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# **THE PATH UNTAKEN “Indian Cities” in Canada and the Māori Model**

**BY JOSEPH QUESNEL**



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“Urban Māori had to evolve and develop new *tikanga* (rough translation, “the Māori way of doing things”). We had to develop new *marae* (focal point of Māori communities) that celebrated our tribal diversity but did not wallow in our tribal differences ...”

— John Tamihere, CEO, Te Whānau o Waipareira

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013, the residents of Little Bay Islands<sup>1</sup>—an isolated outport community in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador—had to make an emotionally wrenching choice. The remote community in the northern part of Newfoundland had lost its crab processing plant and the number of paid jobs was dwindling. Its location also made it very difficult for the government to provide public services to the community. The community is dependent on a long ferry ride to get around the region. With a population mainly of seniors, that was deemed to pose a medical risk.

First settled in 1825, Little Bay Islands was once a thriving community of 500, but was now reduced to a population of just over 70. The community is strewn with abandoned buildings.

So, after looking at its options and bleak prospects, the community applied for provincial “resettlement” which would mean if 90 percent of the community voted in favour of moving, every household would stand to receive between \$80,000 and \$100,000.

However, in 2015, the population of Little Bay Islands voted 89.47 percent to resettle their community; just one voter short of the 90 percent needed for approval.<sup>2</sup>

But, lest one think this is an isolated incident, it is important to note that this is part of government policy and strategy. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, to centralize Newfoundland’s work force, the government encouraged small remote villages to abandon their communities in favour of larger centres.

Since 2002, seven remote outport communities have been moved in Newfoundland. Besides Little Bay Islands, North Boat Harbour and La Poile have asked the province to move them as well.<sup>3</sup>

The government process is democratic and voluntary. Residents must vote at least 90 percent in favour to start the process. Also, Municipal Affairs determines whether it is cheaper to relocate them than to continue providing public services over the next 10 to 20 years. If all is approved, the province provides homeowners \$250,000 to \$270,000 to move depending on the size of the home.<sup>4</sup>

So far, the government estimates they have saved \$30M by relocating these seven communities.<sup>5</sup>

Now, looking at the First Nation context in Canada, we see many equivalent “Little Bay Islands” out there. We have many communities that have also long lost their economic rationale for existing and are far from the reach of provincial public services. However, we never ask those communities to even consider relocating unless there are major crises, such as flooding on the reserve lands, such as Kashechewan First Nation on the shore of James Bay in Ontario or First Nation reserves in southern Manitoba affected by seasonal flooding.

We assume Indigenous communities must remain where they are forever. That is their homeland no matter what. In other words, we allow Indigenous communities to remain without hope of meaningful employment opportunities and consign members in their productive years to live on social assistance. As a result, dysfunction and familial strife continue, as does addiction and a temptation towards gang involvement and criminality.

But, a loss of economic rationale and distance from public service delivery does not trigger any relocation process or policy in the First Nation context. The problem is that the memory of a few involuntary relocations in the past has poisoned the well for any such discussion now.

This paper argues that the federal government should take a leading role in relocating First Nations that have lost an economic rationale for existing to larger urban centres. As will be shown, although First Nations obviously still face challenges and lagging indicators in urban centres, they still have much better outcomes than First Nations living on reserve. More importantly, other Indigenous communities around the world have been urbanizing several decades now and they are doing well (relatively speaking, all Indigenous communities lag other communities) and are retaining their identity and culture.

This plan calls for First Nations living in the most uneconomic reserves to become a much larger part of these cities as well as other less-populous centres across Canada. But, rather than the federal government and the provinces continue to squabble about who is responsible for urban First Nations, the federal government should take the leading—if not sole if provinces refuse to co-operate—role in paying for these communities to relocate, provide incentives to live and survive, as well as help maintain their cultural and civic institutions so that First Nations living in cities are not adrift and alone.

The government cannot be neutral as regards to where First Nations in the direst of circumstances live. It would become the policy of the government to encourage relocation and survival in urban environments—as it is in Newfoundland and Labrador with remote outport villages—with the added caveat that the federal government would continue its support of these communities, both materially and in terms of helping them preserve their distinct cultures and languages.

This study makes the case for the creation and encouragement of “Indian Cities” within these urban environments, much as other ethnic communities have their own communities, such as “Chinatown.” The difference is whereas these new communities did not have explicit federal government support to grow, this study argues that the federal government plays a leading role in incentivizing on-reserve First Nations to relocate to cities as well providing for and nurturing their supports and civic institutions so that the transition is much easier.

