

## Are Designers Diluting Culture? Connecting Theory to Practice

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### Abstract

The cohabitation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in this post-colonial society is a hefty but necessary topic that must be discussed. This is particularly important for landscape architects, as we are responsible for designing our urban public spaces and cities. Māori, the Indigenous people of Aotearoa, have struggled with land theft, and the erasure of their history and identity since the first European settlers arrived. Aotearoa has come a long way regarding cultural acceptance, acknowledgment and collaboration when it comes to design. This is evident, as engaging with mana whenua is considered of national importance in the Resource Management Act; however, the effects of colonisation still impact Māori today. As designers responsible for our public realm, we can aim to address these issues and create a co-habitable society that embraces and empowers all. Although this is the intent of many landscape architecture groups, is it appropriate to label recent projects as transformative and progressive if the design process follows colonial thinking, lacks authenticity and spirituality, and is essentially “a copy of something that never existed”?

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