also protests, such as the successful opposition to marina development plans at Matiatia on Waiheke, continue and renew mana whenua relationships (Logie 2016; HGF 2021).

Waiheke Island is often described as "notoriously political and fiercely independent" (Logie 2016, p. 220). Many on the island support an image of an independent, alternative, politically and environmentally activist island community distinguishing themselves from Waiheke's *outside* or *invaders* (e.g., 'urban Auckland', investors and new money, wealthy second homeowners). However, multiple *ontological styles*—presuppositions about how the world works (or should work)—and imaginaries are present on Waiheke, and are vibrantly discussed in debates such as Matiatia (Rose Muna, Feb 2020; Salmond 2012; Logie 2016). The idea of a homogenous, autonomous island community is also challenged by the island's connections to the mainland, such as the 35-minute ferry service, regular commuting between Waiheke and Auckland's CBD, political and administrative city-island connections, and the influx of international and domestic tourists to the island (Oliver et al. 2023).

Increased tourism, gentrification, infrastructure developments, and other changes have significantly impacted Waiheke, its people, and the exercise of kaitiakitanga over the past decade (Oliver et al. 2023). These developments have been reflected in struggles of coexistence, also concerning the coastal and marine environment. During the fieldwork for this article, interviewees repeatedly mentioned two key struggles besides Matiatia: the unsuccessful 2013 initiative to establish a marine reserve off northern Waiheke and the 2020 protests against a marina development at Pūtiki Bay/Kennedy Point. The 2013 marine reserve proposal by the conservation group *Friends of the Hauraki Gulf* (FOHG) faced opposition, particularly from a group of residents called *Keep our Beaches*, whose properties were near the proposed reserve, highlighting the contentious issue of non-use reserves on the island. The Pūtiki Bay/Kennedy Point case not only divided islanders from developers and city planners but also revealed tensions among islander dwellers and Mana Whenua (Davis 2018; Weiss 2022).

The WMP was established in 2019 as a subgroup of the *Waiheke Collective*, an environmental stewardship network that began with land-based pest control. The *Waiheke Collective* describes itself as "a united network that works with Mana Whenua to activate and amplify efforts to restore and sustain a healthy and thriving natural environment on Waiheke" (Waiheke Collective 2018). The WMP was formed through the

collaboration of individuals involved in the 2013 marine reserve initiative (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020), discussions around the implementation of SCTTTP, available funding opportunities and a growing awareness of the need for greater marine protection and kaitiakitanga. The WMP organised itself into three working groups. The Mana Whenua workstream aimed to ensure a strong Mātauranga Māori voice and that the WMP was genuinely co-managed (WMP 2022a). A second group focused on organising a Future Search (FS) event, designed to bring together 70–80 island voices to explore stories and future perspectives for Waiheke's marine environment (WMP 2021a). The third group organised marine experiences and publicly informed about the FS event and the WMP.

The WMP engaged island dwellers through formats like a public meeting at Morra Hall in August 2019. Funding came from various sources such as the Waiheke Local Board, The Working Together More Fund, the Foundation North's Gulf Innovation Fund Together, and smaller grants and donations. The Department of Conservation (DOC) played a key role as a project partner, supporting the Mana Whenua and FS workstreams through its Pou Manutaki/Partnerships Manager (WMP 2023e).

#### 4 | Methods

The article draws on multiple data sources: (1) interview and participant observation data collected during a 3-month research stay on Waiheke Island from January to April 2020 and (2) newsletters, media, and project reports gathered on-site and remotely between February 2020 and April 2024 (Table 1 and Figure 2a).

The narrative interviews were conducted with people met at WMP meetings and those recommended by interviewees. Participants included Anne Jackson, Robyn Watts, Sarah Gardner, Andrew Williams, and Joshua Watson, who were involved in the WMP from its inception. Jack Snapper, who attended some meetings, provided a recreational fishing perspective. Rose Muna, who is Māori, attended the FS event, contrasted with others who identified as Pākehā. Ben Hill, approached by the WMP for a recreational fishing perspective, declined involvement and was interviewed for his potentially controversial views on the WMP. In addition to the main interviews, four other interviews and several informal discussions provided valuable background information. Six participant observation protocols, recorded after events organised or attended by the WMP, were included. The interview transcripts and observation protocols offered insights into narratives surrounding coastal issues on and around Waiheke Island and the WMP. They also helped identify struggles, disagreements, and ruptures within and between these narratives and (public) discourses.

