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Integrated Indigenous Management of Land and Marine Protected Areas in Teahupo`o (Tahiti, French Polynesia): A way to enhance ecological and cultural resilience

Tamatoa Bambridge, Marguerite Tairui, Patrick Rochette,
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Introduction

This case study retraces the implementation and development of an integrated management area (land and sea) in Tairapu, French Polynesia, based on an old Polynesian custom called rāhui. Traditionally, rāhui is a sacred decision to protect an area and/or a resource, whether on land or lagoon. The rāhui has spiritual as well as economic and social dimensions. In 2008, the community of Teahupo`o (a small district in the south of Tahiti Iti), decided to create a management plan for their territory to increase its social and ecological resilience. Land and lagoon toponyms were recorded, along with the associated tahu`a (ancient specialists), and scientists have been mobilised to devise the patterns and frontiers of the integrated coastal areas to be protected. Moreover, the governance of this territory integrates decades of missionary and colonial influences. To strengthen the legal basis of the new rāhui system, the community decided to create a hybrid model of

governance, in which local norms based on *rāhui*, with the participation of traditional experts and the local population, interact with the state's legal framework borrowed from the IUCN's MPA typologies. This has created a legal pluralist model of governance that has already increased social resilience and fostered the creation of an integrated MPA over land, lagoon and coral reefs. In addition, thanks to this plural governance pattern, the economic and cultural activities now planned in and outside the MPA are carefully chosen to enhance ecological resilience.

Analytical framework

Across the Pacific, legal pluralism—which is understood as ‘the presence in the social field of more than one normative order’ (Griffiths 1986: 8)—is a structural element of the governance of marine and terrestrial resources (Ward and Kingdom 1995; Boege et al. 2008; Govan 2008; Govan et al. 2009; Bambridge 2009, 2013a, 2013b). Limited studies have addressed issues of ecological and social resilience, taking into account this structural context (Barrière 1996; Fisher et al. 2009; Bambridge 2013a). Social and ecological resilience are generally defined as the ability of social and ecological systems to withstand disturbances without changing their structure, function, feedback or identity (Walker et al. 2006; Adam et al. 2011), and be flexible in responding to changing environmental and social contexts (Redman and Kinzig 2003; Bohensky and Maru 2011). However, it seems clear that no system, ecological or social, can return to its previous state after disturbance.

Analysing ecological and social resilience in the context of legal and cultural pluralism requires consideration of the economic, cultural, social, political and plural normative contexts, incorporating land and marine aspects. As such, traditional knowledge and practices should be incorporated into the study of social and ecological resilience (Bohensky and Maru 2011). This would reduce the gap between data collected by social scientists and ecologists' ecosystem models (Folke 2006).

In Teahupo`o, social and ecological resilience can be analysed as social constructions built daily according to specific institutional and human terms, historically situated. As elsewhere in Polynesia, here, discourses and practices refer to the island territory including the inland side (*pae uta*, literally ‘mountain side’) and seaward side (*pae tai*, literally ‘sea side’).

The analysis of practices in the light of subsequent developments illuminates the perception and understanding of a management model integrating land, sea and coral reefs. Social resilience manifests primarily by 'working on memory' about *rāhui* (the traditional Polynesian spatial management of resources).

It is important to discuss here how this pluralism is articulated locally and in what ways a cultural and legal hybridisation process allows, at two different scales, the history of governance and collaboration between institutional and Indigenous science, including traditional knowledge, to increase the social and ecological resilience of the territory.

The poor integration of normative and cultural aspects in previous studies of resilience has encouraged the formation of a multidisciplinary team to conduct this program at Teahupo`o. The team included researchers in the humanities (Polynesian civilisation, oral history, linguistics, anthropology, fisheries law, geography), ecology, remote sensing and mathematical tools applied to the space (Bambridge 2008–11).

Two main approaches have been used. A qualitative method based on fieldwork and surveys helped to identify and define the territory, actors, knowledge and management issues (Bambridge 2009; Bambridge 2008–11). A quantitative survey using statistical processing and geographic information from the general census of the population was used to quantify information and compare it with qualitative analyses of field surveys (Campaner 2010). The results of the two types of surveys were compared to refine the choice of variables and the sociocultural development of indicators for the management of protected areas.

The mapping tool (GIS) integrated the information shown in Figure 7.1.

The choice of Tairapu, encompassing the associated towns Teahupo`o (East Tairapu) and Tautira (West Tairapu), was determined by the cultural issues that arise there, some of which date back to pre-European times: conflicting use of resources and space over a relatively homogeneous area (conflict over lagoon resources, issues related to the use of a border between the two territories), and the increasing urbanisation of this part of the island (construction of a port and an industrial area, residential and agricultural developments, and so on).