To make this case, this paper will look at the experience of the heavily urbanized Indigenous Māori people of New Zealand. It will look at their historical example and trajectory to see how moving to the cities has not destroyed their Indigenous identity but allowed it to evolve and shift over time.

## SUPPORTING A 'MIDDLE PATH' VISION

In fact, in New Zealand it became official government policy to help urban migration. By the 1960s, Māori families had already begun to migrate in significant numbers. The government recognized that the economic future of the Māori lay in larger towns and cities. The government-commissioned Hunn Report of 1961, made many recommendations for social reform and improvement for the Māori, one of the central ones being their relocation.<sup>6</sup>

Jack Hunn, the New Zealand civil servant who was commissioned to review the Maori Affairs Department and produced the Hunn Report, supported the path of integration into the broader New Zealand society, and rejected the path of assimilation or segregation. This study sees the wisdom of this “middle path” and supports this integration, not assimilation or segregation route for Canada’s First Nations peoples.

After the 1960s, rural Māori families were incentivized to move to larger urban centres with the provision of housing, employment and general assistance to adjust to a new life.<sup>7</sup>

This paper argues that Canada should similarly re-orient its First Nation policy to one of encouraging and incentivizing relocation to larger centres. It should not be encouraging First Nations in uneconomic and desperate situations to remain as they are.

The hope is that, over a few generations, residents of these “Indian Cities” will develop better outcomes—such as higher incomes and educational achievements—and ideally reduce the incidence of pathologies and dysfunctional behaviours. However, as the Māori example shows, no plan can eliminate all these, but our plan seems most poised for success.

Also, importantly, urbanization does not have to lead to “assimilation” or a loss of any identity or culture. A careful study of survey data will show that existing urban First Nation populations have had a much better experience of navigating the world of urban environment and First Nation identity.

This paper calls for a “middle ground” approach of sorts, in that the government does not expect that urbanized First Nation communities will assimilate and disappear as distinct communities. The policy will be to ensure it survives in the long term. Indigenous communities will not be treated like any other ethnic community in Canada that has immigrated here over time and is expected to assimilate into the multicultural “melting pot” that is Canada. Indigenous peoples are not just one other part of the multicultural fabric in Canada—as the 1969 White Paper seemed to portray them. The government and the broader Canadian society has a responsibility to help First Nations survive culturally as distinct peoples that are Indigenous to this country.

But, rather than adopt the much more assimilationist policies of the White Paper, this paper argued that perhaps it would have been much better if Canada had adopted the “integrationist” vision of the Hunn Report in New Zealand.

The federal government should encourage and finance to a great degree First Nation language and cultural education in the larger centres and help support First Nation cultural and civic organizations. Perhaps these urban First Nations could have some limited forms of cultural self-government or “home rule.” This is like the Māori approach where the aim is for Indigenous communities to survive economically, but not disappear culturally.

At the same time, it is very important to acknowledge that Canada is not New Zealand and Canada’s Indigenous communities are not the Māori. Canada and its Indigenous peoples will need to find a made-in-Canada way for First Nations to urbanize and remain as distinct communities.

## LIFE ON MOST RESERVES IS BLEAK

Canadians should understand that poor socio-economic conditions are not just part of the most remote Indigenous reserves. Most reserve communities are poor and characterized by higher rates of dysfunction and criminality.

A large handful of First Nations are doing well due to location, transformational leadership, and successful economic development. But, the reality is that is not the likely destiny of most First Nations in Canada. The reality is even with large injections of funding, these communities will continue to face horrible economic conditions. Large numbers of band members will continue to have no jobs. There will continue to be vast disparities of wealth and power on First Nations, with the chief and council and his/her family enjoying access to jobs and opportunities, with other families left out. This will continue to be a breeding ground for hopelessness, dysfunction, and criminality. First Nations who are not politically connected are left in isolation and warehoused in environments with little to no economic opportunity. These individuals and families deserve a much better chance in life.

The Canadian Press reviewed Census numbers for First Nations in Canada and found that almost 81 percent of reserves had median incomes below the low-income measure, which Statistics Canada considers to be \$22,133 for one person.<sup>8</sup>

In more absolute numbers, of the 367 reserves for which there was data on total individual median incomes, 297 communities fell below the low-income measure, while just 70 had median incomes above the de facto poverty line.<sup>9</sup>

At the lowest end, 27 communities reported median total incomes below \$10,000.<sup>10</sup>

Only 26 of the 503 of reserves with income data had higher median household incomes.