Newsletters, media, and project reports offered insights into the symbolic and material components of the WMP and their evolution over time. This enabled me to trace the emerging narratives, imaginaries, practices, and relationships, by creating a list of the WMP's activities and a visual overview of its relationships. While integrating the data sources expanded the dataset,



TABLE 1 | Data sources used in the analysis, by type, including pseudonyms for interview partners.

Document set	Type/name	Time/date	Pieces analysed
WMP newsletters and updates	WMP newsletters and updates	May–Nov 2020	5
	WMP newsletters and updates	Jan–Dec 2021	14
	WMP newsletters and updates	Jan–Dec 2022	15
	WMP newsletters and updates	Feb–Nov 2023	3
	WMP newsletter and updates	Jan 2024	1
Media reports	Radio Broadcast WMP	Aug 19	1
	Gulf news	Feb–Mar 2020	6
	Hauraki Gulf Forum Podcast	Mar 2021	1
Documents and reports	Waiheke Collective Charter	2018	1
	WMP Inaugural Report	2021	1
	WMP Project Plan	2022	1
	WMP Annual Report	2022	1
Interviews	Anne Jackson <sup>a</sup>	Feb 20	1
	Jack Snapper <sup>a</sup>	Feb 20	1
	Rose Muna	Feb 20	1
	Robyn Watts <sup>a</sup>	Mar 2020	1
	Sarah Gardner <sup>a</sup>	Mar 2020	1
	Andrew Williams <sup>a</sup>	Mar 2020	1
	Joshua Watson <sup>a</sup>	Mar 2020	1
	Ben Hill	Mar 2020	1
Participant observations <sup>b</sup>		Jan–Apr 2020	6
Total			61

Note: For reasons of anonymity, all information that could lead to the identification of participants or interviewees is omitted from this article. Interviewee names are fictitious.

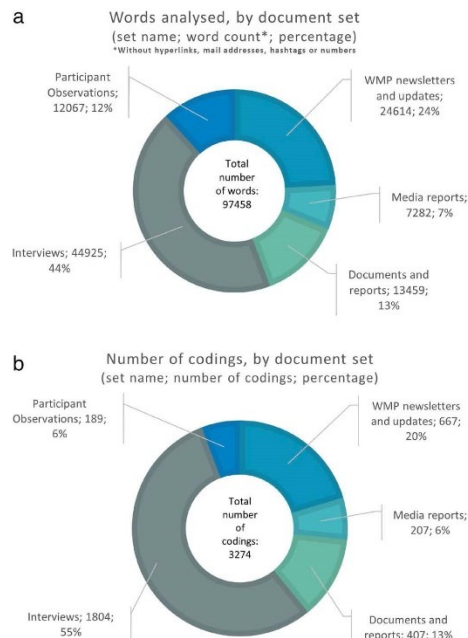
<sup>a</sup>Interviewees met at WMP meetings.

<sup>b</sup>Participant observations were made at Waiheke Waitangi Day celebrations at Pirihahi Marae, the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park 20th-year celebrations at the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron on Auckland's waterfront, an information event at Waiheke Ostend Market organised by the WMP, an information and community event at Little Oneroa beach attended by the WMP, a coastal walk at Te Matuku Marine Reserve organised by the WMP, and an evening film presentation and discussion of *The map to paradise* at Waiheke Community Cinema organised by the film's producers.

careful attention was given to the epistemological and methodological differences between them. There is a tension between the dataset and a relational view of coexistence. I approached my research from a poststructuralist perspective, which led to an underrepresentation of non-human actors. Upon reflecting on the narratives of relationality, coexistence, and emergence that emerged from the findings, I recognised a tension between my analysis and a relational perspective, which would challenge such a detached viewpoint. Therefore, I see the need to develop more innovative methods in the future that extend beyond process and actant tracing. Nonetheless, poststructuralist analysis has been valuable in assessing social realities and power structures, particularly in examining different understandings of localism in this study.

