

asylum

rethinking our future neighbourhoods

Designing Neighbourhoods to Facilitate Intercultural Encounters: Negotiating Between Self, Society and Place

Niyati Soni

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Introduction

Globalisation, and the consequent migratory processes, have radically transformed many countries across the world. A greater number of people with diverse backgrounds have been travelling to more places for numerous reasons.¹ Consequently, immigrants have become an intrinsic part of most societies across the globe. When an individual travels from one place to another, they carry unique cultural information about specific areas. As such, immigrants inadvertently influence the spatial environment they interact with. Consequently, the built context of destination areas can be interpreted as the physical manifestation of accumulated information over time. Thus, immigrants effectively serve as catalysts for increasing levels of cultural flow between the place they have come from and the place they choose to resettle.

However, through this shift immigrants often face a personal and/or cultural identity crisis. They find themselves as ‘other’ – disconnected from their cultivated personality in their former environment and distinct from the ‘norm’ in their new context. As a result of their ‘difference,’ the immigrant can often feel or become

marginalised, discriminated against, or isolated within the neighbourhoods they settle in.² In such situations, these individuals face the challenge of adapting to new influences whilst also preserving cultural and geographical associations they may have inherited or cultivated in their place of origin. Thus, there exists a need for host countries to develop neighbourhoods to suit these needs – and subsequently reduce the adverse impacts of immigration. However, to respond to this, it is crucial to first understand how an immigrant’s cultural identity is defined, developed, and expressed as a consequence of the process of resettlement.³ To do so, the following research will analyse both subjective insights – of being an immigrant – and objective knowledge, gathered from literature regarding immigrant discourse.

Immigrant Identity and Experience

Various theories have been articulated to argue the constraints implied on, and the malleability of, an individual’s identity evolution. Through primordialism, one’s identity is premised on the perspective that it is predetermined through biological and familial factors that are assumed to be unreservedly passed down by kin or elders in one’s community of origin. Hence, an

individual will always be predisposed to relate with the same ethnic, national, or shared group they were born into.⁴ Alternatively, constructivism argues that an individual will have multiple identities that are socially constructed through interaction with other people and constantly influenced by the changing political, economic and/or social conditions one is exposed to. However, both these theories have been challenged by increased, and varied, levels of national, ethnic, religious, social, cultural and political exposures faced by immigrants. However, the essentialist nature of primordialism and its dependence on stagnancy does not recognise the impact of the influences and adaptations an immigrant’s identity may be subject to when trying to establish connections within a new context. And while constructivism enables immigrants to characterise themselves as affiliated with varied groups, this belief system may also encourage the rejection of those that believe in a more manifest truth.

The consideration of both perspectives together has inspired another view of identity evolution, termed constructed primordiality.⁵ This theory advocates for a

1 Steven Vertovec, Daniel Heibert, Alan Gamlen, and Paul Spoonley, “Superdiversity: Today’s Migration Has Made Cities More Diverse than Ever – in Multiple Ways,” <https://superdiv.mmg.mpg.de/#vancouver-intro?bubble;filter:Total%20population?map;variables:o,o;mode:traditional?tree;year:2012;category:Humanitarian?sankey;year:1991?dashboard;filters:99,99,99,99,99>

2 Ashleigh Ali-Aziz, ed., *Think Diversity: Different Journeys, One Destination*, 2nd ed. (Wellington: Eyeview Ethnic Trust, n.d).

3 Niyati Soni, “Facilitating Intercultural Encounters: Through the Negotiation between Self, Society, and Place” (master’s thesis, University of Auckland, 2022), 21, <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/61038>

4 Sheila Croucher, *Globalization and Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 42.

5 Ibid, 45.

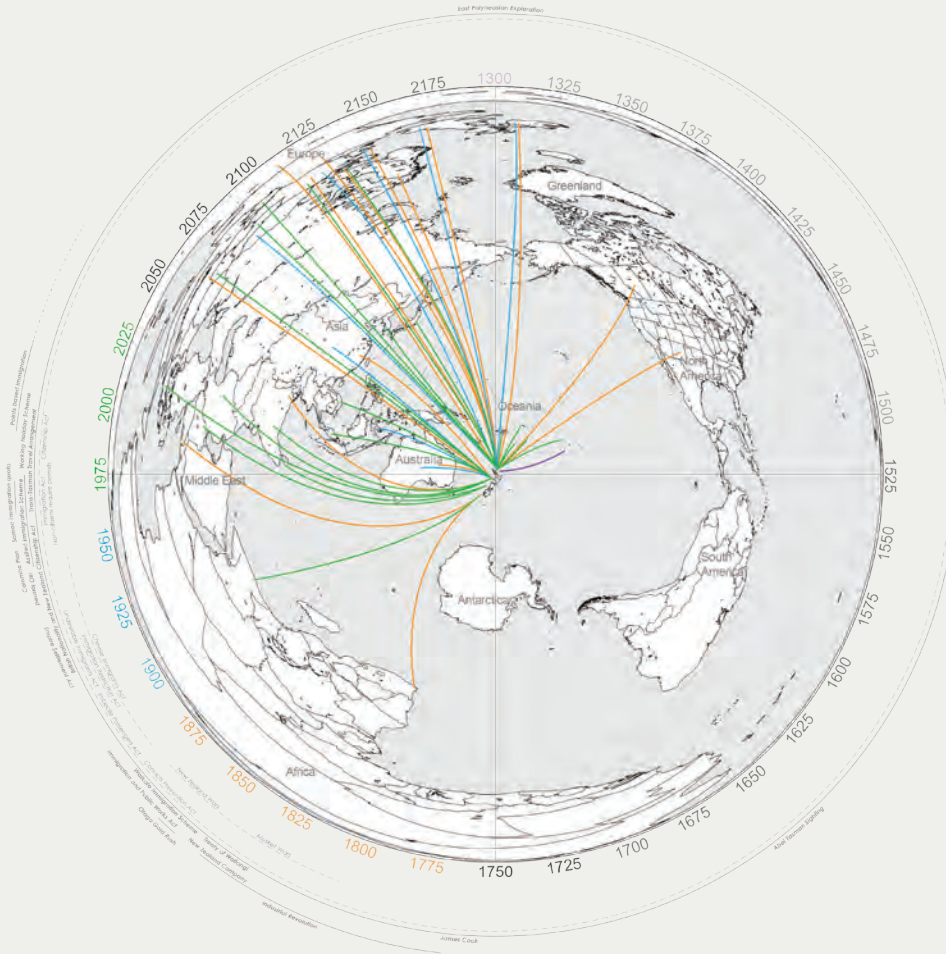


Figure 1. Diagram of mapping migratory movements to Aotearoa New Zealand over time. Image: Author.

