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Gerhard Rosenberg

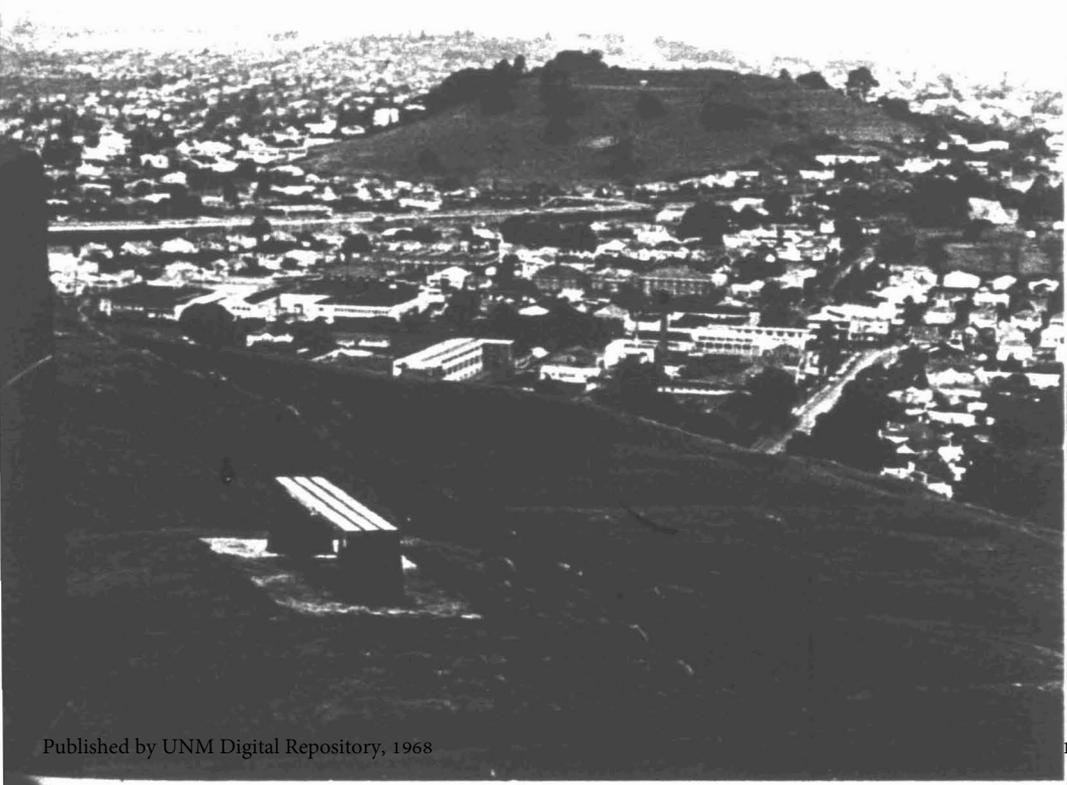
Life Style In A Polynesian Metropolis

In Auckland, New Zealand, a lagging economy now demands a greater commitment from the workers, and population is increasing faster than recreation resources.

This is in contrast to the past thirty years, during which Aucklanders enjoyed a postindustrial economy and environment. This vanishing utopia was made of beaches, green hills and nearby rain forests; an extensive park system; a welfare economy; and the influence of a playful Maori culture.

AUCKLAND IS THE LARGEST industrial city in New Zealand, and its dominance is still increasing. About half a million people live in the urban area; half of these are gainfully employed. This article

This is a view from Mount Eden towards Mount Hobson, two of the many volcanic cones that serve as parks throughout Auckland. Photo: Richard Collins