All materials were analysed using a grounded theory approach (Mey 2011), which involved an open and interpretive

analysis of the texts. Using MAXQDA, the data analysis process included iterative rounds of memo writing, open coding, and selective coding (Figure 2b). The coding process initially did not distinguish between data sources. In the first round, all text was coded by summarising paragraphs and assigning content-related headings. Codes were merged, abstracted, and reorganised in several rounds. Finally, MAXQDA's *Creative Coding* tool was used to organise the code system and create hierarchical code structures. Code memos linked the final codes. The codes and codings were interpreted in relation to the research questions. Indigenous scholars, alongside those in the constructivist research tradition, emphasise that knowledge and theorisation are “inextricable from context and the people who [...] create it” (Artelle et al. 2021, p. 289; Charmaz 2016). As such, the findings should be viewed as one possible interpretation, influenced by my positionality and chosen perspective.



**FIGURE 2** | (a) The total number of words analysed in the research and their distribution by document sets. (b) The total number of codings and their distribution by document set.

I became aware of several limitations during the research, analysis, and writing process, particularly related to my internalised individualism and anthropocentric worldview (Charmaz 2016). I only began to try to find the way out of the “hall of mirrors” (Larsen and Johnson 2017), facilitated by the generous, more-than-human relationships I experienced. Limitations also stem from my *evolving* reflexivity, as I navigated the research process while adhering to a preconceived timeline. There is valuable thinking and research on Ahu Moana on Waiheke, including from the *Enabling kaitiakitanga and EBM project of the Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge* (Taylor and Hikuroa 2022). My intention in this article is to contribute to the theorisation of *urban ethics* from a Gulf perspective while exploring how an urban ethics focus can enrich our understanding of coastal community-based management practices.

## 5 | Marine Kaitiakitanga/Guardianship

Kaitiakitanga and ocean care have long been practised locally, particularly among Mana Whenua. As the WMP aims to formalise marine environmental care, ethics of kaitiakitanga/guardianship for the ocean have been (re)assembled and imagined. The following subsections highlight seven themes that emerge from the central data—either explicitly or implicitly—to the practice, work, and communication of the WMP,

serving as foundational elements of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship.

### 5.1 | Relationality

Relationality is intrinsic to the more-than-human coexistence on Waiheke, continually emerging and being reproduced through care activities. It also features prominently at a discursive level in the WMP’s conceptualisation of reality. *Relationality* is evident in both the texts produced by the WMP and the activities it (co-)organises, such as the Conscious Swim Kaukau Orangā events—guided swims aimed at “building the connection to the ocean” (WMP 2023b). In 2022, FOHG resubmitted a proposal for a marine reserve off Waiheke’s coast, independently of the WMP. The WMP’s response highlights relationality and connectedness as an alternative and “better way” (WMP 2022b) to frame marine conservation. This approach incorporates mechanisms like marine protected areas or rāhui (Māori practices that restrict access or use) (WMP 2023c). The WMP emphasises that “legal tools alone do not *reconnect* people and the moana. [Instead] it is the actions that people take and the changes of behaviour” (WMP 2022b, emphasis added) that drive the long-term regeneration of Waiheke’s marine environment.

### 5.2 | Collaboration and Consensus

Larsen and Johnson’s (2017) understanding of coexistence, along with the struggles of Matiatia or Pūtiki Bay, highlight the ongoing presence of agonistic relationships and negotiations into which Waiheke and the Gulf call their more-than-human actors. Within the WMP, however, a narrative emphasising *consensus* and *overcoming conflict* has developed. In 2020, Anne Jackson expressed the hope that the WMP would mirror the Waiheke Collective model, where “all [are] on an equal footing with each other, and the voices all being in the room from the beginning”. The Collective’s charter defines consensus as a process of negotiating and careful consideration of diverse opinions, ideas, and concerns (Waiheke Collective 2018). However, WMP communications often frame collaboration as a unified effort for Waiheke’s marine environment, emphasising a shared commitment and slogans like “Eco over Ego” and “common ground & future NOT problems & conflict” (WMP 2022a). This framing suggests that active marine protection work should transcend differences, problems, and conflicts, as reflected in WMP reports and its partnerships with other organisations that are committed to a similar understanding of collaboration (Weave 2023; Sustainable Business Network 2024). This emphasis on common ground has faced criticism. Some F’s participants observed that “focus[ing] on common ground prohibited deep exploration of contentious projects such as the Kennedy Point marina” (WMP 2021a, 2022a). Despite efforts to avoid disagreements and agonistic relationships, dissenting voices have surfaced elsewhere, as seen in the 2022 FOHG reserve proposal.

