This intervention asks how the people of Porirua can feel empowered and included in the decision-making processes that will shape the future of their city. I draw on my experiences as a life-long resident, activist, artist, architect, landscape architect, and urban designer in Porirua to find answers. I have found that young Pasifika are very concerned about whether their cultural values will be represented in housing and development in Porirua. This speaks to an issue facing the country as whole: while the Pasifika population continues to grow in size and importance in Aotearoa New Zealand, they are subject to flawed cultural assumptions, and are frequently overlooked or misunderstood in decision-making processes that will have profound impacts upon their future. There is room for more talanoa between Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand, and between Pasifika and the wider population. It is only when architects and planners expand their cultural kete that they will provide suitable housing and neighbourhoods for Pasifika.

Driving Through the East:
An Insight into City Planning in Porirua

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Driving through the eastern suburbs of Porirua can be nostalgic, like driving through the islands where your parents grew up. There's the house with weatherboards coloured in rose pink with bright-blue architraves. There's the house with the lush front yard and well-kept greens, right next to the house that looks like a mechanic's garage. There are the roaring, squealing toddlers, kids, and adults playing volleyball at the Waitangirua Mall courts on a summer's weekday dusk. Rows of state houses are clustered together in their own archipelago. The local dairies have their own garden of ready-to-sell island food. Freshly baked taro and koko Samoa are still on the weekly shopping list.

Much of my home-schooled childhood was spent in the back of the Cannons Creek library. My mum's friend was the librarian and she also home-schooled her daughter. We would often get two dollars' worth of hot chips from Joe's Takeaways and eat together, sitting on the concrete seat that is curved like a taniwha's body. Together we watched school kids spill out of the bus and into the fish and chip shop to buy their own chips. And we talked about life and the future.

I grew up in Porirua as a 'half-caste' with a Samoan mother and an Australian father. I quickly learned to weave between cultures. One impressionable moment occurred when I was 12. My home-schooling days had come to an

end; my brother and I were put back into school in Pauatahanui, a rural northern suburb of Porirua. We were the only 'brown' kids and, at that, only half-brown. It was there that I added coloured patterns to my cultural kete. At lunch time, my new classmates proceeded to eat their chips without offering me any. I was horrified. Where is the shared lunch? The nuances of culture commanded me to expand my kete, and so I did. I discovered when it was culturally inappropriate to not share my chips, and when it was acceptable to eat them all by myself. When my Pautahanui friends came to my 13th-birthday-party sleepover at my house in Cannons Creek, one friend facetiously asked, 'Are we gonna get jumped?' My innocent eyes were opened: I realised that my neighbourhood, *in the same city*, had been misunderstood. I discovered how they really perceived the area where I lived, and they discovered the reality of my neighbourhood: that the 'hood' wasn't much of a hood after all, but more like a village. My kete expanded, and so did theirs.

Porirua is like this in many ways. It demands you to draw from its unique wealth of culture, and to weave your own basket.

Ten years later, I completed my master of architecture degree. I felt a responsibility to the community that had formed my foundational perceptions about people, love, and living. My final year's thesis set out to ask and answer a question that had altruistic motives: how can the narratives of eastern Porirua and Porirua City be made positive through architecture and urban planning? This question evolved and expanded, with my work seeking to strengthen other positive narratives that already existed within the city, leading me to ask: *How can the people of the city feel empowered and included in decision-making processes?* The thesis set out a strategy to reimagine Porirua City's urban future through bringing people back to its neglected water edge. A series of small, medium, and large-scale interventions were proposed, and two temporary interventions were tested in Porirua: an art installation and a community pop-up space. The intent behind both was to start conversations about the future of the city with people in the city. I jumped between the roles of activist, artist, architect, landscape architect, and urban designer. I sought to carry the weight of

what I had accumulated in my basket, my cultural kete, with grace and an understanding of the complexities of the city I have grown up in.