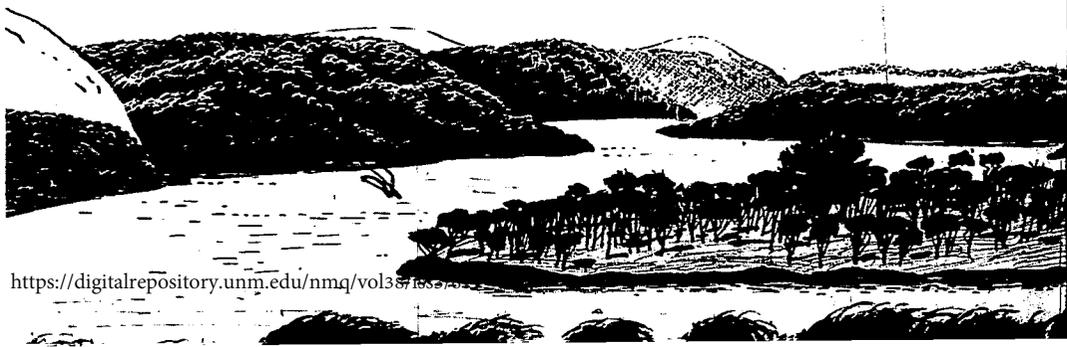


describes the happy combination of the attitude towards leisure and the possession and use of natural features that has made it possible for the citizens of Auckland to enjoy what could be a pattern of life in a postindustrial city. Although certain present trends threaten to prevent Aucklanders from continuing to enjoy their unique way of life, some measures are being taken to preserve their heritage.

Aucklanders' attitude toward leisure is influenced, first, by the kind of economy New Zealand has had since the depression of the thirties, and, second, by virtue of the city's being the largest Polynesian city in the world. Since the thirties New Zealand, a permissive, democratic society has maintained full employment. During the thirty years of this policy, New Zealanders have developed a degree of independence toward employers and work routines. To demonstrate how high the standards have been, in 1936 the average work week was 40 hours; it is now 39 including overtime. Real cash income has increased only 20 percent in 30 years. During this thirty-year period, New Zealanders have enjoyed a high standard of living and a freedom from job demands.

In this period, leisure pursuits have become the goals of life for many people, and none are cut off from enjoying such pursuits. In Auckland, 90 percent of householders own their own homes, generally on one-quarter acre sites. The overall density is about seven persons to the acre. Most business enterprises are small: 94 percent employ fewer than fifty people. One-third work in industry and about one half work in tertiary services. Of the total population,

Lake Ototoa, one of the dozens of fresh water lakes in the sand dunes area about twenty-five miles northwest of Auckland. These lakes and dunes stretch for about thirty miles, and are lightly used by urban crowds.



about half are gainfully employed. These workers and those they support dwell in a large modern city and have had the time and freedom to pursue an out-of-doors way of life for thirty years.

The Aucklanders' attitude toward leisure is reinforced by the Polynesian culture which is so much a part of the city life. The Maoris have been assimilated, and their songs, dances, and attitudes toward life increasingly influence the city people. Maoris and Islanders take their leisure together without guilt and without Anglo-Saxon intensity.

To enjoy leisure would, of course, be impossible without natural opportunities. Auckland's site, chosen in 1840, could not have been more auspicious for the needs of a leisure-oriented society. The deep water harbors on both sides of a level volcano-stubbed isthmus, with fertile soil and a temperate climate, were chosen for mercantile reasons; but its name "Waitemata"—Maori for "glistening water"—fulfills its promise of an indestructible "blue belt" of open space around the most densely inhabited part of the city. These harbors contain many islands, especially on the eastern side. Some islands have wide sandy beaches, and some face north where far islands are silhouetted on the horizon. These remote islands have unique and unspoiled flora and fauna native to the South Pacific. The water is clear and there are underwater locations that are safe as well as spectacular for divers. One island in the western harbor, close to the port and visible from many parts of the older city, serves as a regional symbol, a landmark for Aucklanders. A view of "Rangtoto," a volcanic cone, is said to add \$2000 to the value of any house lot. Such a landmark, an ever-present reminder of the power of natural forces, is a significant counterpoint to the ephemeral preoccupations of modern city life.