### 5.3 | Action

In line with the Waiheke Collective Charter, the WMP emphasised *action-based* kaitiakitanga/guardianship (Waiheke

Radio 2019). *Action* was viewed as a key vehicle for relationship building, driving behaviour change, and fostering overall transformation. Initially focused on coastal experiences, education, information, and communication, the WMP has increasingly shifted toward *tangible actions* such as citizen science initiatives and stewardship practices, including beach clean-ups and kelp gardening (WMP 2022a).

#### 5.4 | Treaty Partnership

The WMP has embraced a commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi as a core ethical principle guiding its work (HGF 2021; WMP 2021a). The relationship between the WMP and Ngāti Paoa has evolved over time, reflecting diverse and complex interactions. Initially, Ngāti Paoa's involvement was sought as part of the Mana Whenua Workstream, aiming for co-management and collaboration. Over time, Ngāti Paoa's role as a *partner* has been solidified and became more prominent, especially during and following the FS event. With the start of the second phase of the WMP in October 2021, iwi members joined the steering group. Additionally, workshops were organised to enhance Treaty literacy among non-Māori members, further underlining the WMP's partnership commitment (WMP newsletter, Feb 2023).

#### 5.5 | Emergence

The WMP's communications reflect an understanding of kaitiakitanga/guardianship and its elements, including Treaty partnership, as part of an ongoing *journey* and learning process. The framing is encapsulated in the statement: "The WMP is a verb itself. It is an evolutionary process" (WMP newsletter, Feb 2022). This notion of emergence is associated with a relational framing. It also seems to relate to a broader discourse in the Gulf as the project plan suggests:

In line with Foundation North and GIFT's commitment to system change, the WMP has leaned into the diverse energy that is already in and around Waiheke Island. Rather than take a normative approach by allocating money to pre-agreed solutions, the WMP applies an emergent and collaborative approach to the complexity that exists around marine care in Aotearoa/New Zealand (WMP 2021b).

#### 5.6 | Future Generations

Youth/rangatahi are seen as vital voices and key agents of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship on Waiheke. They were included as one of the "nine categories [...] comprising the Waiheke marine environment system" (WMP 2021a) and represented in the FS. Phase one and two of the WMP explicitly aimed to build "youth capacity for sustainable environmental care" (WMP 2021b). Activities involving youth included youth meetings, school engagement, a youth snorkelling club, and beach clean-ups and citizen science events organised and led by a youth coordinator (WMP 2023d).

#### 5.7 | Moral Economies

The WMP envisioned a *moral fishing economy* focused on subsistence fishing, small-scale sustainable practices, and values like sharing, gifting, and minimising waste. Positive references were made to photo-based sport fishing competitions where fish were returned to the sea (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020; Robyn Watts, March 2020). A project to collect and up-cycle fishing gear further supported waste reduction efforts. The WMP also worked toward creating a *moral circular economy* on Waiheke, emphasising waste reduction, reusable systems, and behaviour change (WMP 2021a, 2022a; WMP newsletter, Feb 2022).

#### 6 | A Relational Ahu Moana Community

While the SCTTTP concept of AM seems to understand the local community conventionally, based on dwelling locally, the WMP fostered a relational understanding of community. This view emerged from interviews and observations (Observation, Feb 2020; Anne Jackson, Feb 2020; Joshua Watson, March 2020), where Anne Jackson, for instance, linked community to an ethics of care and the integration of "Māori ways of seeing the world" (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020). She saw community as togetherness formed through interrelationships and responsible caregiving (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020). In other instances, community was imagined as a network united by the aim to achieve ecological benefits through a particular way of caring—namely the outlined values of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship (WMP 2021a; WMP answer on MPA, Jan 2022).

Ethics, particularly marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship, appear to be understood as the substance but also boundary of the community. A relational concept of community, based on consensual ethics, becomes significant when it replaces conventional participation models in local governance and resource management. Although not yet realised on Waiheke Island, the WMP applied to be recognised as an AM prototype by the institutions implementing SCTTTP.<sup>9</sup> The WMP justified its suitability as AM prototype by its "credible way of embodying the Ahu Moana concept" (WMP 2024b), namely Treaty partnership and marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship. This demonstrates how conventional notions of localism are being challenged and negotiated in the implementation of the AM concept.