critical and ongoing evaluation of the negotiation between the predetermined and self-determined attributes that may characterise identity. It involves reference to “salient and important past events, and the creation of links between those events and the present self”⁶ to delineate the crucial rituals, actions and activities that have been persistently practised or abided by throughout an individual’s life. For immigrants, these defining markers of one’s identity become the most apparent and challenging at the time of resettlement – when they are faced with the choice of heritage-based and/or host-based cultural acquisition.⁷ Consequently, immigrant identity can then be construed as a “unique synthesis of established cultural constructs and varied affiliations”⁸ which is “one of perpetual choice.”⁹ As this can result in innumerable permutations, the identity of an individual – especially an immigrant – should always be self-defined. However, the multiplicity inherent in this notion of identity implies that the performances and expressions of immigrants’ authentic selves will differ, if not be revealed, “depending on the opportunities afforded (and denied) by a given context.”¹⁰

To recognise the unique needs of immigrants, McLean and Syed have developed a master narrative framework.¹¹ Master narratives are culturally specific stories that provide insight into socially accepted values, practices and ideologies shared amongst the host society. While some immigrants may be able to adopt these factors completely to ‘fit in,’ other immigrants who cannot relate or do not feel accommodated by the master narrative will create alternative narratives – stories that describe an individual’s ‘difference’ from the expected ‘norms’ in a new context.¹² While this interrogative and comparative articulation of stories

6 Kate C. McLean and Moin Syed, “Personal, Master, and Alternative Narratives: An Integrative Framework for Understanding Identity Development in Context,” *Human Development* 58, no. 6 (2015): 321, <https://doi.org/10.1159/000445817>

7 Seth J. Schwartz, Jennifer B. Unger, Byron L. Zamboanga, and José Szapocznik, “Rethinking the Concept of Acculturation: Implications for Theory and Research,” *American Psychologist* 65, no. 4 (2010): 237.

8 Soni, “Facilitating Intercultural Encounters,” 22.

9 Themrise Khan, “Is It Possible to Define Immigrant Identity?” *Routed*, <https://www.routedmagazine.com/omc2020-1-immig-identity>

10 Shaun Wiley and Kay Deaux, “The Bicultural Identity Performance of Immigrants.” In *Identity and Participation in Culturally Diverse Societies: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Assaad E. Azzi, Xenia Chrysochoou, Bert Klendermans, and Bernd Simon (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 51, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444328158.ch3>

11 McLean and Syed, “Personal, Master, and Alternative Narratives,” 322.

12 Kate C. McLean, Jennifer P. Lilgendahl, Chelsea Fordham, Elizabeth Alpert, Emma Marsden, Kathryn Szymanowski, and Dan P. McAdams, “Identity Development in Cultural Context: The Role of Deviating from Master Narratives,” *Journal of Personality* 86, no. 4 (2018): 634, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12341>

enables immigrants to consolidate the understanding of their own identity, it also assists people who have input in moulding the surrounding social context to recognise the specific contextual constructs that can adversely impact immigrants and their identity development. Therefore, this article advocates for, and tests, the extrapolation of this framework into a design guideline that can be utilised to create places that can facilitate 'difference' in a positive manner, celebrate diversity and enable the self-representation and integration of immigrants within globalised societies.

Concepts of Self: Soul, Body, Mind

Personally, I choose to self-categorise as an Indian New Zealander. At the age of four years, I immigrated with my family to Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, from Mumbai, India. Since then, consciously and subconsciously, I have constantly altered my dialogue, behaviours and expressed preferences in attempts to conform to the norms of particular cultural communities, spaces or situations.

This experience, combined with my academic progression toward becoming an architect, directs the incentive for this research. In agreement with the theory of constructed primordiality, I believe that my identity is comprised of many facets – each moulded by the interactions, observations and experiences I have encountered in numerous social situations and diverse cultural contexts throughout my life. As such, each facet of my 'self' requires a unique place, space, or situation in which I can express, develop or advocate my authenticity. This is the design incentive for my research. To do so, then, each and/or any facet deemed to be most impacted by resettlement will be interrogated – through the scribing of narratives that articulate the intersectionality between my cultural connections with India and my experiences with diversity

in Aotearoa New Zealand. While my master's thesis¹³ explored the multiple facets of my identity, for the scope of this article, I will only focus on one – which I have named 'soul.'

The narrative of 'soul' relates to my affiliation to religion as a Hindu Punjabi, and how my interpretation of Hinduism may differ from established, or perceived, norms and expectations within the community. As such, my unique religious performances/practices revealed in the following narrative will be the driver of the design process.

Digressing from Hindu conventions, I do not believe in any deity; as a manifestation of a supreme being or God. Instead, I guide decisions based on two core ideologies inherent in Hinduism: ātman and karma, both referencing energy as the source of all existence ... This energy – the spirit or true essence of one's being encapsulated within a human form – is called the soul or ātman. Fundamentally, the Hindu purpose of existence is "to transcend individually, [and] realize one's own true nature" by positively nurturing the ātman through every lifetime. To fulfil this, Hindus abide by karma, whereby the actions throughout past life/times have corresponding consequences impacting the present and determining the future.

