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Pouakani: People, Power and Place

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Abstract

Pouakani: People Power and Place is an investigation of structure, autonomy and change in a central North Island locality. It raises the question of who, or what, has the power to bring about or influence geographic change. A three pronged approach is adopted which resists linearity and encourages entry to the study via change and reproduction of the local environment, or through a survey of local power brokers, or from a theoretical basis, informed by relevant literature and presented in the form of a guiding framework.

In the last fifty years Pouakani has been transformed by government initiated farm development and hydro electric power projects. These major transformations and others of lesser consequence provide the changing contexts within which local actions are discussed. Knowledge, perceptions and power are considered along with facets of formal and informal decision making, implementation of decisions and long term as well as short term outcomes. Permeating the local contexts are supralocal structures, institutions and influences that combine with local contingencies to constrain and facilitate change.

Similarities with other localities are apparent, but Pouakani has unusual features arising from the Ministry of Works legacy and from Ngati Kahungunu ownership of Mangakino township and migration to settle on the adjacent farm lands. The roles of government, Maori owners, local residents and commercial operators shaped by legal, political, economic, social and cultural factors are all important in changing Pouakani.

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