Conventional understandings of the local community were not entirely erased. The WMP's communications differentiate between *their* community and the *wider or larger community*, which includes all residents and workers on the island (WMP 2021a). The wider community was invited to public meetings and other informational and educational activities. While conventional notions of localism often exclude non-residents or those unable to afford to live in a place, the reimagined community, based on a shared ethic of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship, raised new questions about legitimate participation, inclusion, and exclusion.

Marine reserves have been contested due to the rise of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship ethics. The WMP opposed the FOHG's proposed marine reserve, arguing that it reflected exclusive Western ontological assumptions. Instead, the WMP advocated for relational and communal approaches to



"caregiving", which they believed were more effective, aligned with Treaty partnership, and more progressive and legitimate than centralised measures of "control dominance" (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020). The WMP argued that "contemporary communities are seeking better ways to achieve [...] ecological benefits that are more aligned with Tiriti partnership, active connection, and regeneration, and to be effective over a wider area" (WMP answer on MPA, Jan 2022). These communities committed to marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship were positioned in opposition to those holding on to reactionary marine conservation values. This argument is also situated within the broader national discourse on co-governance and Indigenous rights over natural resources, including the foreshore and seabed (Sullivan 2017).

By framing community as emerging from active marine protection work, common ground and consensus were prioritised, while protests and conflicts were delegitimised. Kaitiakitanga/guardianship was imagined as the substance of *relationship-building*, in contrast to narratives that defined Waiheke's identity through opposition and protest. For instance, the marina conflict at Pūtiki Bay, which divided islanders, Mana Whenua, and the WMP, was deliberately excluded from the FS event. Issues of class and social justice raised in this and other protests were marginalised and largely absent from WMP discussions (Rose Muna, Feb 2020; Robyn Watts, March 2020; Ben Hill, March 2020).

Finally, new dynamics of inclusion and exclusion emerged around recreational fishing within the WMP. A moral fishing economy and *responsible* fishing practices were emphasised, with certain fishermen and groups celebrated as role models (Robyn Watts, March 2020). In contrast, some recreational fishermen were seen as "middle aged Pākehā blokes" showing dismissive and uncooperative behaviour (Andrew Williams, March 2020). While not formally excluded, some fishermen felt the WMP had a hidden agenda and perceived it as imposing its values, leading to self-exclusion from project spaces (Ben Hill, March 2020). Participation was further complicated by concerns about being judged by their fishing community (Jack Snapper, Feb 2020).

## 7 | The Gulf as Relational Care Network

Although a new form of localism centred on marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship was not formalised as an AM prototype, the WMP reimagined and reshaped relationships in the Gulf, offering a renewed vision of its governance and geography (Affolderbach et al. 2012).

A vision of Waiheke Island and the wider Gulf as a relational network of marine caregivers emerged. Aligned with its relational community understanding, the WMP saw itself as "part of a bigger system in [the] context of regional (Tikapa Moana) and national marine management [...] taking a deeply relational approach that includes forming conscious allyship with other parts of the system to enable collective action" (WMP 2022a). The WMP has built diverse relationships with iwi, civil society (e.g., owners of neighbouring islands, NGOs, trusts), the private sector (e.g., dive operators, underwater ROV services), research

institutions (e.g., University of Auckland, Sustainable Seas), and public agencies (e.g., Auckland Council, Biosecurity NZ). These horizontal networks address shared concerns, such as managing exotic caulerpa seaweeds, fostering new non-statutory governance arrangements that transcend formal boundaries and planning levels (Metzger and Schmitt 2012, p. 266; Haughton et al. 2013).

The role of civil society has changed as relationships with state and municipal agencies were reimagined within relational care networks. Civil society acted as (co-)initiator, partner, or participant in urban care projects. Active citizenship is exemplified by the WMP's nominations for the Mayoral Conservation Awards (Collaboration and Innovation) and the Sustainable Business Network's Outstanding Collaboration Award (Auckland Council 2022; Sustainable Business Network 2024). The WMP described itself as an "*urban* island [co-managing] its land and seascapes" (WMP 2021a, emphasis added), challenging prevalent perceptions of urban-island boundaries and relationships.

The vision of the Gulf as a relational network of care remaps its geography, shifting from a Euclidean view of bounded zones to one emphasising relationality and open, emergent space/place. Administrative boundaries, such as those of the Marine Park, were transcended by interconnections and alternative frameworks like *rāhui*. This relational approach challenges traditional territorial notions of community and localism, promoting flexible conservation ethics over rigid spatial designations. While not formally recognised, the WMP's relationships, governance and spatial visions change, complement, and challenge existing norms and structures.