[And] while my spiritual connections are aligned with selected Hindu values, my expressions of the soul are influenced by [inter-]cultural exposure and [diverse] religious practices. The religious practices I perform are meditation and introspection. I meditate by simultaneously chanting and performing yoga in respect and

gratitude for my body and all it has endured to support me through life. This allows me to acknowledge my ātman and reconsolidate my spiritual purpose. I introspect by interrogating my karma through spiritual journaling in places away from my usual environment. In doing so, I analyse my actions whilst identifying specific activities, gestures, and linguistic tools which I have observed/experienced from other cultures and would like to inculcate in my daily life.¹⁴

Existing Urban Context *Migration in the age of globalisation*

As the destination for my resettlement, and a city that has been identified as the fourth most ethnically diverse city globally, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, is the urban setting of focus for my research.¹⁵ Whilst this young country has attracted and absorbed numerous waves of immigrants from various areas across the world over time,¹⁶ the existing built environment is not reflective of the cultural variances and anomalies that characterise this ever-diversifying composition. The key approaches that direct actions towards and for, and management of, diversity within this country are categorised into three socio-cultural models: biculturalism, multiculturalism and interculturalism.

Theoretically, Aotearoa New Zealand is founded by a bicultural political structure that acknowledges the authority of the Crown and upholds the recognition of Māori as tāngata whenua. However, the debates on implemented equity between these groups are ongoing.¹⁷

In response to these debates and in reflection of immigration flows, initiatives and management strategies intending to acknowledge and accommodate all existing cultures have been formed – most of which stem from the

¹³ Soni, "Facilitating Intercultural Encounters," 27.

¹⁴ Ibid, 28.

¹⁵ International Organization for Migration, *World Migration Report 2015 – Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility* vol. 8, 2015, 39, <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2015-migrants-and-cities-new-partnerships-manage-mobility>

¹⁶ Hiromi Ishizawa and Dharma Arunachalam, "Ethnic Neighbourhoods in Auckland, New Zealand," *Urban Policy and Research* 32, no. 4 (October 2, 2014): 419–420, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0811146.2013.877391>

¹⁷ Francis Leo Collins and Wardlow Friesen, "Making the Most of Diversity? The Intercultural City Project and a Rescaled Version of Diversity in Auckland, New Zealand," *Urban Studies* (Edinburgh, Scotland) 48, no. 14 (2011): 3068, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098010394686>

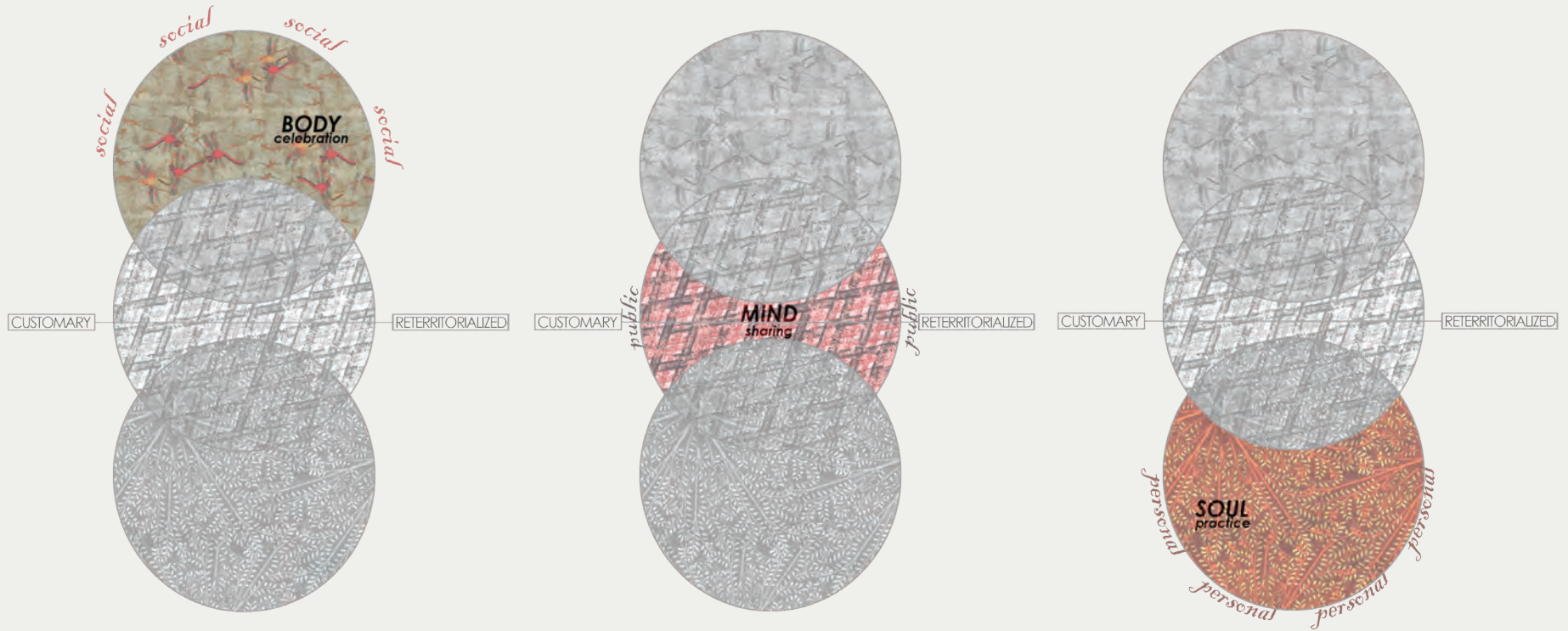


Figure 2. Diagrams of my identity facets. Image: Author.

ideologies of multiculturalism. In Aotearoa New Zealand, its implementation has been manifested in two forms. On one hand, symbolic differences such as food and ethnic ceremonies have been enabled and encouraged through permissions granted for community-based events. On the other, formal policies to aid marginalised groups have been established. However, while both these forms have actively accommodated specific preferences and requirements for varied groups, these approaches have been considered to “overemphasise diversity, without building on the bonds that unite people.”¹⁸

The search for alternative approaches to managing diversity reveals the importance of cultural exchange as a prerequisite for the development of societal constructs that “cannot be derived from one culture alone but through an open and equal dialogue between them.”¹⁹ This can occur in two scenarios: through interpersonal cultural encounters, wherein one can express inner values, beliefs and practices within a trusted group or comfortable environment, and through social encounters, wherein one is exposed to, learns from and increases tolerance towards other cultures. In reflection of this, this article advocates for “the facilitation of

intercultural encounters – wherein different cultural groups/individuals are instigated and/or enabled to ‘correct and complement each other, [and to] expand each other’s horizon[s] of thought’.”²⁰

Urban context

Today, Aotearoa New Zealand is home to over 200 ethnic groups,²¹ with immigrants residing predominantly in the Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland region. While some suburbs have been spatially appropriated entirely by the rapid influx of immigrants, other areas have witnessed more subtle and partial adaptations of the existing built

¹⁸ “What Interculturalism Is About?” Council of Europe OP Services, Vimeo, 2019, <https://vimeo.com/340202838>

¹⁹ Bhikhu C. Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, UK; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 13.