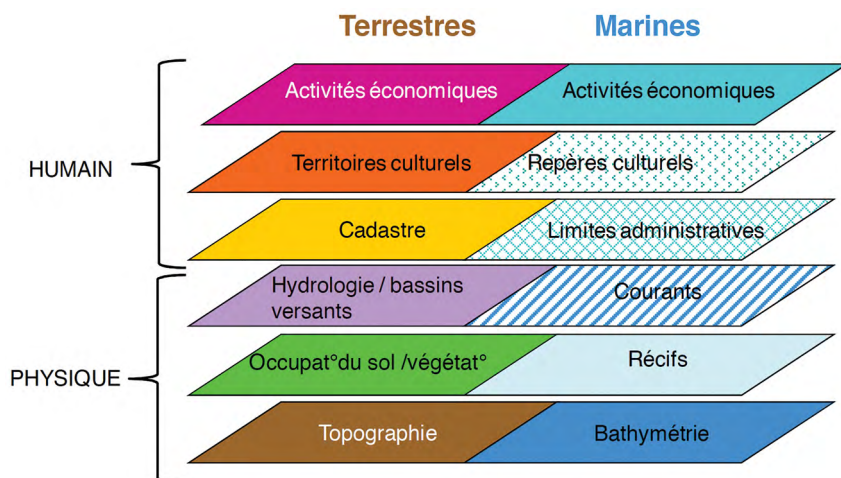


Figure 7.1: GIS mapping tool information.

Humain = Human

Physique = Physical

Activités économiques = Economic activities

Territoires culturels = Cultural territories

Reperes culturels = Cultural landmarks

Cadastre = Landownership registration

Limites administratives = Administrative boundaries

Hydrologie/bassins versants = Hydrology/watersheds

Courants = Currents

Occupat du sol/végétat = Land use/vegetation

Récifs = Reefs

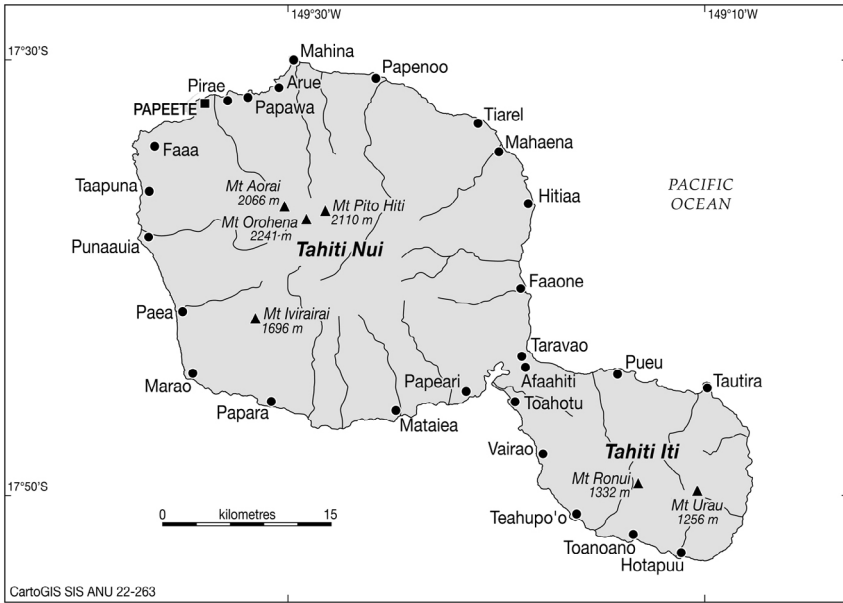
Topographie = Topography

Bathymétrie = Bathymetry

Source: Jean-Brice Herrenschmidt (ddatpacific@gmail.com).

After a brief presentation of the study area, the first part of the chapter is devoted to the history of this island society and its present links with *rāhui* (the traditional system of land management and resources). This will allow us to show how *rāhui* is now used to build social resilience.

The second part will be devoted to the mechanisms currently being implemented in terms of governance (participatory management and the involvement of traditional experts or *tahu`a*) and the construction of a hybrid framework for state and local management to increase social and ecological resilience.



Map 7.1: Map of Tahiti (Teahupo`o is at bottom right).

Source: CartoGIS SIS ANU 22-263.

The study area

Teahupo`o, a municipality associated with west Tairarapu, is at the southern end of the island of Tahiti. With 1,289 inhabitants (ISPF 2007–17), the district is divided into three sociologically distinct geographic parts: the ‘village’, the ‘fenua `Aihere’ and the ‘pari’.

Table 7.1: Population dynamics of Teahupo`o study area, 2007–17

	2002	2007	2012	2017
Tairarapu West	6,081	7,007	7,706	8,078
Change over five years (%)	0	+15.20	+9.90	+4.80
Change over 10 years (%)			+26.70	0
Teahupo`o	1,194	1,321	1,289	1,419
As a percentage of municipality population	19.60	18.80	16.70	17.60
Change over five years (%)	0	+10.60	-2.50	+10.00
Change over 10 years (%)			+7.90	0

Source: ISPF (2007–17).

