

# Mātauranga Māori and Museum Practice

*Te manu kai i te miro nōna te ngahere.*

*Te manu kai i te mātauranga nōna te ao.*

**The bird that feeds on the miro, theirs is the forest.**

**The bird that feeds from the tree of knowledge, theirs is the world.**

**How do museums facilitate and express that which is essential to Māori – their values, concepts, culture, and worldview? How will they do so in the future?**

In recent years, museum professionals throughout New Zealand have asked for guidance on measuring how well their activities express mātauranga Māori. But to effectively express mātauranga Māori, museums must first understand what mātauranga Māori 'is' and 'looks like'.

Museums and other culture and heritage organisations have also asked how to:

- support the development of mātauranga Māori
- access and receive mātauranga Māori
- store mātauranga Māori so as to maintain its integrity
- pass mātauranga Māori on appropriately to their audiences through their exhibitions and other products
- pass mātauranga Māori on to their staff through research, professional development, and policies.

This guide shares information and stimulates discussion on these matters. It also provides practical guidelines on developing an understanding of mātauranga Māori and incorporating it in museum practices.

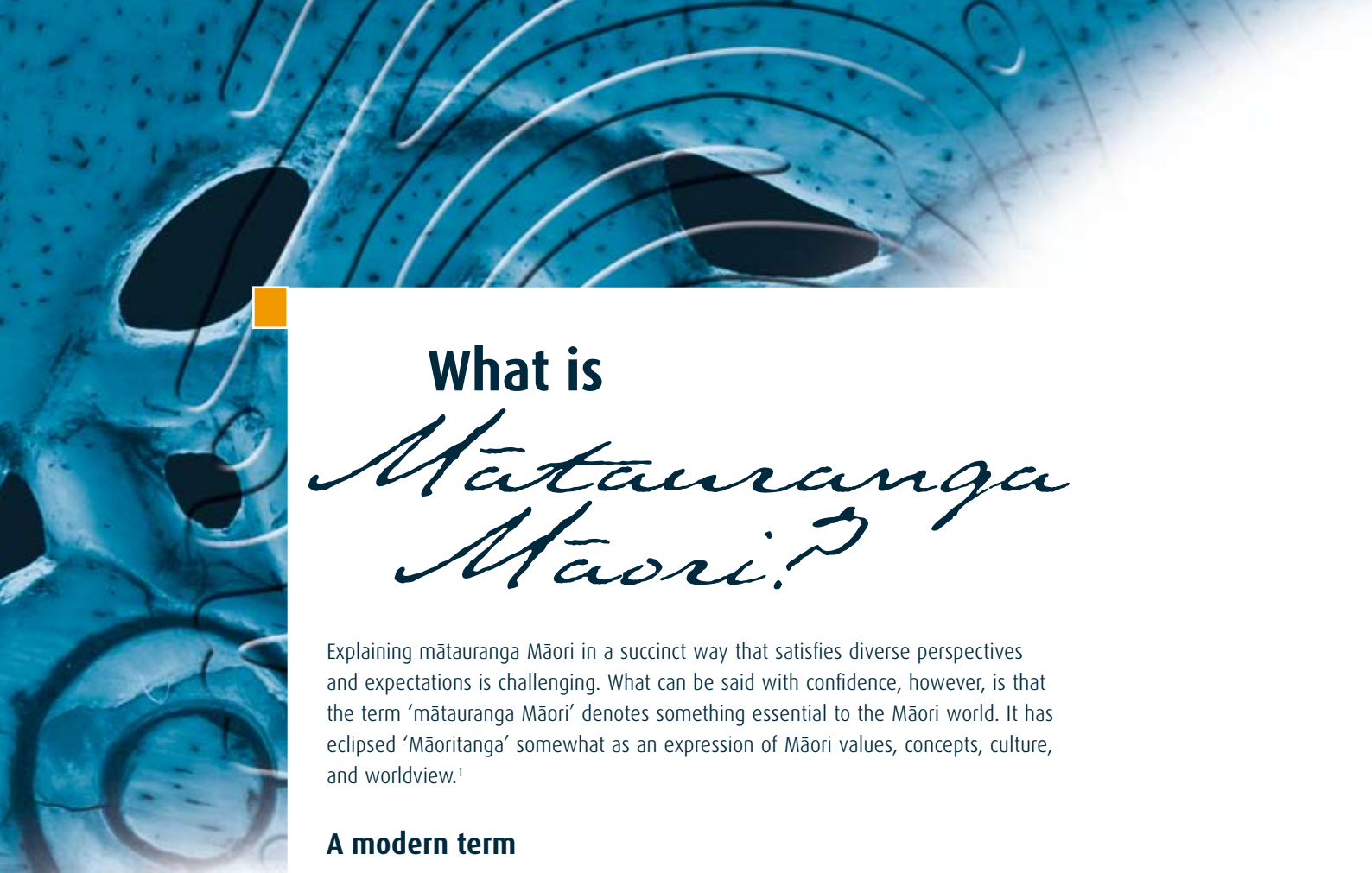
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## What is