²⁰ Ibid, 167.

²¹ Vaimoana Tapaleao, “Auckland ‘More Diverse’ Than London,” *New Zealand Herald*, March 4, 2014, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/auckland-now-more-diverse-than-london/GAKIORANZOOGNA314BUVHRWLMU/>

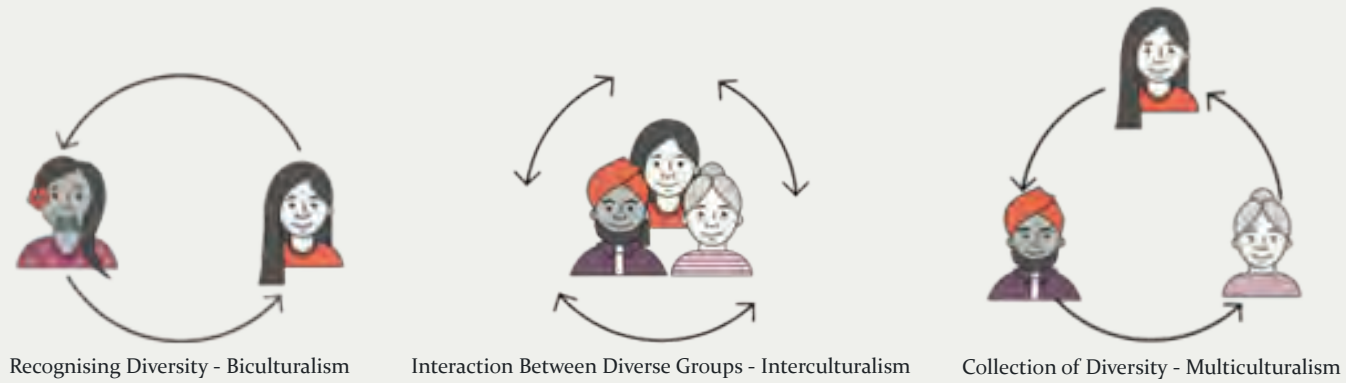


Figure 3. Visual representations of biculturalism, multiculturalism and interculturalism. Image: Author.



Figure 4. Diagram of the diversity encapsulated within Auckland Central. Image: Author.

environs. However, the intersection of immigrants, tourists and working people from various backgrounds is greatest in Auckland central. This is due to its commercial profile, and its critical positioning at the geographical centre of the entire region and the region's public transportation network. As such, the area hosts the greatest prevalence of intentional or happenstance interaction between diverse groups.

While many sites within this area can be developed to facilitate intercultural encounters, the public realm of the city is of most interest for this research due to three reasons:

1. Public spaces serve as platforms of expression where a range of activities, forms and people are most likely to be accepted and celebrated, or at least acknowledged.
2. Public spaces in the city serve as thoroughfares, rest places and/or exotic destinations. As they are constantly accessed by many, the chance of encountering cultural diversity is almost inevitable.
3. Compared with the rest of the region, Auckland central has the most publicly used typologies that can be, or are already planned to be, developed for the purpose of cultural advocacy.

Research question

Thus, the research question that frames the rest of this exploration is: How can the representation of 'self' transform a public space in order to facilitate intercultural encounters?

Methodology

Space into place

The term 'space' is understood as a "continuous area or expanse which is free, available or unoccupied" and is

physically defined by "dimensions of height, depth, and width within which all things exist and move."²² Whereas 'place' exists through the amalgamation of three components: "the physical setting, human activities, and the human psychological processes relating to it."²³ While spaces can physically exist in their material form, without the latter two components they do not embody any meaning or have any value to any person.

In the specific context of immigration, architectural lecturer Stephan Cairns suggests the built environment can be transformed in four ways: it can either be created for, adapted by or designed by immigrants, or it can be subject to architectural migrancy – wherein built forms from an immigrant's origin country are reconstructed at the new destination.²⁴ When meaning is ascribed to a space through these methods, immigrants may be enabled to inculcate known conditions into their new environment through culturally directed adaptations, active engagements or decorative measures, while exhibiting cultural knowledge and skills to society. This establishes their sense of belonging to that place. Thus, not only do these constructions enable one's cultural empowerment, but they also highlight the value of the immigrant within their new context and inspire other diverse hybrid tectonics and aesthetics.

Precedent study

By cross-referencing Cairns's categories with the functions outlined in the narrative about my soul, I have been able to identify built precedents that may have design features that can possibly facilitate the maintenance, development or expression of my religious practices; namely meditation and/or introspection. The analysis revealed such typologies are either designed to represent people of a particular religion, or are devoid of any symbolic features in order to cater to as many people as possible.

22 "Space," Lexico, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/space>

23 Andrea M. Brandenburg and Matthew S. Carroll, "Your Place or Mine?: The Effect of Place Creation on Environmental Values and Landscape Meanings," *Society & Natural Resources* 8, no. 5 (September 1995): 384, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941929509380931>

24 Stephen Cairns, "Drifting: Architecture/Migrancy," in *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy*, ed. Stephen Cairns (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 17–47.





Figure 5. Rani ki Vav, a stepwell in Patan, Gujarat, India. Photo: Bernard Gagnon. Source: Wikimedia Commons. CC BY SA- 3.0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rani_ki_vav_02.jpg

Multi-faith spaces

An example of the latter is multi-faith spaces. Spatially, the most prevalent form of this typology is the “empty white room.”²⁵ To avoid association with any singular religious group, these are created by the absence of any elements – material, structural, iconic or otherwise. With only storage provisions as physical elements, and sometimes supported by external supplementary facilities such as ablution areas, these banal spaces can be constantly repurposed to suit specific needs. Consequently, the inexhaustive adaptability and multifunctionality of this typology has necessitated its inclusion within utilitarian public areas that are subject to the greatest density of diversity – such as airports, universities and hospitals.