Most of the population of this municipality is concentrated in the village. Over the past decade, the population increase in Teahupo`o has been 7.9 per cent, compared with 26.7 per cent for the whole of the west Taiarapu municipality.

The village enjoys the conveniences of the modern world in terms of capital goods, infrastructure and means of communication. The fenua `Aihere, between the coast and inland peaks, has its western limit in the coastal part of Mahora peak while its eastern limit is the pass of Tutataroa. There is a buffer between the village and the pari (mountain cliff or steep slope). Few people live there. This part of the Tahitian coast boasts large wet valleys, attracting new economic interests and secondary residences. More and more people are building homes here.

The pari was probably quite densely inhabited until the nineteenth century (Rodriguez 1995), but was abandoned due to the regrouping of the population into villages by missionaries. This place is for many people an area of great cultural value—a reservoir of biodiversity for traditional care, hiking trips and fishing—and also has numerous archaeological sites, testifying of the heroic history of the peninsula.

Many changes have affected the life of the village, mainly in terms of the influx of non-residents, the opening of a marina, increased housing in fenua `Aihere and annual surfing competitions that are internationally publicised. Since the 1980s, the village space has grown steadily in the direction of fenua `Aihere.

The main activities in Teahupo`o are agriculture and fishing, and there are 324 family businesses. These figures often hide the reality that many activities are seasonal and not practised for much of the year. The number of tourist operators also varies depending on the time of year. It is mostly on the Teahupo`o site, during the international surfing competition that takes place each year, where, for a few weeks, a substantial amount of the population will be oriented towards providing tourist services: renting out houses, driving boats, acting as tourist guides, and so on.

History, rāhui and pluralism

To understand the patterns of land use in Tairapu, one must consider the territorial and political boundaries of the eighteenth century. The district of Tairapu holds a special place in Tahitian mythology. The island of Tahiti was believed to be a fish that detached from Havai`i (Raiatea). According to Henry (1968: 454–60), Mahine, the ari`i (chief) of Huahine and Tamera, a famous tahu`a (priest-specialist), recalled how Tahiti became separated from Havai`i, travelled like a fish and settled again as fenua (land) when it arrived at this destination. It is likely this historicity is recent (no earlier than the seventeenth century) and emerged at Opoa (Raiatea) at a moment when the atua (god) Oro became more important in Polynesian history. The place where we worked, Matarufau, was considered to be the head of the fish, whereas Hotuārea, in the district now called Fa`a`ā, is the tail of the fish. Thus, in many ways, this history is considered the point when Tahiti became more independent and autonomous in relation to Havai`i's gods and social organisation.

In Tairapu, there were six political and territorial federations whose boundaries were included in each confederation, depending on shifting alliances. The territory of the present town of Teahupo`o, which was not yet its name, was part of the Confederation of Teva-i-tai ('Seaward Teva'), who were allies of the Teva-i-uta ('Inland Teva'). Together, these Teva, under the authority of the chief of Papara, who was also chief of Teva-i-uta, was the most powerful coalition on the island of Tahiti. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the territory of Tairapu (where the first Catholic mission was established by the Spaniards) played a crucial role in Tahitian history. The ari`i Vehiātua was the chief of Seaward Teva (Teva-i-tai). Vehiātua was closely linked to another young ari`i, Tu, who ruled the north of Tahiti and had previously made a coalition with Vehiātua's father to remove the maro`ura (a belt of red feathers and the honorary badge of the supreme power of Tahiti) from Inland Teva. The victory that freed Seaward Teva from the tutelage of Inland Teva took place in 1769 after the passage of James Cook. This battle saw the defeat of the ari`i Amo and his wife, Porea (written as Oberea by Cook), whose ancestral district was Papara on the southern coast of Tahiti Nui. Thus, the tumultuous history of Teahupo`o was intertwined with the transformation of the centres of power in Tahiti until the advent of Pōmare, who formed the first Christian Tahitian dynasty, which ultimately centralised political power within a unitary state.

In line with the Tahitian *tapu* (spiritual restriction), the *rāhui* was probably the most important attribute of *ari`i* in their management of populations, territory and resources (Bambridge 2013a). Strictly speaking, *rāhui* is a sacred ban imposed by the chief on a specific area for a certain period. The logical order of *rāhui* was economic, political and religious. Its aim was to impose temporary restrictions to renew the area's resources in preparation for a large and prestigious circulation of goods, to demonstrate the reality of power and human networks (Oliver 1974; Devatine 1989; Rigo 2004).