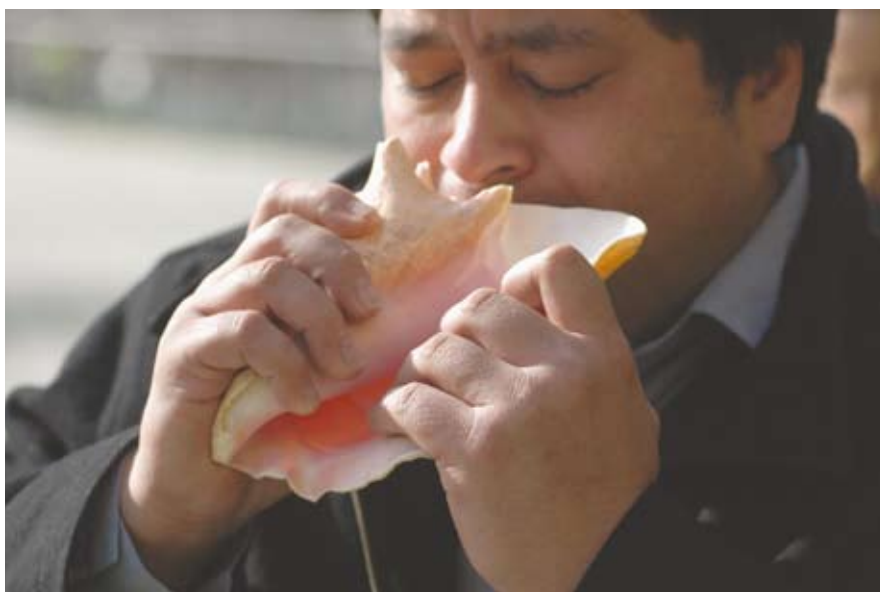
# *Mātauranga Māori?*

Explaining mātauranga Māori in a succinct way that satisfies diverse perspectives and expectations is challenging. What can be said with confidence, however, is that the term 'mātauranga Māori' denotes something essential to the Māori world. It has eclipsed 'Māoritanga' somewhat as an expression of Māori values, concepts, culture, and worldview.<sup>1</sup>

### **A modern term**

Mātauranga Māori is a modern term. Its use (to define a unique body of knowledge) was popularised in the 1980s, when it appeared in government policy and the course programmes of tertiary institutions such as wānanga Māori. The term has become well-known for many reasons. These include:

- Māori involvement in the knowledge economy, that is, the national and global exchange of knowledge using various or combined technologies (for example, computer software, telecommunications, and virtual services).
- the Treaty of Waitangi claims process, including claims for the protection of cultural knowledge and taonga (treasures).
- the establishment of, and interest in, Māori-medium education, including kōhanga reo (preschool education) and kura kaupapa Māori (Māori-immersion primary schools).



## An interpretation of mātauranga Māori

The following interpretation is from the Mātauranga Māori Strategy developed by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Mātauranga Māori is a dynamic and evolving system of knowledge (te kauwae runga and te kauwae raro\*) used by tangata whenua (people of this land by right of first discovery) to interpret and explain the world in which they live. It is framed by the whakapapa (genealogy) of all things and whanaungatanga (kinship connections) between them. Examples of mātauranga Māori include:

- the oral histories of whānau (families), hapū (extended families), and iwi (tribes)
- karakia (prayers and incantations)
- waiata (songs).

\*The metaphor of te kauwae runga and te kauwae raro (the upper and lower jawbones) was traditionally used in whare wānanga (houses of learning) to distinguish between sacred knowledge and earthly knowledge.

## The knowledge

The knowledge to which the term mātauranga Māori refers is extensive. It encompasses esoteric knowledge (for example, spiritual knowledge held only by certain people) through to day-to-day knowledge (for example, knowledge of practices such as fishing or cultivation).