Stepwell

Another typology of interest is a stepwell. Although essentially created for irrigation purposes, the spatial experience provided by the space has enabled it to be appropriated – in function – as a place of worship. Architecturally, a stepwell is formed by the strategic composition of three key elements: *kūtas* – tower-like pavilions created from platforms and columns – which are placed at regular intervals through a stepped corridor descending towards the *kūpa* – a vertical well shaft.²⁶ As water is recognised by many religions to be associated with purification and spiritual cleansing, the descent enabled by a stepwell is akin to a pilgrimage. While the subterranean subspaces framed by the *kūtas* serve as places for social gatherings, the *kūpa* located at the end of the journey allows for various religious activities, such as baptisms, rites of blessing or spiritual bathing, to take place. Consequently, then, the various expanses and enclosures encountered within the stepwell are conducive of experiences that can encourage both interactivity and introspection.

25 Andrew Crompton, “The Architecture of Multifaith Spaces: God Leaves the Building,” *The Journal of Architecture* 18, no. 4 (2013): 487, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2013.821149>

26 Jutta Jain-Neubauer, *The Stepwells of Gujarat: In Art-Historical Perspective*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1981), 2.



Figure 6. Archimedes Palimpsest. Photo: Matthew Kon, courtesy of the Walters Museum. Source: Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Archimedes_Palimpsest.jpg

Place-Making Techniques

Palimpsests

In the current urban context, all appropriations of the built environment presuppose a negotiation between existing and desired built conditions. Architect Paul Lukez argues that all physical sites exist as *palimpsests* – built products conceived from the iterative superimposition of “successive operations of transformation on a site over time.”²⁷ Therefore, in order to transform any existing space into a place of belonging, the first step of the design process is to decipher what elements from the existing context are of value. Only then can demolition or construction be accordingly and appropriately implemented on the site. Every instance of this process, which causes a transformation of the site, is considered an ‘episode’ of the site’s existence.²⁸ The identification and examination of these episodes collectively reveal the hierarchical influences that mould a site and inspire, guide, or limit the possibilities for its further development. Not only does this analysis reveal

Figure 7. Collage based on the graphic understanding of traditional Indian scroll paintings. Image: Author.

27 Paul Lukez, *Suburban Transformations* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), 26.

28 Geoffrey Bailey, “Time Perspectives, Palimpsests and the Archaeology of Time,” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 26 (2007): 207, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaa.2006.08.002>



material or temporal changes of the context, it also highlights the multiplicity of meanings, associations and functions ascribed to a site by its various users. This in turn directs any future transformations to be directed toward “emphasizing the coexistence of multiple visions and impacts of different cultures on the landscape.”²⁹

Scroll paintings

Once a site is selected and assessed as above, the potential of it becoming an intended place is conceived through design proposals – mostly presented via two-dimensional drawings. While architects traditionally utilise sections, elevations and plans to describe the potential appropriation of space through tectonics, this article advocates for the recognition of scroll paintings as an alternative visualisation tool. Serving as visual manifestations of cultural information, scroll paintings have been used to record illustrative narratives of mythology, folklore, traditions and ideologies of various regions.³⁰ Historically belonging to itinerant painter minstrels, these scrolls would be carried to various towns and presented through an oral explanation to support the visuals as the painting was unrolled. As these drawings are based on scenarios rather than a subject, this performance enables viewers to become travellers in the paintings – connecting intimately to the places, cultural activities and time periods being represented.

Collage

A drawing technique that can be extrapolated from both these concepts is collaging. By layering, overlapping and juxtaposing various two-dimensional mediums, unique understandings and perceptions about the base components are revealed. When analysed as a whole, the resultant composition can even present new potentialities of three-dimensional space. Therefore, in architectural discourse, the holistic approach of this technique can appropriately consider the importance of existing elements within a site and seamlessly incorporate the proposed. As a result, the usage of the site in its existing neighbourhood is acknowledged and either encouraged,

challenged or incorporated in response to absorbing and welcoming the cultural nuances immigrants bring to the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the versatility of collage enables its implementation at numerous levels of the design process for various purposes; i.e., for the investigation and isolation of critical elements during initial design phases or for the means of visualisation and presentation towards the end of the design process.

Architectural Strategy

In response to the research question, the various concepts, theories and processes discussed above have been amalgamated into a four-phase guide that outlines steps for manifesting the ‘self’ into a representational built form.

Phase One: Brief development

The brief articulates the requirements of representing one’s ‘self.’ It consists of three parts:

1. Functional intent – outlines the key functions

to be facilitated: the core practices, activities and actions extrapolated from one’s identity narrative/s.

2. Design intent – identifies core design elements from the precedent study which can be utilised to cater for the above-chosen functions.
3. Site selection – provides insight into how the existing spatial conditions of a selected site may support the design and functional intent.

Phase Two: Visual ideation

Utilising palimpsest as a tool to spatially interrogate the selected site, this phase combines site analysis and design conception to create a three-dimensional physical collage that explores the site’s spatial evolution over time.