There are many other natural landmarks, some in the city itself. Volcanic cones caused by long-ago eruptions pockmark the isthmus. Many were originally used as quarries for volcanic rock, but some were retained and now stand covered with black and green vegetation. Some suburbs are named after their guardian volcanos, and the white, red-roofed houses huddle around these mounds like sheep around a shepherd.

Within a twenty-five mile range of the city's center, there are spectacular land forms. Ranges of hills covered with primeval rain forest delimit the urban landscape to the southeast and northwest. To the north lies thirty miles of straight, wide, sandy beach flanked with sand dunes and a dozen fresh water lakes. There are hot springs which feed two pools for open-air swimming. On the west coast are

black sand areas and white sand areas, sheltered beaches and exposed beaches, rocks to climb, and forests, man-made and natural. Finally, at a distance, there are high mountains, ski slopes, and a huge inland lake.

Given such resources, Aucklanders early learn to love sports and the out-of-doors. There are some 10,000 private boats, for instance, and the number of golfers has increased 175 percent between 1950 and 1966. Builders must take into account this demand for recreational facilities, and subdividers have to allocate 10 percent of rural and 5 percent of urban land for public reserves. In the past, all foreshores were reserved for public access as soon as land was subdivided. There is, then, a general pattern of about 10 percent of open space in all new areas.

One area may serve as an indication of how land is provided for recreation in an inner-city suburb. The Borough of Mt. Roskill—named after a volcanic mound in its midst—has 33,500 people who occupy 4605 acres. Of this, about 985 acres (21.4%), are set aside for recreation and open space. This is thirty acres per 1000 population. Of this 21.4% open space, 8.9% is public and 12.5% belongs to private institutions such as schools and hospitals. There are fourteen playing fields for children and a larger number for adult athletes. For every seventeen people in the Borough, there is one

Maori Po, fortified hill at Matakana, Auckland.



player of rugby, soccer, hockey, or football. These 2000 amateur Borough athletes play from 140 to 200 games each weekend. A typical playing field will be used for five consecutive games on a Saturday.

Aucklanders share further in the use of 5,500,000 acres of National Parks—about two acres for every New Zealander. These parks are far from city centers, so Aucklanders follow the new family trend of using a car, camping caravan, and trailered boat to tour the country during the holiday months. The present indication is that any shortening of working hours will be used for longer holiday periods, especially during the midsummer Christmas season.

New Zealand was the mode for Samuel Butler's utopia in the novel *Erewhon*. Unfortunately, Auckland is not in a true utopian situation. More and more, Aucklanders encounter two problems in attempting to follow their leisure-oriented pattern of existence: the increase in population and the changing economy. The increase in population has put an added strain on the natural resources and man-made facilities. It seems likely that the changing economy will, in turn, produce changes in attitudes towards work. In addition, Auckland is growing. A doubling of the population to one million by 1988 is forecast. This forecast may be high if the economy fails to provide opportunities; however, at the present time the growth is a strain on the open space resources. This is true at every level: the National Parks, the areas within easy reach of the city, and those within the city itself. For example, in Auckland some 300 yacht-owners are wait-listed for moorings. Most boats are trailered, but launching facilities are scarce. No private golf club accepts new members, and many have closed their waiting lists. Further pressures come from developers seeking to buy up land. Only a few years ago the city resolved to subdivide most of a 120-acre golf course on the basis that Auckland's overall acreage of open space compared favorably with other cities. Even though these local facilities are good, the need for preserving large areas of natural environment is not fully appreciated—and such areas are dangerously scarce.

Other difficulties result from planning problems on local, regional, and national levels. For example, there is about 10 percent open space in most new areas; but where freedom of movement was taken for granted before the land was covered with houses, little care has been taken to link open spaces by tracks or rights of way. Consequently, the quality of open spaces is often low because subdividers have been able to allocate useless land for public reserves.