During the evangelisation of Tahitians after the defeat in 1812 of the chiefs attached to the old social and religious order (Taaroa 1971; Ellis 1972), missionaries drew up legal codes designed to get rid of the old religion and weaken the *ari`i* system. One measure was the suppression of the *rāhui* in the first half of the nineteenth century. Many of the prerogatives of the *ari`i* were transferred to a new institution, the *To`ohitu ha'avā* (literally, 'seven judges'), who were non-*ari`i* (Newbury 1967). This declining trend in the power of the *ari`i* and ancient Tahitian structures served French interests following the establishment of a protectorate in Tahiti and its dependencies from 1842. Although the *rāhui* was restored, the distinction between the French and native administrations disappeared, which resulted in the *ari`i* losing significant land rights and their control of the *rāhui*, while the selection of district chiefs was now conducted by election.

Land registration

Registration of property title in Teahupo`o was made under the influence of a decree on 24 August 1887, following the annexation of Tahiti and its dependencies in 1880. Claims organised between 1890 and 1891 resulted in 331 titles or *tōmite* in Teahupo`o. The first land register was established in 1935 and updated in 2008, excluding the mountainous areas. The application of the 1887 decree to the registration of property excluded claims relating to the lagoon—a result of the fact that the Western legal standard was at odds with traditional Polynesian ones, under which marine and land territories were appropriated by extended families. Since the late nineteenth century, under French administrative rules, the official design of the territory of Teahupo`o has neglected cultural aspects, which locals still consider disruptive.

Rāhui: Symbol of social and ecological resilience

For today's actors in Teahupo`o, rāhui is the preferred instrument to restore the economic, social and political resilience deconstructed by two centuries of missionary and colonial influences. It is therefore important to show how this resilience is built locally by considering multiple, sometimes contradictory, influences.

It is interesting to note the extent to which people in Teahupo`o now view the rāhui as a mechanism for social resilience in terms of land and marine resource management. This is perceptible not only in discourse, but also by observing unspoken attitudes that demonstrate commitment to an old institution. Thus, when the central government and the municipality of Teahupo`o decided to set up a general plan for the maritime area in 2004, locals greeted it with indifference. The ultimate sign of its failure was that it was consistently and negatively compared with the rāhui.

As in much of eastern Polynesia, in Teahupo`o, the rāhui is very present in the minds of the inhabitants when management of marine and terrestrial resources is discussed (see Bambridge 2013a). During group meetings or individual surveys conducted by our team to discuss the management of the commune's territory, a local expert, Papa Mote, clearly captured a policy framework for managing land and resources. He spoke bluntly in Tahitian:

If I am the ari`i here, it's me who decides the harvest period. It is the ari`i who share the resources and the harvest goes to the ari`i ... even if it was you who planted it. This is the word of ari`i. Here at Teahupo`o, it certainly existed. If your territory is rāhui, do not touch it. You can have access to another place. All resources in the sea and on the land were rāhui.

The rāhui restriction is here clearly linked with a political dimension of resource management. It includes terrestrial and marine areas, and implies authority, a body of rules and behaviours adapted to respect an institution. The rāhui refers more to a logic of sovereignty than to a property logic (Colin 2008; Jacob and Le Meur 2010).

Many actors in Teahupo`o expressed the need—like other attempts in neighbouring districts—to restore a 'priority mastering of land' (Le Roy 2011, 2013) as well as community control of the lagoon. If the lagoon's resources must be managed, it is a community space for the benefit of