Some traditional knowledge is common to all Māori. Much traditional knowledge, however, is specific to whānau, hapū, or iwi.

Mātauranga Māori refers to essential aspects of the Māori world, past and present – that is a constant. However, the specifics of mātauranga Māori have evolved over time in response to the changing social and physical environments that Māori have encountered.

## The evolution of Mātauranga Māori

Māori have different origin stories about how they came to live in this country. Some believe that they have always lived here while others believe that their ancestors arrived by bird, by whale, or from the earth itself.

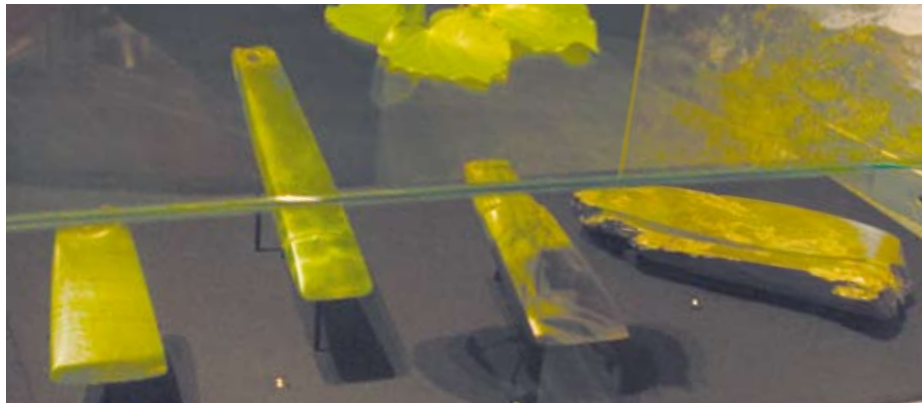
Many Māori believe that their ancestors arrived from their Polynesian homeland by double-hulled canoe more than a thousand years ago. Over time, the knowledge and values that these ancestors brought adapted to the geography, climate, and natural resources of Aotearoa New Zealand. Their tikanga (protocols) evolved to regulate the degree and manner of their interaction with the environment. Important reasons for this regulation included protection of resources for future generations and personal safety.

The values, concepts, culture, and worldview of Māori faced another great challenge with the arrival of Europeans from the late 1700s. Christianity and the written word (among other influences) challenged customary practices. These practices were not all lost, however, and Māori values, language, and protocols weathered the influence of the contact period.

In recent times, these traditional elements have sparked a creative period for Māori people and Māori culture. Mātauranga Māori continues to evolve and to influence the shape of this nation. Ongoing influences on its evolution include:

- the arrival of other immigrant cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand
- relationships with indigenous people from other countries
- efforts to understand and interpret Māori traditions
- emerging technologies.

Given the right conditions, everyone, including Māori and Pākehā, can learn about basic aspects of mātauranga Māori, including tikanga Māori (see page 5), and participate in applying them. For example, they can learn about and take part in a pōwhiri (welcoming ceremony) on a marae (communal meeting place) or in a blessing for an exhibition opening.



### **Why is mātauranga Māori important for museums?**

A museum's understanding of mātauranga Māori creates an opportunity to involve iwi and Māori communities in the way the museum cares for and manages taonga (treasures). It also facilitates valuable partnerships, dynamic and innovative exhibitions, and programmes and storylines relating to taonga and local histories.

### **Key points**

- Mātauranga Māori is holistic and encompasses all situations where Māori concepts, values, themes, or perspectives are apparent.
- Mātauranga Māori is a modern term.
- It is framed by the whakapapa (genealogy) and whanaungatanga (kinship connections) between all things.
- Examples of mātauranga Māori include Māori oral histories, karakia (prayers), and waiata (songs).
- There are levels of mātauranga Māori with differing processes, requirements, or conditions of attainment.
- Much traditional knowledge is specific to whānau, hapū, or iwi.
- Mātauranga Māori has grown and will continue to grow over time.

## What is

# *tikanga Māori?*

**Tikanga Māori 'cannot be understood without making use of mātauranga Māori. All tikanga Māori are firmly embedded in mātauranga Māori ... While mātauranga Māori might be carried in the minds, tikanga Māori puts that knowledge into practice and adds the aspects of correctness and ritual support ... Tikanga Māori might be described as Māori philosophy in practice and as the practical face of Māori knowledge'.<sup>2</sup>**

Tikanga Māori, or Māori protocols, are part of mātauranga Māori. They have evolved over generations in response to the many environments and situations that Māori have faced. They differentiate between values considered right and wrong and provide Māori with a level of predictability of what is expected in specific circumstances.