Over the next two years I became more involved with the Porirua City Council. I presented the findings from my thesis at a number of meetings. I had local government staff in the City Growth Team excitedly ask, 'When shall we start?!' After addressing about 200 business owners and city developers, the mayor declared, 'We need to employ you, Elyjana'. No formal offer to become the council's in-house architect followed. I continued to practice architecture in a small beach-side firm, quite content to remain free from local-government bureaucracy.

The council later asked me to build on the work undertaken in my thesis by facilitating community youth-focussed workshops on urban planning. These workshops fed into two policy-focussed documents, the *Porirua Growth Strategy 2048* and the *District Plan Review*. The *Porirua Growth Strategy 2048* is a guiding framework for Porirua City that is intended to shape and influence 'why' and 'where' the city will physically develop over the next 30 years and beyond. Undertaken in 2018, it identifies the big issues now and in the future, and takes a principles-based approach to dealing with those issues.[1] The *Porirua City District Plan* is a document that sets the framework for land-use planning and contains the current provisions and rules that manage Porirua's resources and environment. The document had not been reviewed since it became operative in 1999.[2]

Through these workshops, we discovered a matter of real concern to Pacific young people: *Will my cultural values be accurately represented in the development of my neighbourhood and in housing?*

This question poses some real challenges: how can the values of Pacific young people be articulated in a way that guides practice? What exactly is the 'Pacific Identity'? Such an identity has yet to be translated into practical design principles suited to the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Is it the

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1   Porirua City Council, 'Porirua Growth Strategy 2048,' Porirua, Porirua City Council, 2019.

2   See: https://poriruacity.govt.nz/your-council/city-planning-and-reporting/district-plan/

identity of our parents? Or the identity of those of us with Island heritage who have never been to the Pacific and cannot speak our parents' language, but who share this 'Pacific Identity' bond? And who is best to answer these questions for the future generations to come? Who will be held accountable to these future generations for what is built today? Around 70 percent of Porirua East residents are Pacific and 19 percent are Māori. Are the architects and designers who are coming to work in this area equipped with the appropriate tools, the cultural kete, to plan these neighbourhoods? Are they sensitive to the lived reality of these neighbourhoods, or are they prey to the same misconception as my friends who once asked, 'Are we gonna get jumped?' when visiting my neighbourhood. The answers to these questions are important for the success of the $1.5 billion revitalisation of eastern Porirua over the next 25 years.

Youth workshops and some reflections for city planning in Porirua

Below, I will expand in more detail on my involvement with the youth-focussed workshops for the two Porirua council projects. The end remarks made by the youth in these workshops shape some concluding thoughts about culture, spaces, and city planning in Porirua.

For the *Growth Strategy 2048*, I created posters and workbooks to translate 'council speak' into a digestible format for people to read, discuss, and comment on. Twenty-three different focus-group workshops took place reaching over 300 people, ranging from senior citizens to developers, new migrants and former refugees, to social services, residents' associations, local businesses, and so on. I helped to facilitate the youth-focussed workshop for people aged between 18 and 25. These workshops allowed members of the community to have input into the formation of the growth strategy. The community discovered that there are a number of large and complex issues that will be expensive and time-consuming to resolve.

The *District Plan Review* engaged with the Porirua community in a similar manner to the *Growth Strategy*. Reference focus groups were formed

and met over a series of workshops. They were presented with a range of strategic issues for the city and the task was to 'go deep' with what they identified as the number-one priority. A specific youth reference group was set up as one of these, again for people aged between 18 and 25. I helped to facilitate half-a-dozen workshops between the youth reference group and the planning team of the Porirua council. Each of the youth-group members had their own stories and experiences of growing up in Porirua. Housing was identified as their top issue. The environment, particularly that of the harbour, was a close second.

These priorities resonated with a group of around 400 secondary-school students from Porirua when presented at a careers-day event. Through a deliberative and rigorous consultation process, involving a lot of discussion and sticky notes, the youth reference group members identified five issues to be resolved in Porirua: that there needs to be more variety of housing types; better connectivity into, within, and out of the city; an integration of community spaces and cultural values through design guides and/or design principles; the protection of waterways and the environment through large- and small-scale water-sensitive urban design; and affordability.