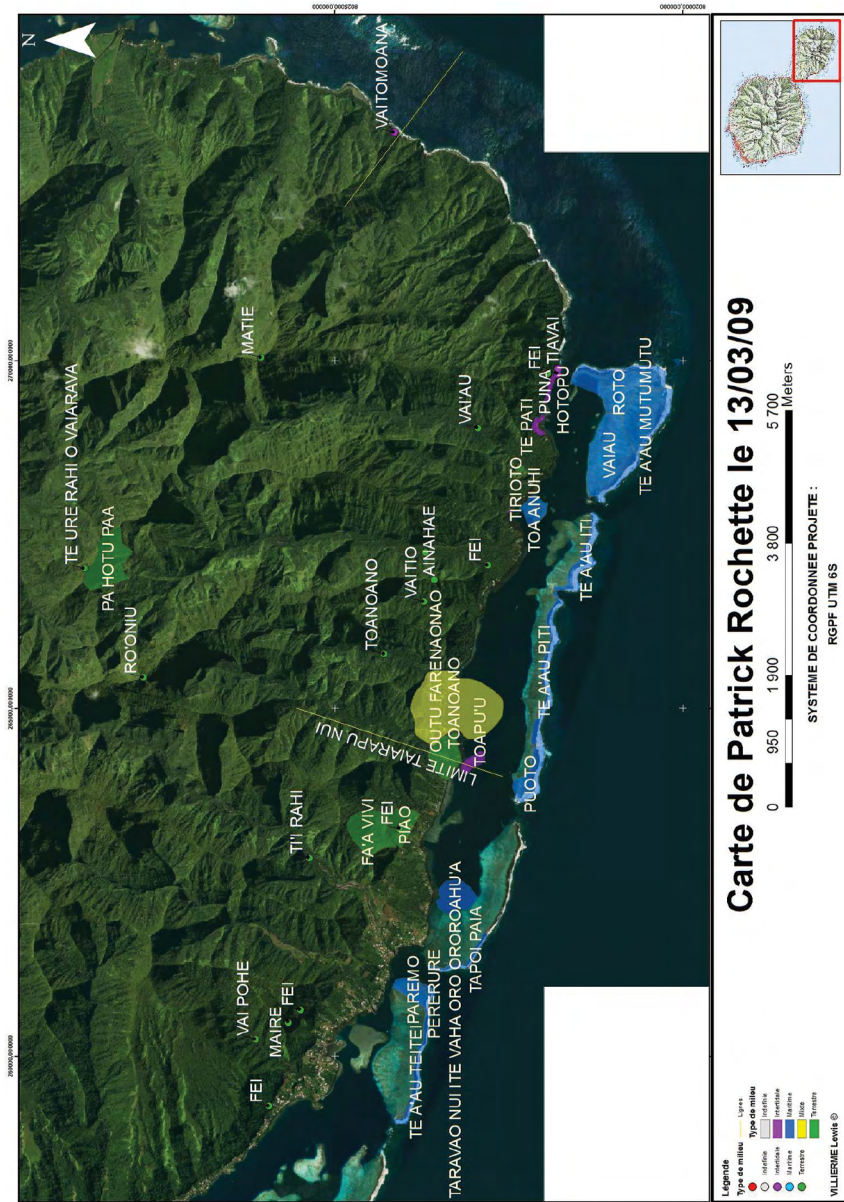
its stakeholders. Our investigations have indeed helped to highlight the different categories of traditional expertise that correspond with two types of control over territory (Bambridge 2013a). ‘Specialised mastering’ is specific expertise associated with a field of activity (fishing, culture, agriculture, pharmacology) in a territory. ‘Priority mastering’ is the ordering of society (person or tahu`a-specific extended family, and so on) to allow access to certain areas or resources. This involves privileged access to specific uses of an area and should not be confused with absolute rights or fixed ownership as in the civil law tradition.

The cultural and legal hybridisation process for strengthening social and ecological resilience

Local ways of characterising territory by encompassing the continuity of land and sea contrast with the duality of state standards regarding the land (private property) and the lagoon (public domain). Thus, the toponymies developed by experts (tahu`a) in culture, fisheries, traditional medicine and agriculture form a space of ecological and cultural coherence, including the land and the lagoon.

The representation and use of the public maritime domain are examples of local norms in Teahupo`o. According to the State of French Polynesia, lagoons are in the public domain. Successive autonomy laws have enhanced the transfer of competence to Polynesian authorities for the protection and management of lagoon areas (Cazalet 2008). This ‘official law’ (Chiba 1998), however, does not correspond with Tahitian norms from the pre-European period, nor does it correspond with contemporary local norms based on *habitus* in the sense of Bourdieu (1986b: 40). Paralleling the practical experiences of law (code) and regulation (Bambridge and Vernaudo 2013), Tahitians often feel state rule is alien and established largely for foreign interests. In this regard, several interviews we conducted were interesting for the beliefs expressed that the legislation on the maritime public domain was clearly anti-Tahitian. The same pattern applies to Teahupo`o regarding ownership of rivers and springs, which the state considers to be in the public domain yet are subject to appropriation and use by local actors based on longstanding use and affiliation (for example, the freshwater source carrying the name and history of a group).

7. INTEGRATED INDIGENOUS MANAGEMENT OF LAND AND MARINE PROTECTED AREAS



Map 7.2: Map of local names in Teahupo'o.

Source: Patrick Rochette in Bambridge (2008–11: Report 2).