In simple terms, tikanga are guidelines by which Māori interact:

- with each other
- with visitors to their area
- with the complex situations that arise out of ceremonial life.

As such, tikanga are very important in a museum context.

Every hapū, iwi, and Māori organisation approaches tikanga in a different way. Iwi have particular worldviews and bodies of knowledge. For example, the Whanganui iwi are 'river people', the Ngāi Tūhoe iwi are 'mountain and bush people', and the Ngāti Porou iwi are 'coast people' to name just a few. Their knowledge is based on, and particular to, their surroundings and history.



<sup>2</sup> Mead, H M. (2003). *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori Values*. Wellington: Huia Publishers, p7.

## Tikanga taonga

Certain protocols are required when working with taonga (treasures) to protect the taonga and the people interacting with them, hence the term 'tikanga taonga'.

Tikanga taonga are principally associated with states of mana, tapu, and noa. (For explanations of these concepts, see page 6 of *He Rauemi Resource Guide 8: 'A Guide to Guardians of Iwi Treasures'*. Also see the references at the end of this guide.)

Incorporating tikanga taonga in a museum requires an understanding of the term taonga from a Māori perspective. It also requires an understanding of the concept of mana taonga. These concepts are discussed below.

### Taonga Māori

The term taonga extends beyond Māori-categorised collection items to include:

- natural-environment specimens such as whales or plants
- artworks and other works of visual culture
- any tangible object where Māori concepts, values, themes, or perspectives are evident
- knowledge such as te reo Māori (the Māori language) and other less tangible things.

Many of the objects, histories, and specimens held in museums are therefore important in terms of the mātauranga Māori that may be attached to them.

### Mana taonga

Mana taonga acknowledges the significance of taonga and the knowledge associated with these treasures. It recognises the powerful spiritual and cultural connections that Māori have with taonga and the important role that whānau, hapū, and iwi play in caring for and protecting them.

Because taonga are associated with whānau and hapū, museums need to establish links with Māori at this level. It is then possible to understand the significance of the taonga to the wider iwi and to develop an appropriate approach.



# Incorporating *tikanga Māori*

Understanding tikanga Māori will help you to develop relationships with whānau, hapū, and iwi. It will also allow your museum to care for and manage taonga in more culturally appropriate ways.

Many museums have already begun to incorporate aspects of tikanga Māori in their work processes. For example, they welcome new staff or special guests with pōwhiri (welcoming ceremonies), open exhibitions with karakia (prayers), or restrict food near taonga.



## Examples of tikanga taonga

The following are basic tikanga practiced when working with and around taonga. Because whānau, hapū, and iwi have different views on appropriate behaviour, use the rules below as a starting point only.

- Avoid bringing food or drink near taonga, whether they are on display or in storage.  
There are many reasons for this. One example is that every taonga has a mauri (life force), and food (particularly heated food) neutralises that life force.
- Avoid standing over or stepping across taonga.  
Generally speaking, if we think of taonga as living entities, then we begin to understand why it is inappropriate to step across them. Treat taonga with the utmost respect at all times.
- Have water available, separate from but near collection areas.  
Māori use water for cleansing, symbolically cleansing themselves after leaving taonga storage areas to clearly separate their transition from a 'tapu' (sacred) space back into the outside world.

Other ways that your staff may choose to be guided by tikanga taonga include:

- saying karakia
- not participating in areas about which they have no knowledge or guidance (for example, carving and weaving areas)
- for women, not working with taonga while menstruating.

## Consulting with iwi, hapū, and whānau

Remember, tikanga are not arbitrary. There are reasons behind the protocols – and different iwi, hapū, and even whānau apply them differently.

Be guided by the iwi from your region (which, if necessary, will link you up with the appropriate hapū or whānau). Also, refer to the conditions under which the taonga were loaned or given to your museum (if these conditions are known). As a first step, your staff need to research these whānau, hapū, or iwi links and how the taonga came to be held in your museum.