One untoward move has been made in the New Zealand Parliament by the introduction of a bill to make some trespass a criminal offense. New Zealand has no tradition of "ancient rights" of way, which Great Britain and other older countries have wisely developed and maintained, and which are now the mainstay of their system of access to the countryside. Until recently, New Zealanders could walk almost everywhere, over private, public, or Crown land, as long as they did no damage. It had been easy to acquire vast acreages and to leave much of it unused or lightly used—the population was small, and the task of control so impossible that freedom of movement was taken for granted. But for whatever reason, damage by young people with cars, guns, and cartons of beer has become so commonplace that landowners and farmers now insist on tightening up the law of trespass. Under the Government bill, trespass would become a criminal offense so that prosecution could take place even when no damage had been done. If this bill is passed, it will not only put a tremendous financial burden on the Regional Authority to acquire all land over which access is to be allowed, but it will inevitably restrict the population to a much smaller area of open country.

This will be another retreat from the high quality of life which New Zealand's postindustrial thirty years has provided. The definition of the rights of property in land is crucial for the achievement of an acceptable compromise between public and private needs. Where private property rights are absolute, no reasonable degree of financial effort can achieve adequate freedom of outdoor life for metropolitan populations.

The regional aspect of recreation caused anxiety in this city that was made up of dozens of small local authorities, none of them able or willing to accept regional responsibilities. Realizing that planning without power and finance remained abortive, the local authorities combined in 1960 to form a Regional Authority, which was then given a \$2.24 million grant for the acquisition of rational open spaces in advance of requirement. The Master Plan of the Planning Division of the Regional Authority sets down the outline of regional policy: public and private action is to be combined; the policy is to be one of diversity and distribution.

So far, the Regional Authority has looked after bush and beach reserves, and it has acquired a site for a botanical garden. It aims at the preservation of fragile resources and plans to satisfy a broad section of the population, as well as to ease traffic problems. As demand and prices rise, access to water facilities be-

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comes an important preoccupation. The Authority plans a fore-shore survey, to flag sites for outright acquisition or for purchase of easements for access. It locates sites for submarine and marine parks, and plans for the multiple use of forest and watershed areas.

Forests are used for watershed control as well as for timber production and erosion control. Forests are also used for hunting, fishing, camping, and picnicking. Golf courses can be recreation centers and scenic areas that create buffers between incompatible land use zones. Borrow pits and quarries may be nuclei of future reserves or lakes. Even idle industrial land may have a short term recreational use. Thus, one such area has been used for horse-back riding, another as a rifle range.

The growth in population is felt in the National Parks, and the current theory is that new parks are needed near the large urban concentrations. The Auckland Regional Authority has proposed a number of National Parks, as well as regional parks. These range from the Varpara Sand Hills and some other coastal areas where a minimum of human interference with the wild landscape is planned, to an elaborate path system, which will make the cascades of the Hunua and Wartakere Hills accessible and will link them to the city by a walking, horseback riding, and cycling track.

If then, the increasing population threatens to overburden the open space resources, the changing economy threatens to destroy the New Zealander's attitude towards leisure. But perhaps the thirty years of full employment have provided a taste of the kind

On a fine day this girl had this beach to herself. It is located fifteen miles from the center of Auckland.

Photo: Kim Goldwater



of life people want to live in a postindustrial society. New Zealanders may have been forerunners. Yet the unhappy fact is that annual economic growth has slowed from two percent to about one percent, and New Zealand is being forced back into the free enterprise world, where work and accomplishment displace leisure pursuits.

Fortunately, to mitigate such a gloomy prediction, Auckland is becoming more Polynesian every year. If enough beautiful natural and man-made open spaces are preserved, Maoris and islanders may continue to take their leisure out-of-doors, without the guilt and intensity of the junior executive who squeezes in a few hours every couple of weeks. The Polynesian attitude, the island resources, and a reasonable rise in income may retain and further in Auckland a spontaneous, many-faceted urban life, less stressful than that of other work-oriented societies of the Western world.