The outcomes varied wildly, from, for example, \$13,168 in Manitoba's Roseau River First Nation to \$114,381 in the Cree Nation of Chisasibi on the shore of James Bay in Quebec.

To give all First Nations in less-than-ideal economic conditions a chance at achieving a better life, the federal government must slowly dismantle the reserve system, which means local First Nations would be in charge of their own destiny and own their own lands completely. The time for paternalism, which is literally killing people in Indigenous communities, is way over.

The strategy should be increased hope for First Nations who remain on reserves, but an official policy that favours strongly relocating to urban centres and re-designing Indigenous communities there, as the New Zealand Māori have done.

## FIRST NATION DEMOGRAPHICS NOW

The latest 2011 census data from the National Household Survey (NHS) tells us that 1.4 million people reported having an Aboriginal identity. This represents 4.3 percent of the total Canadian population.<sup>11</sup> Broken down, First Nations people in 2011 made up 2.6 percent of the total, compared with 1.4 percent for the Metis, and 0.2 percent for the Inuit.<sup>12</sup>

For our purposes, we will focus on the 851,560, or 60.8 percent of that total, who self-identified as First Nations (North American Indian) in the NHS. For comparative purposes, we will later also look at the data for Metis peoples.<sup>13</sup>

In 2011, the largest First Nations population was in Ontario, followed by British Columbia, followed by the Prairie provinces.

Also, for the purposes of this study, we will zero in on the First Nation population that identified as being Registered Indians (637,660 people). The Census tells us that of this population, nearly one-half (49.3 percent) lived on an Indian reserve or Indian settlement. The data also showed that 323,290 First Nations people with registered Indian status did not live on a reserve.<sup>14</sup>

There is plenty of confusion around Status and non-status Indians and those First Nations who identify as members of a specific First Nation band versus those that do not. The point is that the number of First Nations who live in cities versus those who still live on reserve is roughly equal, with some caveats.

The number of First Nations moving to urban centres is exploding, although reserve communities also continue to grow, mainly due to the burgeoning First Nation birth rate. So, we know there exists a very large proportion of First Nations people who already have relocated to larger urban centres. There already are First Nation sections of cities. The metropolitan areas with the largest populations of First Nations people with status were Winnipeg (25,970 or 3.6 percent of the total), Edmonton

(18,210 or 1.6 percent of the total) and Vancouver (15,080 or 0.7 percent of the total).<sup>15</sup>

The census metropolitan areas with the largest populations of First Nations people without status were Toronto (14,505 or 0.3 percent of the total), Vancouver (13,635 or 0.6 percent of total), Montreal (10,540 or 0.3 percent of the total) and Ottawa-Gatineau (6,495 or 0.7 percent of the total population).<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, First Nations with or without Indian Status, are already a part of urban centres and are only expected to become a larger part into the future.

This paper argues that the federal government should play an official and formal role in encouraging many more First Nations to relocate to urban centres. It should be incentivizing and supporting relocation, as well as the protection of their distinct culture in cities. They could also support limited cultural self-governing institutions in cities, as the Māori have done.

## LIFE IS BETTER IN THE CITIES

It is no secret now that First Nations who live off reserves do better on a wide area of indicators. Of course, problems do not disappear when First Nations people move to urban centres, but conditions do certainly improve for them and it is quite arguable that they are better poised for success there than remaining on the reserves.

Looking at 2006 Census figures, policy makers discovered that the median total income of the Aboriginal population aged 25 to 54 in 2005 was just over \$22,000, in comparison to over \$33,000 for the non-Indigenous population of the same age cohort.<sup>17</sup> Across all Indigenous identity groups, the Metis had the highest median income at almost \$28,000, followed by the Inuit with less than \$25,000 and First Nations people with a median income at around \$19,000 in 2005.<sup>18</sup>

It bears mentioning that the Metis do so well because they are well integrated in urban centres. They do not have lands held in trust for them or have a comparable *Indian Act*. Yes, language and cultural retention is lower among the Metis in cities, but that is changing and there is a growing number of Metis cultural and political institutions working to improve Metis identity.