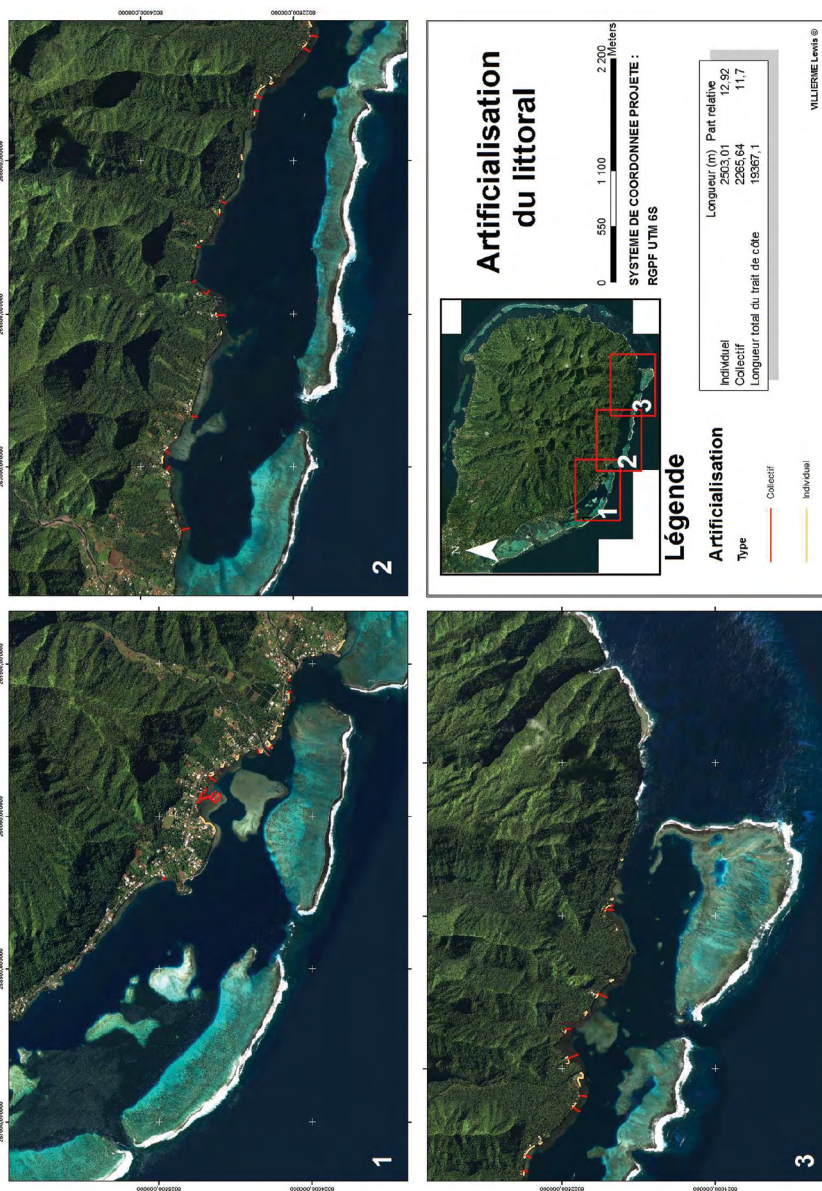


Plate 7.1: Artificial modification of the Teahupo'o coastline.

Source: L. Villierme in Bambridge (2008–11: Report 1).

This poses a fundamental problem for the public authority, which does not seem to have sufficient legitimacy to impose the rules of the public domain. However, the low acceptance of rules of public property, the significance of collective and private ownership of the coast today, combined with population growth in the municipality of Teahupo`o, have led to significant human modification of the coastline. In total, considering both collective (public embankments, docks) and individual, generally unauthorised coastal modifications, more than 4.7 kilometres of hitherto common-access-only Teahupo`o coastline is now artificial.

These figures are important considering Teahupo`o has a reputation as a wild place, preserved from the ‘evils’ of civilisation. The artificial coastline now represents about one-quarter of the territory of the district of Teahupo`o—a ratio that has significantly increased in a decade (Raynal 2004). This is likely to reduce the ecological resilience of the district because it destroys beaches and areas that protect juvenile marine species that are necessary to repopulate the lagoon.

Considering the previous human and ecological dynamics, the populations of Teahupo`o decided to respond to these disruptions by creating a protection framework to promote cultural and ecological resilience based on the rāhui.

Rāhui, hybridisation and co-management

‘Stakeholder participation’ is a controversial notion because it encompasses very different realities, ranging from simple consultation of stakeholders through to the implementation of co-management processes in which actors retain a high degree of autonomy and freedom of choice (Gregory et al. 2008; Deroche 2008; Le Meur et al. 2012). It is in the context of this second interpretation that our research team worked with populations of Teahupo`o to consider different management scenarios for protected land and sea known as contemporary rāhui practices (Fabre et al. 2021). The people’s desire was to design a framework that combined the security of state law to provide the necessary legal certainty for the sustainable development of the territory and enabled management of this area according to the rāhui standards, as it is recalled by local people. Our team invited various leaders of the administration of French Polynesia to show the people of

Teahupo`o the possibilities, advantages and disadvantages of each option. Three main tools were discussed: the urban code, the fisheries code and the environmental code.

Through our meetings, the first two proposals were subsequently excluded by actors because they did not allow land and sea management by the people; the process was legally controlled by the government, with locals simply asked to give their opinion on the implementation of management plans. However, the third option, the environmental code, is more flexible and provides six rating categories borrowed from the IUCN that allow a local management committee relative autonomy in its organisation and decision-making, as long as local actions do not contravene the general framework.