When the Porirua council district-planning team presented the youth reference group with the policy outcomes from the 'go-deep' workshops, the youth supported incorporating Ngāti Toa values through the Tangata Whenua, Sites of Significance to Māori, Special Purpose Hongoeka Zone, and Papakāinga chapters. However, the youth reference group felt that, while Māori values were addressed, Pacific values were not. The group concluded that Porirua is distinctive due to the inclusive values of Pacific culture and that these should be acknowledged and incorporated as well. It was argued that, as things currently stand, Pacific communities must adapt to housing that does not reflect or empower their values and cultural practices, a situation that should be rectified in future planning for Porirua.

Though the terms 'Māori' and 'Pasifika' are often used together, there are distinct differences within each of these communities. Māori have led the way, and rightfully have an established kōrero within Aotearoa New Zealand architecture. Māori design principles have been translated into

formal acknowledgments and legislation; examples include the *Porirua District Plan*, the *Resource Management Act*, the signing of Te Kawenata o Rata between Ngā Aho and the New Zealand Institute of Architects,[3] and Te Aranga Principles in the *Auckland Design Manual*.[4] This is not the case for Pasifika. There is room for more talanoa between Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand, and between Pasifika and the wider population. In *Island Time: New Zealand's Pacific Futures,* Damon Salesa explains why this is important for all Aotearoa New Zealanders, as the country is becoming more Pacific by the hour:

> It is not a question of altruism, or of responding to the vagaries of political values and their expression. Rather, the size of the Pacific population is such that their success or failure has consequences for all New Zealanders, and especially for those in the locations where Pacific people are concentrated. Which kind of future Pacific people experience will have a vital influence over which kind of future New Zealand experiences.[5]

Aotearoa New Zealand has a dynamically changing demographic that is becoming *more* Pacific. The question is not, what is the new Pacific? or even, what is the evolving Pacific? but, more importantly, what is *fundamentally* Pacific? For architects and designers, does this mean specific housing typologies, 'flexible spaces', island-inspired colours, patterns, or

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3   Te Kawenata o Rata is a covenant that formalises an ongoing relationship of cooperation between the New Zealand Institute of Architects and Ngā Aho, the society of Maori design professionals. Signed in February 2017, the Kawenata enables future joint strategies and action plans to be developed between the two groups. See: https://www.nzia.co.nz/explore/te-kawenata-o-rata

4   Te Aranga Māori Design Principles were developed by Māori design professionals as a response to the *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol* in 2005. The principles have been adopted by the Auckland Council with the support of Ngā Aho. The principles integrate Māori cultural values into the design process and development of buildings. The *Auckland Design Manual* provides resources on Te Aranga Principles and their use across a range of projects. See: http://www.aucklanddesignmanual.co.nz/design-subjects/maori-design/te_aranga_principles

5   Damon Salesa, *Island Time: New Zealand's Pacific Futures* (Wellington: BWB, 2017), 29.

materials? Or is it something more subtle, like family, community, faith, and connection?

The essence of what is really needed can be found in the image of sharing a two-dollar serve of hot chips. Relationships are built over food; it is through talanoa and life-building that our communities are made. For Pasifika, the real business doesn't start until you've eaten and laughed together. Unfortunately, much of this relationship-building is quashed in our neighbourhoods before it even gets going: we are isolated behind our automatic garage doors, and behind the pressures of our meeting deadlines. For projects like the regeneration of Porirua East, hiding behind cultural assumptions is not the way to build for a future community! The professionalism currently animating this process is respectful, but it will only go so far. Timelines, costs, and outcomes must be managed, of course. But what we really need to do is to expand our cultural kete. We don't want a project that completes on time and on budget, but which has failed to understand the clients' real needs. As designers, planners, and builders, we have to open the doors of our cultural awareness and sensitivity. Let's continue to weave our cultural kete. Let's share our two-dollar chips.