Firstly, information about the site is collected, segregated and categorised into groups, forming the layers of the collage. Each layer relates to an episode of the site’s existence; it conveys

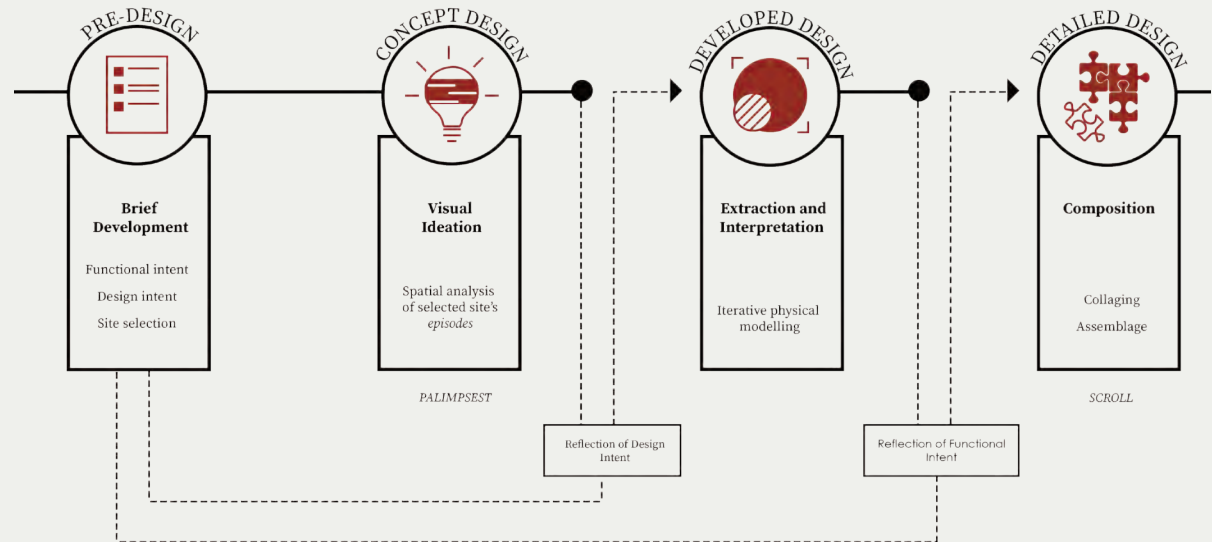


Figure 8. Diagram of the proposed four-phase guide to manifesting the ‘self’ into a representational built form. Image: Author.

29 Ivan Mitin, “Palimpsest,” in *Encyclopedia of Geography*, ed. Barney Warf (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2010), 2111, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412939591>
 30 Tasneem Sariya, “Scroll Paintings of India – A Fine Mix of Story-Telling and Art,” *Caleidoscope* (blog), September 23, 2019, <https://www.caleidoscope.in/art-culture/scroll-paintings-of-india>

a visual depiction of the site and its features and functions at a specific period – the past, present or future.³¹

These layers are then superimposed chronologically by two fundamental operations: reading (the critical analysis of the existing composition); and writing (adding further layers) or erasing (removing/covering aspects of the existing composition). Following the assemblage of the initial layer – representing the site’s conception – the traces that prevail through the subsequent superimpositions reveal the resilience of specific materiality, form, spatial arrangements and/or planning constraints that should be appropriately acknowledged by the future layer.

Phase Three: Extraction and interpretation

This phase consists of the interpretation and extraction of key spatial elements from the palimpsest through model making. While the overall form and function of these models will be derived from the precedents, the materiality, spatial composition and details will reference the layers present in the palimpsest. Consequently, these models are considerate of both the existing site and the cultural nuances inherent in the precedents of interest. These models are then photographed and digitally manipulated into spatial moments that can exist on their own or in conjunction with other models as complete spaces. They serve as experimental iterations to test ideas regarding the planning, aesthetics and form of the final intervention.

Phase Four: Composition

This phase amalgamates visualisation techniques from scroll paintings and architectural drawings to present the final design intervention as a ‘place’ of belonging. This is done through two steps: interpretation of spatial moments into a final design form; and narration of function. Firstly, the spatial moments that best support the functional intent are amalgamated into specific arrangements that visualise various aspects of the proposed intervention. The drawings generated are plans, perspectives and architectural scrolls. Secondly, the perspectives and architectural scrolls are embellished with artistically varied characters

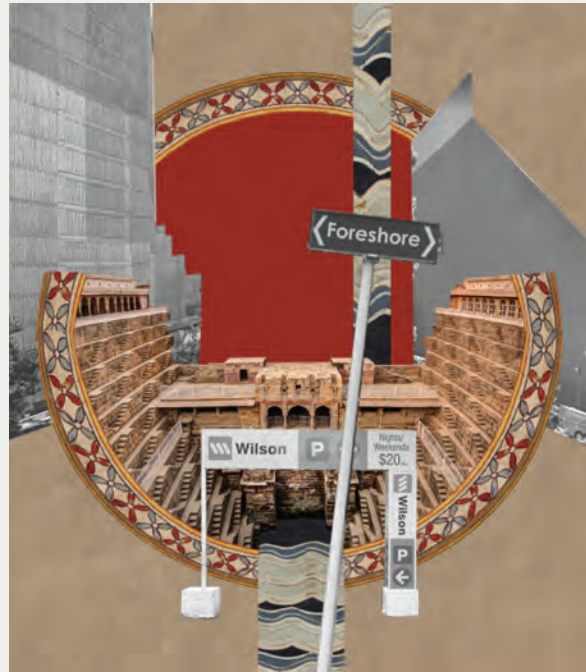


Figure 9. Collage conceptualising a place of soul. Image: Author.

representing how the proposed intervention can be used differently to stay relevant through time and for different cultural groups. Consequently, this presentation method prioritises communicating the ambience, experiences and cultural meanings evoked by, and through, the intervention – rather than just describing its physical structure, as may be the case via more traditional formats of architectural visualisation.

**Proposed Intervention: Rūh-sthaan – Place of Soul
Brief development**

Responding to the unorthodox practices I choose to perform when expressing my religion, the functional intent of this intervention is to create a place for introspection and meditation that enables me to collect, concentrate and reflect on actions to reaffirm my faith. To do so, the design intent for this proposal is to amalgamate arrangements

