

Placemaking and the Complexities of Measuring Impact in Aotearoa New Zealand's Public and Community Housing: From Theory to Practice and Lived Experience

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RANGAHAU / RESEARCH

- Placemaking in public and community housing aims to build belonging, safety, and connectedness through shared spaces, community infrastructure, and everyday practices.
- This study examined four community housing providers (CHPs) in Aotearoa New Zealand, using provider interviews, document analysis, spatial analysis (including an accessibility index), tenant surveys and interviews, and site-specific case studies.
- Case studies focused on Central Park Apartments and Daniell Street (Te Toi Mahana) and Whakahoa Village/Gowerton Place (Ōtautahi Community Housing Trust).
- Research explored how providers' change theories of placemaking align – or misalign – with tenants' lived experiences.
- A prototype Placemaking Decision Framework was developed to guide housing providers' decisions across design, development, and activation of shared spaces.

NGĀ HUA MATUA / KEY FINDINGS

- Providers share a belief that placemaking strengthens wellbeing, but approaches differ – from structured and participatory to integration-oriented and opportunity-driven.
- Central Park Apartments demonstrated comprehensive on-site provision, while Daniell Street and Whakahoa Village/Gowerton Place relied more on neighbourhood amenities.
- Tenant surveys showed no significant differences in reported safety, belonging, or connectedness between high- and low-provision of community infrastructure on housing sites.
- Interviews revealed mixed experiences – some valued on-site amenities and activities, others avoided shared spaces due to safety concerns or social tensions.
- Tenant experiences appear to be shaped less by infrastructure quantity than by everyday social dynamics, accessibility and safety considerations.
- Māori and Pacific tenants were under-represented, as were younger tenants and families, limiting conclusions and underscoring the importance of kaupapa Māori and Pacific-led research approaches.

WHAIKUPU / RECOMMENDATIONS

- Housing providers should see placemaking as an ongoing process, not a one-off intervention – focusing on activation, cultural responsiveness and sustained tenant engagement.
- The six-stage Placemaking Decision Framework (see back page of this summary) offers a prototype for decision-making, but requires adaptation, evaluation and Indigenous partnership to ensure legitimacy.

TO READ MORE:

Olin, C.V., Witten, K., Randal, E., Chisholm, C., Logan, A., Howden-Chapman, P. & Leigh, L. (2025).

Placemaking and the Complexities of Measuring Impact in Aotearoa New Zealand's Public and Community Housing: From Theory to Practice and Lived Experience. *Architecture*, 5(3), 69.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture5030069>



Access to neighbourhood community infrastructure from Whakahoa Village/Gowerton Place (OCHT); medium accessibility index score (drawing by Lucy Kokich).

Table 6. Placemaking Decision Framework.

This prototype framework supports public and community housing providers to determine whether, where, and how to invest in community infrastructure and placemaking across the lifecycle of new builds or upgrades. It is grounded in insights from the present case studies and relevant literature, but has not yet been formally tested; it is intended to be adapted and evaluated in different contexts. It recognises that wellbeing outcomes depend not only on the quality of shared physical spaces (like community rooms, gathering areas, or gardens), but also on the presence of social, cultural, and service-based activities that make those spaces meaningful. While grounded in AoNZ's obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the framework is intended to be adaptable to international settings with comparable legal and ethical commitments to local and Indigenous communities. For those based in AoNZ, the authors recommend that this framework be used in coordination with the recently published Māori Wellbeing: A Guide for Housing Providers [87] and principles underpinning Pacific worldviews [39].

Stage	Purpose	Key Questions	Evidence/Tools
PARTNERSHIP, CO-DESIGN & ENGAGEMENT (THROUGHOUT)	Build shared ownership, cultural legitimacy, and enduring relationships from the outset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who needs to be present at the table from day one? Whose voices are heard, and how are they responded to? Engagement [37] and partnership [38,87] are key. How will decision-making and resourcing be shared? Are Māori and Pacific partners supported to exercise tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) in the process? Are relationships grounded in whakapapa (genealogical connection), whanaungatanga (relationship building), vā (relational space), reciprocity, and collective benefit? How will kaitiakitanga (guardianship, stewardship) be upheld, including intergenerational responsibilities? Where will funding come from for any physical elements? For social, cultural, and operational components? Are Indigenous and local community commitments recognised and honoured? 	MOUs, hui or community meeting notes, co-design and engagement processes, partnership charters, legal obligations, funding requirements, and agreements
CONCEPT DESIGN	Develop a shared vision that integrates physical, social, and cultural goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will shared spaces support belonging, safety, cultural connection, and community life? What services, events, or practices will activate them? Does the concept reflect tenant, local authority, Māori, and Pacific aspirations, including the protection and enhancement of mauri (life force) and mana (dignity, authority)? Does the vision align with values such as manaakitanga (care and hospitality), fa'aaloalo (respect), and alofa (love, compassion)? 	Spatial concepts, early programming ideas, local/cultural reviews, visioning workshops, local authority plans/strategies, community aspirations documents
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT	Refine spatial design and programme delivery plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are spaces well located, accessible, and flexible? Are anticipated social, cultural, or support activities resourced and deliverable? Are governance and staffing models viable? Are tikanga Māori and Pacific cultural practices embedded into the spatial design and operational plans? Does the design reflect collective use and guardianship, rather than solely individual ownership? 	Detailed drawings, cost estimates, service delivery plans, partnership agreements
CONSENTING & APPROVALS	Secure required regulatory and cultural approvals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are obligations to planning authorities, Māori and Pacific partners, and community stakeholders addressed? Are intended uses (e.g., gatherings, services, cultural practices) reflected in consents and regulations? Are safety, amenity, cultural, and environmental impacts considered? Have cultural impact assessments addressed both Māori and Pacific perspectives, including the safeguarding of taonga (treasures) and sacred spaces? 	Consent applications, cultural and environmental impact assessments, usage outlines
CONSTRUCTION & INTEGRATION	Deliver quality spaces and enable early relationship-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the built environment delivered to intent, including cultural design features, narratives, and symbolism? Are tenants and neighbours welcomed in ways that recognise local tikanga, vā relationships, and Pacific ceremonial practices? Are shared spaces commissioned and ready for use, with cultural protocols observed? How will long-term custodianship, maintenance responsibilities, and community use practices be embedded from the outset of construction and handover? 	Quality inspections, welcome events, tenant onboarding, space commissioning
MONITORING & EVALUATION	Track usage, outcomes and feedback over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are shared spaces used and valued? By whom? Do activities support connection, cultural identity, and wellbeing across diverse groups? How are shared spaces maintained so they stay safe, accessible, useful, and culturally resonant? Do spaces respond and adapt to changing needs (e.g., disaster resilience, population shifts, pandemics, technology, etc.) while upholding kaitiakitanga and intergenerational equity? What can be learned and translated to other sites, developments, projects, or activities? Are evaluation processes themselves cultural safe and participatory for Māori and Pacific tenants? 	Post-occupancy evaluation, tenant interviews/surveys, participation data, lessons learned, maintenance plans