After discussing the advantages and disadvantages of different classification categories (I to VI), those present at the meetings in Teahupo`o wanted to implement category VI, which provides priority (Table 7.2) to the sustainable use of resources and ecosystems, ecological functions and the preservation of species and genetic diversity.

Table 7.2: IUCN implementation categories proposed to Teahupo`o residents

Management objectives	Ia	Ib	II	III	IV	V	VI
Scientific research	1	3	2	2	2	2	3
Protection of endangered, rare species, etc.	2	1	2	3	3	-	2
Preservation of species and genetic diversity	1	2	1	1	1	2	1
Maintenance of ecological functions	2	1	1	-	1	2	1
Protection of specific natural/cultural elements	-	-	2	1	3	1	3
Tourism and leisure	-	2	1	1	3	1	3
Education	-	-	2	2	2	2	3
Sustainable use of resources	-	3	3	-	2	2	1
Preservation of traditional cultural features	-	-	-	-	-	1	2

1 = primary objective

2 = secondary objective

3 = potentially achievable goal

- = not realisable

The main advantage of category VI noted at the meetings lay in the fact it could integrate at the same level actors such as fishers and farmers, whereas other categories did not prioritise these actors. It should be noted that French Polynesia had never previously implemented a category VI classification. The choice involved protecting the nearshore as a nursery for fish in partial continuity with the terrestrial protected area in place since 1952, and the

participation of traditional experts throughout the process, as a demonstrated commitment to the hybrid solution for environmental protection desired by the people of Teahupo`o. This appears to be a syncretic solution in that it integrates traditional management methods (rāhui) into an existing legal framework that was not originally designed for this purpose.

When considering the management rules proposed by the representatives of the people and traditional experts, the characteristics of this hybridisation clearly show the logic of rāhui. Concerning the rules to be applied to a classified site, the assembly recalled the consensus reached between residents and stakeholders in the period 2009–11, and vowed that all types of fishing should be banned, year-round, as well as all swimming, except in a strip approximately 50 metres wide along the coast. These types of prohibitions recalled the sacred traditional rāhui at Teahupo`o, in which no exception is tolerated. At the same time, the total bans are justified by the difficulties of monitoring the area. In a similar context in the Marquesas, Ottino-Garanger et al. (2016: 45–46) recall:

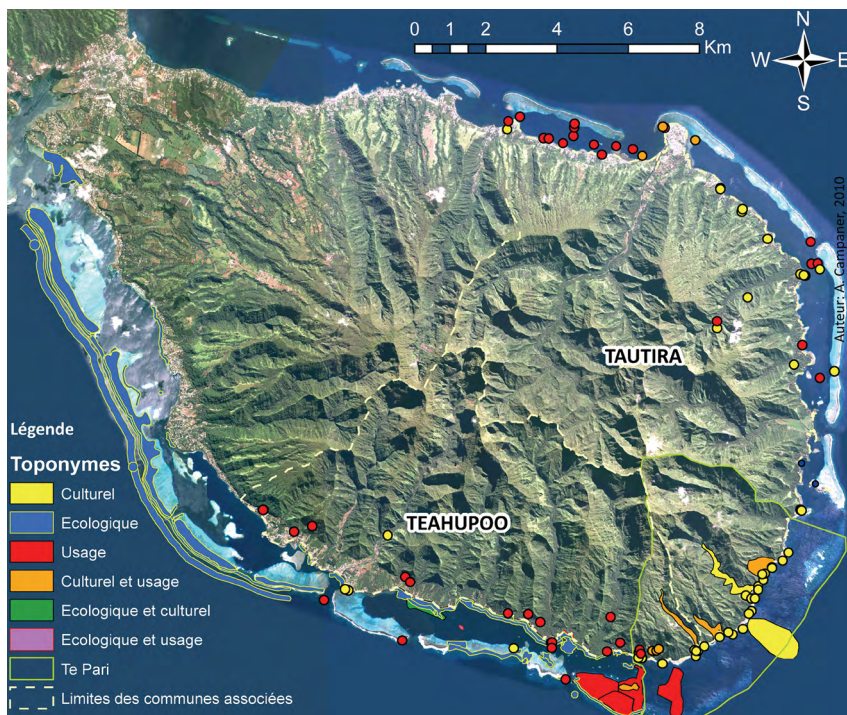
The practice of Kahui/rāhui provides an accurate definition of the scope of their [chiefs' and priests'] power of coercion and initiative. Not heeding the prohibitions set by the chiefs and priests is tantamount to offending and arousing, through them, the wrath of the network's ancestors. There is always an extreme disproportion between the nature of the transgression—such as eating a forbidden fruit, for instance—and the harshness of the penalty, which is often lethal. In this instance, it is less about punishing an individual fault than demonstrating the ancestral power of the network.