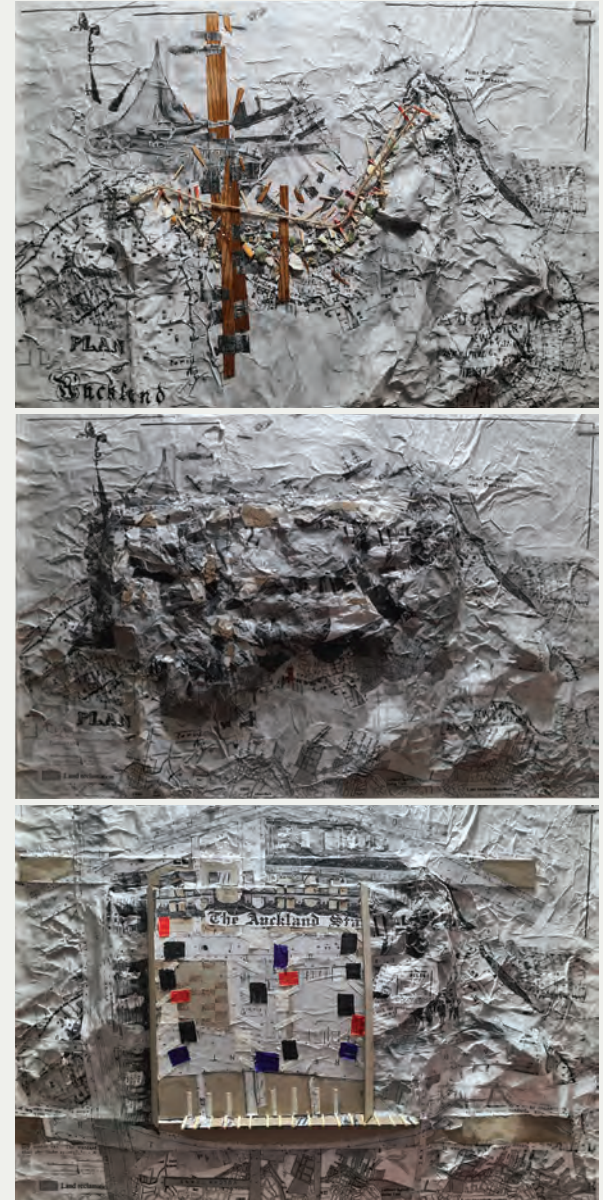
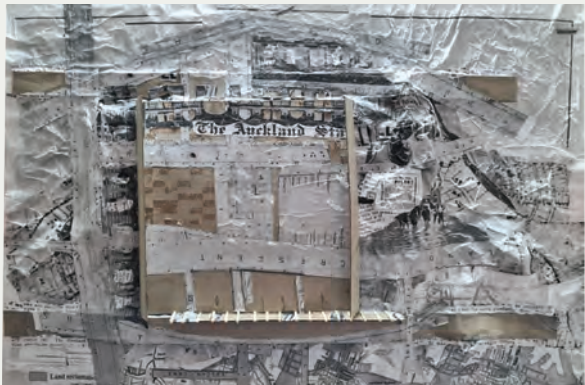


Figure 10. Photographs of physical collaged ‘episodes’ of 27 Fort Street. Image: Author.

31 For more detail, see Soni, “Facilitating Intercultural Encounters,” 102.



that enforce the universality of multi-faith spaces with features that enable the introspective atmosphere of a stepwell.

Thus, derived from the precedent analysis, the core design elements implemented in this design are a body of water, entrances, passages, and platforms.

Visual ideation

The site selected for the development of this intervention is 27 Fort Street – an underutilised car park and transitory circulation space located within Auckland central’s laneway network. Historically, this site existed as the entrance to the city and its location marks the original shoreline. Following colonisation, it was one of the first sites to be reclaimed, and triggered the cartesian grid arrangement that characterises the present-day city layout. Serving as a crucial circulatory pathway intersecting numerous streets, the car park is spatially introspective as it is surrounded by tall buildings, and maintains an uninterrupted view of the waterfront.

Therefore, it is envisioned that this site will be excavated in a manner that carves out an encircling terraced form of a stepwell. Numerous layers of ground will be unearthed by stepped multi-faith pavilions spread through a passageway focused around, and leading towards, a body of water that commemorates the site’s historical use and enables spiritual connection. While some pavilions will emphatically be designed to facilitate private meditation practices, others will exist as open ambiguous zones for people to collect, concentrate and practise introspection and reflection.

Extraction and interpretation

Based on the site’s significant change in materiality through reclamation processes, the models extracted from the palimpsest are formed from the manipulation of or juxtaposition between historically reflective materials – clay, timber, shells – and a material utilised for reclamation – concrete.

Driven by the need to facilitate different environments for varying spiritual practices, the ‘spatial moments’ conceived from the models are arranged to support fundamental interactions one may have with the proposed built form: confrontation, transition and inhabitation.

The collaged moments of confrontation explore the impression an individual may obtain before engaging with the intervention or a particular space within it. The intervention will be created by prying open the ground vertically through multiple platforms, which will either serve as floors or roofs. Each platform lifted above the existing ground level serves as the roof for the subspace associated with it; the lower the roof is to the existing ground level, the deeper the subspace within the intervention. Thus, the observer will understand the intervention is curated as an assemblage of subspaces and alludes to the subterranean atmosphere that is to be experienced.

The moments of transition explore the experiences an individual may have when circulating through the intervention. The descending stepped form proposed will be designed to facilitate a journey of choice. While all pathways within will lead towards the spiritual body of water, the various options of changes in levels provide inhabitants agency to direct their experience. As an individual descends into the intervention, each level will be predominantly formed through concrete, wood and clay – in that order. Not only does this strategic material change allude to the historical structural transformation of the site, but the affiliated changes in temperature and illumination also guide the sensorial experience of an inhabitant journeying through the place. It enables a seamless and comfortable transition from the bustling environment of the city towards an intimate oasis within.

The moments of inhabitation explore the tectonic formation of the areas for activity within the intervention. Symbolically, the intervention forefronts the ‘natural’



Figure 12. Exploring how the ground can be lifted and sunken to generate spaces. Image: Author.



Figure 14. Exploring how the journey through the intervention can be arranged. Image: Author.



Figure 17. Exploring the spatial possibilities of retaining structures. Image: Author.

