

EDITORIAL

## Envisioning Auckland 2050: Insights from Emerging Scholars for a Thriving Future

Jayanthi Nagalingam

Kia ora and welcome to the latest edition of Rangahau Aranga.

This edition marks the journal's first issue dedicated to the theme "**Auckland 2050**". As a fellow doctoral student, I am delighted to contribute to the editorial for the first issue of 2026, highlighting the work of postgraduate researchers whose scholarship explores how Auckland and Aotearoa New Zealand might evolve and flourish in the decades ahead. Together, these contributions offer diverse perspectives on the opportunities and challenges shaping our shared urban future.

To begin with, a brief context, the Auckland Plan 2050, developed by the Auckland Council, is the region's long-term spatial plan designed to guide growth in ways that respond to future opportunities and pressures. The plan outlines Auckland's current state, identifies major challenges, and sets a strategic direction to ensure the city remains a place where people want to live, work, and visit (Auckland Council, 2018). This issue builds on that vision by presenting research that engages with themes such as urban design and architecture, social geography and demographics, cultural identity in urban spaces, environmental sustainability, wellbeing, and artificial intelligence (AI).

Submissions for this edition were received as research summaries and one research overview, with three projects adopting participatory or co-design approaches.

Ru-Te Wang, Heuiwon Han, and Bible Sung Kyong Lee bring a vital social epidemiological perspective to the oral health of Asian children in Aotearoa New Zealand, an area where research remains surprisingly scarce. By integrating international evidence with the emerging New Zealand literature, they emphasise an urgent need for equity-focused action that is culturally safe, structurally informed, and rooted in meaningful partnership with Asian communities. Their work highlights a significant gap: the lack of nationally standardised, ethnicity-disaggregated oral health data, including for MELAA populations. Without this information, disparities remain hidden, and opportunities for targeted prevention and improved access are missed. The researchers therefore advocate for co-designed strategies that reflect the diversity within Asian communities, which could respond to the structural factors influencing oral health outcomes.

Yang Guo examines how AI is reshaping journalism and newsroom ethics. Focusing on Channel 33, a television station serving Auckland's Chinese community, the study uses ethnographic methods to explore how AI tools influence reporting practices, editorial decision-making, and public discourse.

The research raises critical questions about whether AI will ultimately supplement or replace journalistic expertise and highlights the ethical dilemmas that arise as newsrooms integrate automated systems into their workflows.

Khulani Dube draws on experiences from the DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe) programme in Zimbabwe. Coordinated by Zimbabwe Health Interventions (ZHI), the DREAMS initiative aims to reduce HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women through various prevention and support services. Using a reflective, practice-based approach, Khulani discusses the practicalities of implementing Community-Led Monitoring (CLM), emphasising the importance of stakeholder engagement, simplifying monitoring tools, and involving communities in co-designing data collection mechanisms. The findings underscore the value of empowering communities to collect, analyse, and interpret their own data, strengthening advocacy and accountability. The research also acknowledges the structural and operational challenges of CLM. Importantly, the lessons from DREAMS offer insights that could be adapted to the New Zealand context, particularly in addressing health inequities, improving mental health and wellbeing among vulnerable populations, and designing inclusive, community-owned service delivery systems.

Sarah Bodmer and Cath Conn present research of vital importance to the future healthy cities agenda by creating a collaborative space for university students to envision sustainable urban futures. Conducted as a summer project, the research involved a co-design workshop with four university students and a student researcher. The study highlights the potential of serious games, especially world-building games, to foster creative, interdisciplinary thinking about complex urban challenges such as climate change, overpopulation, and social disconnection. Participants imagined solutions including eco-bubbles, arcologies, improved transport systems, and free community-based services. Their ideas reflected values such as Kaitiakitanga (Māori environmental guardianship), demonstrating how Indigenous perspectives can enrich future city design. The authors argue that youth-led co-design and serious games should be embedded in policy development processes to ensure young people's voices shape long-term sustainability and health strategies for cities like Auckland.

Cassie Wang, Cath Conn, and Julie Trafford address how Auckland's emerging smart-city systems can support healthy ageing among Asian communities. Using a co-design methodology that blends creative participation with policy analysis (Berg & Gulden, 2012; Sanders & Stappers, 2014), the researchers developed an adapted World Café method called the "World Teahouse". This culturally resonant format brings together older Asian adults (aged 55+), policymakers, service providers, and technology actors to share stories, ideas, and aspirations in both English and heritage languages (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). By foregrounding the experiences of Asian older adults' voices, which are often absent from ageing and digital health discussions, the study positions healthy ageing as a shared act of design. The authors envision a 2050 Auckland that is not only smart but wise: a city where ageing means becoming more connected, and where every generation sees its future reflected with dignity and hope.

Collectively, the research presented in this edition demonstrates the depth, creativity, and commitment of postgraduate scholarship focused on shaping a thriving, inclusive Auckland.

Each contribution offers unique insights into the opportunities and challenges ahead, enriching our understanding of what it means to design a city for all.

Thank you to everyone (contributors, reviewers, editors and the entire team of Rangahau Aranga) who have made this issue possible.

I hope this issue inspires continued dialogue and collaboration as we work toward a vibrant Auckland of the future.

## References

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