For First Nations people living off the reserve, the median income at almost \$22,000, compared to just over \$14,000 for First Nations living on reserves. First Nations on reserve are literally the lowest of the low when it comes to socio-economic indicators in Canada. They are at the bottom of the proverbial totem pole. This means they are barely surviving.

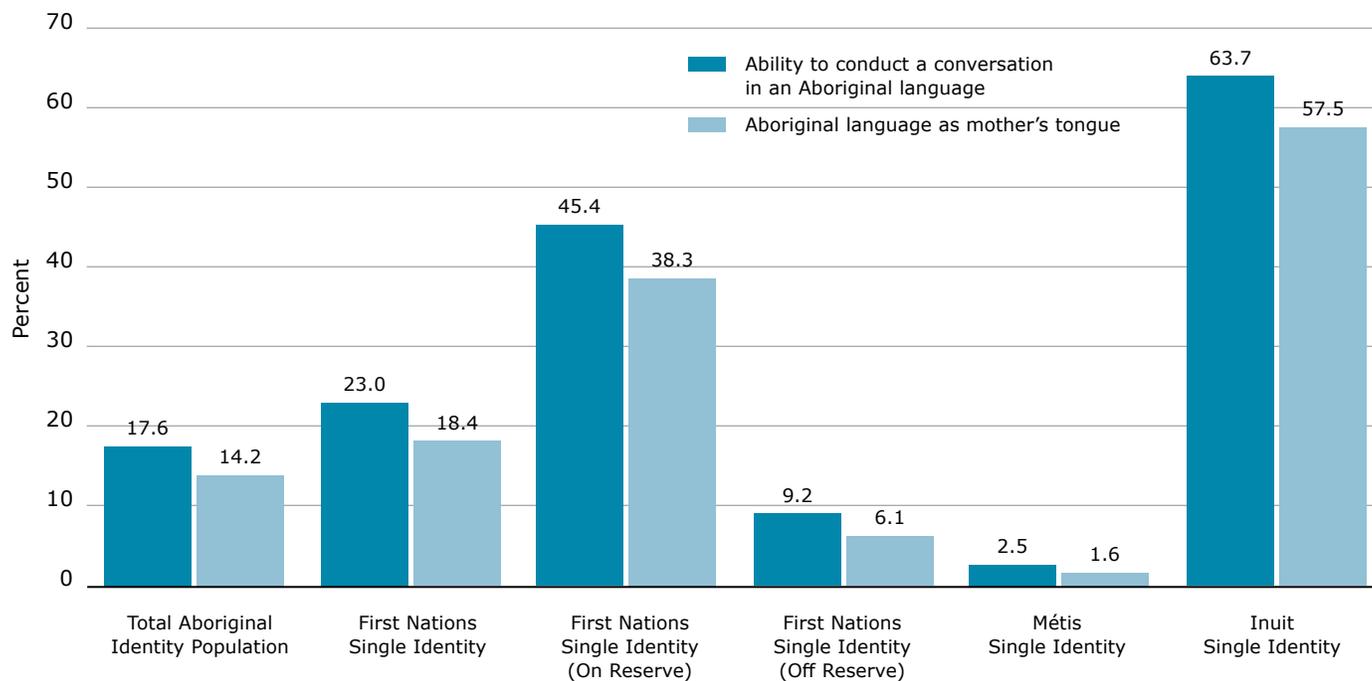
This study assumes that improving material existence is more important than government objectives of reconciliation and pushing for self-government.

The main advantage of living on reserve is the sense of community and solidarity, as well as the ability to retain Indigenous language and culture. As Figure 1 shows on the next page, First Nations on reserve are best able to retain their Indigenous language.

However, this paper argues that, like the New Zealand Māori, the federal government should focus on seriously funding Indigenous languages retention in the cities, which includes full access to First Nation languages in schools. Living in desperate conditions but having better access to language does not seem to be a very good tradeoff, especially when the government can invest in language retention in the urban centres in a large way. Also, as in New Zealand, Indigenous organizations can work with the government to ensure urban Indigenous people have access to cultural organizations, traditional elders, and other institutions.

Figure 1

**Ability to converse in an Aboriginal language and Aboriginal languages as mother tongue.  
By selected Aboriginal identity group and area of residence (Canada, 2011)**



Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

## THE MAORI EXPERIENCE

This section is not intended to be exhaustive of all aspects of Māori history or cultural life. It is intended to be a snapshot of the main contours of Māori life and focuses on their urbanization and re-created national life in the cities. Of course, it will draw out some of the similarities and differences between the Māori and First Nations peoples in Canada. At no point is it asserted or assumed that both communities are exactly parallel or identical. The point is to determine if there are any insights from the Māori experience that can help with Canada's First Nations.