## 8 | Discussion

The Gulf is a contested space where diverse ontological systems, interests, and ideas about how to live (interact, behave) coexist, interact, overlap, and compete. The SCTTTP non-statutory plan proposed initiatives to restore the Gulf's "mauri, environmental quality and abundance of resources" (HGF et al. 2016). Among these measures is kaitiakitanga/guardianship, implemented through AM, coastal co-management areas led by Mana Whenua and local communities. AM, as envisioned in the plan, represents a form of localism that decentralises political power to local institutions and communities (Wills 2016, p. 7). They seek to decolonise the Gulf's geography by remapping its coast based on reciprocal care, self-determination, and Treaty partnership (Aschenbrenner 2023b, p. 13). Unlike top-down devolution of responsibility or bottom-up civic engagement (Wills 2016), AM recentres Indigenous relationships with place, challenging conventional notions of localism tied to Western concepts of place and scale (Tuck and McKenzie 2016).

The article examined how AM was realised and translated by Waiheke Island's *local community*. It highlighted how the WMP emerged as a group that gradually identified as an AM community. Within this framework, the local community and Mana Whenua were seen as distinct AM entities collaborating as co-managing partners, transitioning to joint leadership of the

WMP steering group (WMP 2021a). The WMP also acknowledged a broader Mana Whenua whānau and a wider local community encompassing those “who over many years have called [Waiheke] home” (WMP 2024a).

At the same time, an understanding of the *local community* emerged, defined not by location but by an ethic of kaitiakitanga/guardianship. This concept was understood to encompass *relationality, action, collaboration and consensus, Treaty partnership, emergence, centring of future generations, and moral economies*. Reflecting decolonisation efforts, it integrates Māori values while also incorporating neoliberal planning imperatives and ethics of collaboration seen in SCTTTP and similar institutions (Aschenbrenner 2023a, 2023b). The community is framed as relational and defined by its members’ shared commitment to coastal and marine care. Marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship serves as the substance of interrelationships, forming the basis for a broader relational care network and alliances across the Gulf and ANZ.

How can these findings be understood in terms of power, inclusion/exclusion, and neoliberal governance? The call for AM reflects efforts to decolonise Gulf geographies and assert treaty rights. Treaty partnership is central to the bicultural framework of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship assembled in the context of the WMP. Concepts like marine conservation areas were treated as tools for ecological benefit rather than norms. While Rose Muna felt like “the odd Māori person thrown in for good books [and the WMP being] fronted up by middle class Pākehā” (Feb 2020) after the first town hall meeting, a partnership has since become a core focus, reflected in steering group composition and recent communications (WMP newsletter, May 2023). I therefore interpret the emergence of ethics and practices of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship as a challenge to and incipient shift in dominant power structures. At the same time, new patterns of inclusion and exclusion arose.

Wills (2016) emphasises the need for “sufficient local interest and capacity to engage” (p. 12), such as time and skills, for liberal localism. A Gulf care network will likely be uneven, requiring further research in less active neighbourhoods than Waiheke. Ethics also influence who can engage with the WMP and be considered part of the local community. Exclusion occurred when individuals or groups did not align with marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship, Treaty partnership principles, consensus ideals, or moral economies.

The exclusion of agonistic voices enabled structural change by making Treaty partnership a baseline. However, the moralised discourse excluded *unethical* subjects and depoliticised collaboration, limiting the expression of systemic critique, also on issues like class, privatisation, and social justice (Dürr et al. 2020; Aschenbrenner 2023b). Changing relationships between agencies and civil society complicated opposition and critique, highlighting depoliticising dynamics and neoliberal governmentality. While decision-making power was not formally transferred to civil society (Rose 2000; Smits 2014), bottom-up empowerment was evident in actions like controlling exotic caulerpa seaweed spread (WMP newsletter, Nov 2023). Yet, formal decision-making power remains uncertain for the future (Brownill 2017).

Decolonising perspectives, like those of Larsen and Johnson (2017), view struggle and agonistic voices as inherent to coexistence, contrasting with the WMP’s more unified concept of togetherness. This perspective could address issues of exclusion and depoliticisation within the WMP, as well as offer a more inclusive view of collaboration, similar to the Waiheke Collective’s approach. The article focused on the discursive formation of care within the WMP context, and future research could explore the practical, life-sustaining aspects of care in a broader, more inclusive way.