If you are unsure about the tikanga practised in museums – particularly those concerning taonga – consider the following options:

- If you have Māori staff (for example, a Māori collection manager or Māori curator), ask them for guidance. You may also be able to use their networks to make contact with Māori at whānau and hapū level.
- The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and Māori Museum Workers (Kaitiaki Māori) have established iwi networks. Contact National Services Te Paerangi staff, who may be able to suggest contacts.
- Consult directly with local kaumātua (elders) or tribal authorities (trust board or rūnanga). The local tribal body should be able to advise you on whom to contact.

For further information on tikanga Māori, see the references at the end of this guide.





# Questions for reflection

Once you have an understanding of what mātauranga Māori is, you can begin to consider its importance to your work. You can identify opportunities to include it in your museum processes and products.

Some key questions to consider include:

- How do our museum practices express the values and practices of Māori, and how will they do this in the future?
- How do we currently work in partnership with whānau, hapū, iwi, and Māori organisations?
- How do we respond to requests from whānau, hapū, and iwi?
- How do our policies and processes support the development of mātauranga Māori in our organisation?
- How do our exhibition and collection-development processes support the research and inclusion of mātauranga Māori?
- Who can we turn to for advice and support on Māori matters. For example, do we have Māori leadership or support on our Board?
- How do we currently deal with taonga Māori when acquiring, caring for, and accessing our collections, and in terms of our information management?
- What is our organisation's current level of understanding of, and capability in, te reo and tikanga Māori? What processes do we have in place to develop our understanding further?
- How do we know if we are doing things well in relation to mātauranga Māori?  
How do we measure the quality of our practices, policies, and procedures?



# Next steps

The following action plan suggests activities that may advance your museum's practices concerning mātauranga Māori.

- Hold a series of forums to discuss topics such as:
  - the Treaty of Waitangi
  - mātauranga Māori and tikanga Māori
  - a philosophy of taonga
  - the role of the museum today
  - models of biculturalism
  - successful working relationships with Māori.
- Consider and review your museum's relationship with Māori in the community.  
Use your networks (or the networks of people you work or associate with) to develop meaningful partnerships with iwi and Māori organisations in your region.
- Review current policies and procedures.  
Your policies should challenge the way your organisation currently works. Set the bar high – incorporating mātauranga Māori into museum practice is a work in progress. Talk to other museums to see what they are doing.
- Develop a regional working group of museums to discuss these opportunities.  
If there are other museums in your region, work together and involve Māori from your community as much as possible. You are likely to make more headway and place less strain on your local iwi.



# *Te Maori*

## A case study

In the past, museums didn't always involve Māori in the care, management, and display of taonga Māori. Taonga were often bought, bartered, or removed from tribal areas without appropriate permission. As the level of consciousness about Māori involvement has risen, collection development processes have changed in positive ways.

One of the events responsible for this shift in consciousness was the *Te Maori* exhibition. This exhibition opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1984. It toured museums in the United States before returning home in 1986 to visit major cities here.

*Te Maori* presented Māori people, knowledge, and culture to the world. It was met with enthusiasm and acclaim overseas and with enormous pride when it returned to New Zealand.

The exhibition itself was a great success, but the most important shift for Māori was the involvement of Māori in the exhibition's development. *Te Maori* marked a significant change in the way Māori people were consulted and included in exhibitions featuring their tribal taonga. It sparked a new understanding of, and respect for, the Māori people and Māori visual culture.

'To the unknowing, the pieces themselves were merely made of wood and stone, but when the elders with the young come together to chant the rituals of yesteryear, and to sing the songs that recount the history, the hopes, and the aspirations of the people – then the exhibition lives.'<sup>3</sup>

### What was done differently?

- The exhibition's development acknowledged the connection between Māori people and tribal taonga, including the role of Māori as spiritual and cultural guardians. Iwi representatives were consulted on matters concerning their taonga, and they travelled with the exhibition.
- Māori people were involved in decision-making about their taonga, including how the taonga would be interpreted, presented, and displayed.
- Māori art was presented as a living and dynamic art form, closely connected with the Māori people.

<sup>3</sup> Wetere, Koro, Minister of Māori Affairs. (Spring 1986). *AGMANZ Journal*, 17:3, pp6-7.

### Further reading

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### Useful websites

[www.tekahuimangai.govt.nz](http://www.tekahuimangai.govt.nz)

A directory of iwi and Māori organisations in New Zealand

### Acknowledgements

This guide was written by Karl Johnstone. Some of the material has been adapted from *Mātauranga Māori and Museum Practice* where this subject is treated extensively (see 'Further reading' above).

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