Centuries ago, Polynesian migrants to New Zealand settled into villages that were organized along tribal lines. A single Māori identity did not exist until after European settlers arrived. Māori villages were populated by several extended families (whānau) that formed clans or hapu. Originally, Māori society was very stratified between ruling chiefs and families and subservient classes. The hapū with shared ancestry formed tribes or iwi, which is the largest and most common form of social unit among Māori.

Also, very important to the Māori is the marae (meeting ground, which is the focal point of Māori communities throughout New Zealand). Staying in touch with the Marae is seen as a way of connecting with the tribal culture.

A marae is generally defined as a complex of carved buildings and grounds that belongs to a specific iwi (tribe), hapū (sub-tribe) or whānau (family). Māori people see their marae as tūrangawaewae—their place to stand and belong. Marae are used for meetings, celebrations, funerals, educational workshops and other important tribal events. An important touchstone of Māori culture is to stay in touch with and visit the marae.<sup>19</sup>

The experience of the Māori, however, has been the mass migration from the villages to the cities, but all the while staying connected to tribal identity.

After the Second World War, Māori began their move to the cities which transformed New Zealand forever. For comparison sake, before the Second World War, 90 percent of Māori lived in their rural tribal communities. By the 1970s, almost 80 percent lived in the cities. This was one of the fastest movements from rural to urban in the world. New Zealand is much smaller and only has a few large cities, so comparisons to Canada are challenging. One cannot expect such a mass migration in Canada.

But, the Māori did not disappear in this move. In the capital city of Auckland, for example, Māori began to form in suburbs like Freeman's Bay, Te Atatū and Ōtara.<sup>20</sup>

Urban Māori continued to retain their tribal identities and many of them continued to participate in tribal life, often returning to their homelands. However, many continued their tribal life in the cities by adopting marae committees and tribal land boards. So, in a sense, the tribal life continued.

Throughout the 1980s, many Māori committees, social clubs, and marae groups had created a new urban Māori community life and began the creation of a pan-tribal and urban Māori identity. Also, urban Māori leaders began to emerge on the scene.<sup>21</sup>

Tribes made great efforts to connect with their members and created affiliating groups. Moreover, urban Māori began to achieve a sort of service and cultural self-government through the founding of urban Māori authorities, such as Te Whānau o Waipareira Trust (West Auckland), founded in 1984. Others include the Manukau Urban Māori Authority (South Auckland), Te Rūnanga o Kirikiriroa Trust (Hamilton), Te Rūnanganui o te Ūpoko o Te Ika (Wellington), and Te Rūnanga o Ngā Maata Waka (Christchurch).<sup>22</sup>

These associations fostered the development of urban Māori and created links with the national government and local bodies. They are active in education, health, employment, and economic development. At one point, Māori tribal organizations increasingly

advocated tribal self-management of resources and delivery of services. The government introduced its devolution of services to tribal authorities in the late 1980s. The short-lived *Rūnanga Iwi Act* in 1990 empowered tribal authorities to deliver government services.<sup>23</sup>

Urban Māori authorities also sought to be recognized as iwi or tribal authorities so they can qualify to deliver government services. In 1994, the Whānau o Waipareira Trust made a claim to the Waitangi Tribunal for recognition as a legitimate representative of urban Māori. Subsequently, there were law changes allowing the trust to assume welfare responsibilities from government agencies.<sup>24</sup>

Individual urban Māori authorities have also been advocating for the rights of urban Māori. In 2003, National Urban Māori Authority was formed as the political voice for urban Māori.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, the Māori have survived as distinct peoples in cities and the government has promoted and supported this. It is also worth mentioning that the Māori continue to be defined by their treaty and still enjoy treaty rights and allocations. This paper argues that First Nations in Canada should continue to enjoy their treaty rights and traditional rights to hunt, fish, and trap in their territories, even if they do not continue to live there.

## MAORI CONNECTION TO CULTURAL IDENTITY

Despite their decades-long disconnection from their home villages, most urban Māori continue to identify with the Māori people, know their tribal origins, continue to engage in cultural practices, and still maintain some fluency in the Māori language.