## 9 | Conclusion

This article examined a form of localism introduced by AM, which created an ontologically pluralist and decolonised map of the Gulf, incorporating Mana Whenua areas based on Māori ethical systems. On Waiheke Island, Māori perspectives were integrated into the co-managing community, envisioning local self-management rooted in an ethics of care. This new map redefines the Gulf, emphasising relational, open, and emergent understandings of place and *ethical* localism.

The article highlights ethics as a key dimension alongside politics, economics, and law in place-based coastal management (Dürr et al. 2020). Ethics, encompassing both hegemonic and non-hegemonic Māori ethicalities, is inseparable from politics. Non-hegemonic ethical systems challenge colonial power structures and facilitate decolonisation. Ethical claims promote contestation and legitimacy but also risk delegitimising agonistic views and causing exclusion. These dynamics are challenging and critical to consider for all institutions in the Gulf. Lastly, the article emphasised the importance of place in fostering ethical living, urging more nuanced attention to place and its agency in future urban ethics theories.

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## Ethics Statement

Ethical approval was not obtained, as there was no ethics committee or institutional review board at the researcher’s institution at the time the study was conducted and the article was written. Informed consent was sought from and provided by the research subjects in the form of written informed consent (including consent to the publication of results in anonymised form).

## Data Availability Statement

Publications and newsletters analysed in the research are openly accessible. The interview and participant observation data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the author, after prior review and as far as the anonymity of interviewees and participants can



be preserved. The data are not publicly available as they may contain information that could compromise the privacy of participants.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Tuck and McKenzie (2016) provide a nuanced overview of the differences between *place* and *land*. The paper uses the term *place* in line with Larsen and Johnson (2017), while recognising ontological differences and adopting a perspective of ontological pluralism and openness.

<sup>2</sup>An *ethic of kaitiakitanga/guardianship* refers at this point to the ethical narrative developed in SCTTP (Aschenbrenner 2023a; HGF et al. 2016, p. 27).

<sup>3</sup>In the text, Ahu Moana refers to the concept and areas identified in SCTTP.

<sup>4</sup>Kapoor (2024) criticises Indigenous localism for its limited critique and inability to challenge underlying systems. Other critics warn against the risk of instrumentalising “Māori extended kin groups [as] a kind of ready-made Indigenous NGO” (McCormack 2016, p. 235) to which responsibility can be shifted.

<sup>5</sup>The approach focuses on “what is problematized as (un)ethical in what ways and by what means” (Dürr et al. 2020, p. 2). Ethics here refers to “a field of interaction in which a range of actors in cities negotiate moral and social ideals, principles and norms” (ibid.) while also addressing what is considered (un)ethical within this context. *Urban* may point to (1) the place of ethical negotiation, the city, (2) the object of ethical negotiation, e.g. housing, (3) the urban conditions under which ethical negotiations take place, or (4) ethical postulations that are linked to views of what it means to be emphatically urban.

<sup>6</sup>Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) uses the term *ethicalities* to capture the ontological plurality of ethics.

<sup>7</sup>Larsen and Johnson (2017) argue that conflicts and struggles are inevitable due to interdependencies of human and non-human others, as well as the “cacophony of human and nonhuman ontological styles” (p. 9). Place teaches coexistence, not consensus or the flattening out of differences. This includes the building and emergence of alliances “motivated by mutual albeit dissimilar concerns for places” (p. 8). See also Massey (2005) for the inevitability of negotiation and conflict when ‘throwntogether’ in place.

<sup>8</sup>Nikolas Rose (1996, p. 335) describes “government through community” as strategies that create and use community ties to support regulation, reform, or mobilisation. These strategies aim to promote local participation, empowerment, and decision-making, reactivating self-motivation, responsibility, and active citizenship within a self-governing community, aligning with neoliberal governmentality.

<sup>9</sup>Becoming an AM pilot project could offer benefits such as formal recognition, local governance involvement, and resource allocation from DOC and the Ministry of Primary Industries/Fisheries New Zealand. This may include a dedicated project team, subject matter experts, policy staff to review legislative processes, and financial support during the planning stages with Mana Whenua and local communities (DOC et al. 2021).

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