Another new aspect is that the prohibitions apply to marine and coastal areas, while the rules on land use—governing access to the territories of traditional pharmacopeia in the Faaroa Valley and fishing for īna`a (gobies) at the Vaipoiri River mouth—were not changed.

Local principles of continuity were recognised, such as the interlinking of land and sea, to respect the local community's belief that cultural resilience cannot be separated from ecological resilience. Thus, the protection of spaces does not mean banning access to this space, except during ritual cycles; it necessarily implies the maintenance of traditional routes. For example, the Faaroa Valley in the proposed classification is the place where you will find much of the area's endemic biodiversity, and where experts of traditional medicine (tahu`a rā`au) obtain the necessary ingredients to make their medicines (rā`au). Prohibiting entry would mean losing an important

living aspect of social and cultural heritage that improves health in the community. Preserving access to the mouth of the Vaipoiri River allows traditional populations to continue practising seasonal fishing for *ina`a*, which is an important part of the cultural heritage of these populations.

Similarly, regulating access to sanctuaries like the Vaipoiri and Faaroa valleys would not make sense to people if the same system was not also applied to marine spaces. For locals, their names recall their marine inventories and the historical and contemporary importance of these places. In the logic of *rāhui*, places are protected not for the benefit of humanity, but to allow fry to find a place of refuge to become adults and later feed the population. Environmental protection of the area and maintaining the cultural resources of the community are interrelated and inseparable.



Map 7.3: Map of land and sea use zones in Teahupo`o and Tautira districts.

Source: Campaner (2010).

Interaction with traditional scientific knowledge as a mechanism for social and ecological resilience

Another aspect of building social and ecological resilience in Teahupo`o is collaboration between researchers, traditional experts and local populations (see also Davis and Wagner 2003). Developing a scientific approach to the service of people is not simple as it requires collaboration between disciplines such as history, geography and ecology, to answer questions from actors and help them in their decision-making, without replacing them, about what to protect, the terms of protection, the co-management of land, as well as providing them with the tools to assess the social and environmental development of protected areas.

As such, one of the major contributions of science to the collaboration with the people of Teahupo`o has been to recognise the legitimacy of traditional experts in the management of resources and territories. In a postcolonial context in which these same experts (tahu`a) have historically been ignored or marginalised by missionaries, colonial authorities and local administrations, the simple task of social representation conveyed by our scientific team and the promotion of traditional knowledge represented a profound change. This approach has also been crucial for defining the scope of occupancy, the places that should be protected and the relevant actors who should be included on a management committee. Thus, the legitimacy of these tahu`a was made possible through strict adherence to intellectual copyright, and it led to the development of cultural maps of sacred places suitable for accessing traditional medicines and annual fisheries. These social and ecological maps are not disclosed without the consent of the relevant tahu`a. This work with tahu`a has facilitated their consensual recognition by the people of Teahupo`o who elected them as members of the future management committee.

From a legal anthropological perspective, this work offers a pragmatic and opportunistic view of the relationship between 'official law' and 'unofficial law'. The IUCN categories were not designed to suit local needs in terms of cultural patterns of resource management, but they were used by the inhabitants of Teahupo`o as a means of legitimising the rāhui. The local community was concerned not about the possibility of the rāhui being recognised in official law, but about applying it in a very practical way to suit local needs and, in so doing, preserving their decision-making capacity.

Conclusion

The Teahupo`o case is symbolic. Not only was it the first time a hybrid form of resource management had been implemented in French Polynesia, but also its success has much wider implications. To be fully effective and efficient, other rāhui must be developed to enhance ecological connectivity at a larger scale. The rāhui approaches used in Tahiti Iti provide strong evidence that considerable benefits arise from increasing the scale of contiguous areas managed in this way. Expanding the scale of rāhui management into neighbouring districts enhanced spillover effects in terms of both social resilience and ecological continuity between inter-linked ecosystems. Similarly, hybrid management forms have thrived due to normative and cognitive interactions among stakeholders within this enlarged ecological-management area.

Most protected area models are based on the protection of habitats and resources, and not the integration of culture and connectivity in relation to ecological resilience. This case study has shown how a local population has built a model of hybrid management, combining social and ecological resilience to consider the broader context of cultural and normative pluralism. More fundamentally, social resilience and ecological resilience are inseparable from the space under protection, especially when these spaces are occupied by human communities with a strong cultural identity. The cultural and legal pluralism that dominate many situations in Oceania and the world in general must also be considered when building protected areas. The evidence suggests that this approach is a necessary condition for social acceptance, the effectiveness of actions and, ultimately, the sustainability of management methods.