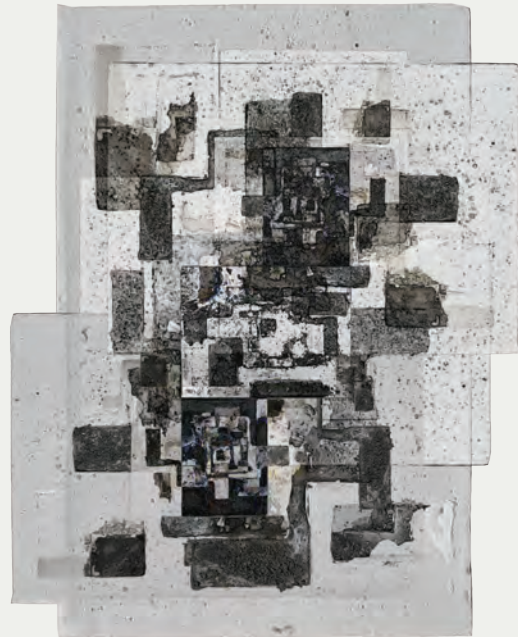


Figure 13. Exploring how the ground can be levelled to direct flow. Image: Author.



Figure 15. Exploring the juxtaposition/transition between the textures inherent within ground. Image: Author.



Figure 16. Exploring materiality as markers of place and time. Image: Author.



Figure 18. Exploring how all the materials within the intervention concentrate at, encase and extend through water bodies. Image: Author.



Figure 19. Architectural scroll depicting the journeys through rūh-sthaan. Image: Author.

against the ‘man made’ and advocates for the resurgence of softer, warmer and more impressionable materials that can complement the introspective and meditative activities to be facilitated by this place. Thus, concrete is utilised to establish space and encase a place curated from the intricacies and depths compressed within the ground. And while each subspace demonstrates the potential of specific materials, they are all superimposed to form the walls of the well shaft which culminates one’s journey through the intervention. This final exhibition epitomises the significance of materials that have endured through, or contributed to, the development of this site.

Composing a place of ‘soul’ – rūh-sthaan

Consolidating the learnings from the former phases, the design of this intervention will be focused on subterranean tectonics, temporal narration through materiality and the spatial management of privacy.

As such, the arrangement of this place is curated from the collation zones. Zone A is a point of collection – designed to draw in pedestrians and direct, transition and condition them for the subterranean experience they embark upon. Zone B is a point of concentration – existing as an interstice of choice, it provides the inhabitant access to all pathways and encourages them to contemplate and direct their journey in alignment with their purpose of engaging with this space. Zone C includes individual and communal meditation rooms. Zone D provides access to water for numerous purposes of introspection – cleansing, purification and/or reflection.

The architectural scroll of rūh-sthaan extrapolates the entire structure of the intervention. With the existing ground level positioned at the top of the drawing, the depths of the intervention are revealed as an observer follows the page downwards. The greyscale photographic characters depict how the site would have been reclaimed, the coloured photographic characters suggest how the place could

be used by people that regularly use the site today, and the coloured illustrative characters represent how I would utilise the space to perform my religious practices. While these character embellishments reveal some possible journeys and pilgrimages that may be experienced within the intervention, I invite the reader to navigate through this drawing by imagining alternative and personal understandings about how they would circulate through the place and use it.

Discussion and Conclusion

Architecture as reflection of the designer(s)

While this research did inspire the design of architectural interventions, the critical response to the research question is addressed by the architectural strategy proposed. Acknowledging the importance of all diverse groups, the methodology proposed is explicitly outlined in a manner that is broad enough to be adopted by anyone who may require alternative places in order to freely express, understand and develop facets of their identity. However, each step of the process is specifically created to encourage the personal perspectives, creative tendencies and spatial aspirations of the person conducting the design process. As such, the results produced will not be based on objective conjecture about diversity but instead guided by the subjective experience and knowledge of evolving diverse lifestyles.

As such, the design interventions presented in this article and my thesis³² are simply examples of the spatial diversity and cultural knowledge that can be conceived from a narrative-driven design process. Not only do these places facilitate my specific cultural needs, but they also exist as exhibits for others to understand my unique cultural identity through their own subjective experiences. Either way, the intended consequence of such a place is the added richness and seamless inclusion of a unique cultural existence within the established palimpsest of a multicultural context.

Practical application: Design reactively

When designs for immigrants are created or implemented prior to their arrival and settlement, these solutions may not be successful. This is because they will mostly be based on perceptions or biases about immigrants’ needs and preferences, which may or may not be accurate. More often than not, the cultural living styles, perspectives and requirements will be determined and influenced by the environments, people, languages and trends of their destination once they attempt to resettle. Furthermore, the current urban context of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland already consists of valuable layers of cultural heritage, forms and usages that must be acknowledged, if not accepted, by immigrants as they establish themselves in, and understand, their new home. Recognising these complexities, it is thus essential to design reactively – by considering and developing solutions through intensive and ongoing collaboration with the impacted immigrant/person/cultural group and the existing context.

Thus, to ensure the public realm maintains relevancy and appropriately facilitates ever-increasing diversity, it must be designed to be constantly evolving and changing. As such, any intervention proposed and/or constructed through this methodology does not determine the final form or function of the site. Existing as an episode of the site’s ongoing evolution, it ensures the cultural nuances it facilitates are acknowledged, but also encourages and welcomes further adaptations as required.

Through these ideologies and implementations, these interventions will serve as places of intimate understanding – a reflection of the dynamism of a particular area, an opportunity to comprehend the cultural nuances of the community living within the neighbourhood and a platform to negotiate one’s connection to, and acceptance of, diversity throughout

32 Soni, “Facilitating Intercultural Encounters,” 112–205.

various neighbourhoods. Thus, public spaces exist as critical opportunities for development that can catalyse future neighbourhoods of multicultural societies to utilise, respond to and facilitate the congruency of diversity in all its shapes, forms and functions.

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Author

Niyati Soni immigrated to Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland from India as a child. As an immigrant, she acknowledges her unique position within society and has a great sense of purpose to interact with, serve and help people to the best of her ability. Niyati studied architecture at the University of Auckland to develop and utilise her creative skills to give back to the community. She advocates for architecture to be a revolutionary tool by which the identity of a space can be redefined to empower, nourish and represent its inhabitants' sense of belonging. She endeavours to design solutions that are fit for purpose, and that criticise and challenge the 'typical' or 'generic' way of living. Following her passion for urban design, master planning, multi-use regeneration and intervention architecture, she is contributing to the industry in a meaningful way by working for Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities in the Urban Planning and Design team.