

He Pā Mataora—Learning to live with the Living Pā Project Summary

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Meegan Hall, Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington

The Living Pā project is a 3000m², three storey, learning, teaching, research, and engagement space being added to Te Herenga Waka marae on Victoria University of Wellington’s Kelburn campus. It is designed to meet the International Living Future Institute’s™ Living Building Challenge™ (LBC). Our research project, He Pā Mataora asked the question: “How can we adapt to climate change and live, learn and work more sustainably, as Māori, within the mātāwaka, pan-Māori context of the Living Pā?”

Pātaka approach

We organised the project around four ‘pātaka’—Tikanga, Reo, Ako and Taiao — drawing on the strengths and diversity within the research team. Over the course of our research we conducted interviews, community wānanga, site visits, and literature reviews and built a corpus and an AI tool to explore our history, cultural beliefs and practices in relation to sustainability.

That helped us develop a framework that blends tikanga Māori with the design principles of the LBC and used that as the basis for an article about how the philosophies of te ao Māori (the Māori world) and living buildings can come together to guide our marae communities into more climate adaptive and resilient practices without compromising on tikanga. We also interrogated our beliefs and practices around manaakitanga and produced case studies around how we propose to host visitors in the Living Pā while managing food supply issues and wastage.

We identified numerous examples of how mātauranga Māori provides guidance around sustainable practice. We produced teaching resources about health and safety and about harakeke plants that we will use to teach a new major and minor in kaitiakitanga, including an undergraduate He Pā Mataora course that has been approved by CUAP and will be offered from February 2025. We completed 3D scans of a pair of huia birds that will be part of a display in the Living Pā to teach the story of their beauty and demise. We also looked at the importance of public education, and developed ideas around community outreach and the need to share our stories beyond the university environment.

Inspiration for the future

Finally, we reflected on the [uniqueness and challenge of trying to create a Living Building](#) – a process that we hope other Māori communities will be inspired to follow, just have we have been inspired through site visits and guidance from the communities of [Te Kura Whare](#) in Tāneatua and [Te Wananga o Raukawa in Ōtaki](#).

While the official period of our He Pā Mataora project has now come to an end, its outputs and outcomes will continue through to the opening of the Living Pā building in December 2024 and into the future. We hope that this work has made a helpful contribution ‘mō te āpōpō—for future generations’.

Changing with our climate

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