However, studies do show that many Māori who are third and fourth-generation urban dwellers have lost their specific tribal identity. There are many who are aware of what tribe they come from, but have very little to do with their tribes in their everyday life. The identities of 'urban Māori' or 'non-tribal Māori' are becoming very popular.

This new non-tribal identity has challenged Māori traditional institutions and brings the debate over the position of tribes relative to urban Māori bodies. If anything, this new identity has forced many Māori to re-think what it means to be Māori in New Zealand in modern times.

If anything, the reality is that Māori are retaining their distinct cultures, practices and identities, while all along integrating well into New Zealand society.

Based on Statistics New Zealand's first survey on Māori well-being, Te Kupenga,<sup>26</sup> showed that in 2013 (most recent data):

- 373,000 (70 percent) Māori adults said it was at least somewhat important for them to be involved in things to do with Māori culture. Just 10 percent said it was not important.

When asked about tikanga:

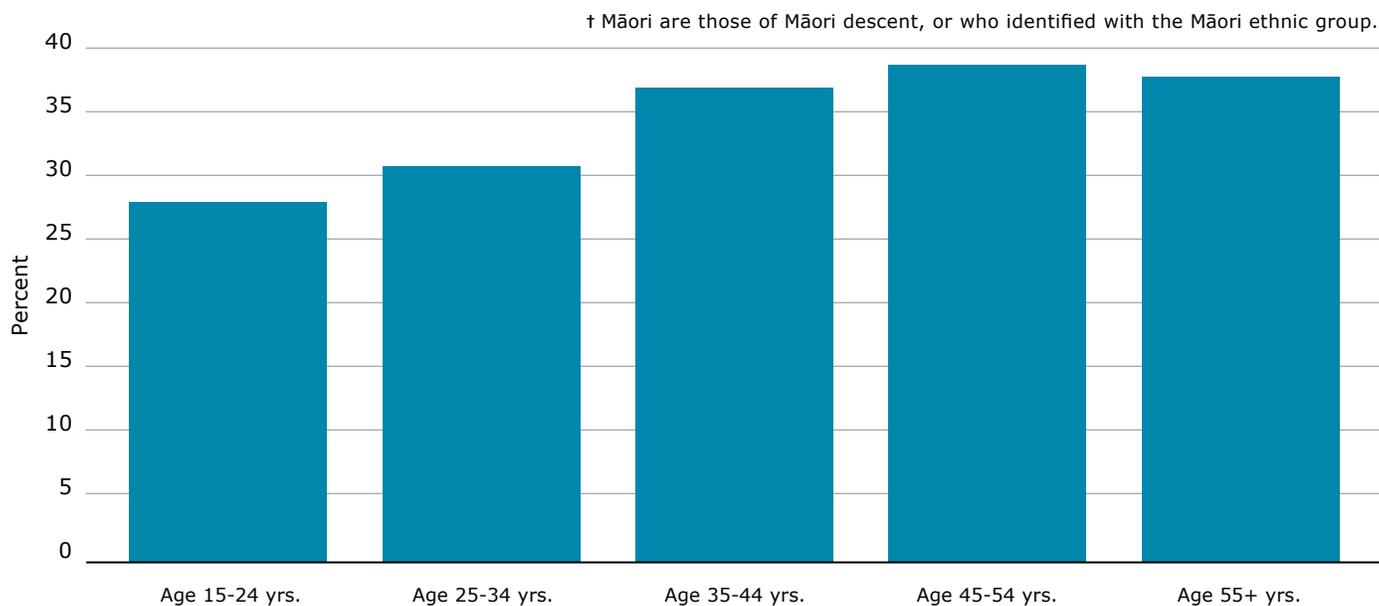
- 89 percent of Māori adults said they knew their iwi. This was the most common aspect of Māori tribal identity or pepeha that Māori knew.
- 62 percent of Māori adults had been to their ancestral marae and 34 percent had done so in the last 12 months.<sup>27</sup>

When asked about te reo Māori (the common Māori language)<sup>28</sup>:

- 257,500 (55 percent) Māori adults had some ability to speak te reo Māori; that is, they were able to speak more than a few words or phrases in the language. This compares with 153,500 (42 percent) in 2001.
- 50,000 (11 percent) Māori adults could speak te reo Māori very well or well; that is, they could speak about almost anything or many things in Māori.
- Between 2001 and 2013 there was a large increase in the proportion of younger Māori who reported some ability to speak te reo Māori.
- 164,500 (35 percent) Māori adults reported speaking some te reo Māori within the home.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 2

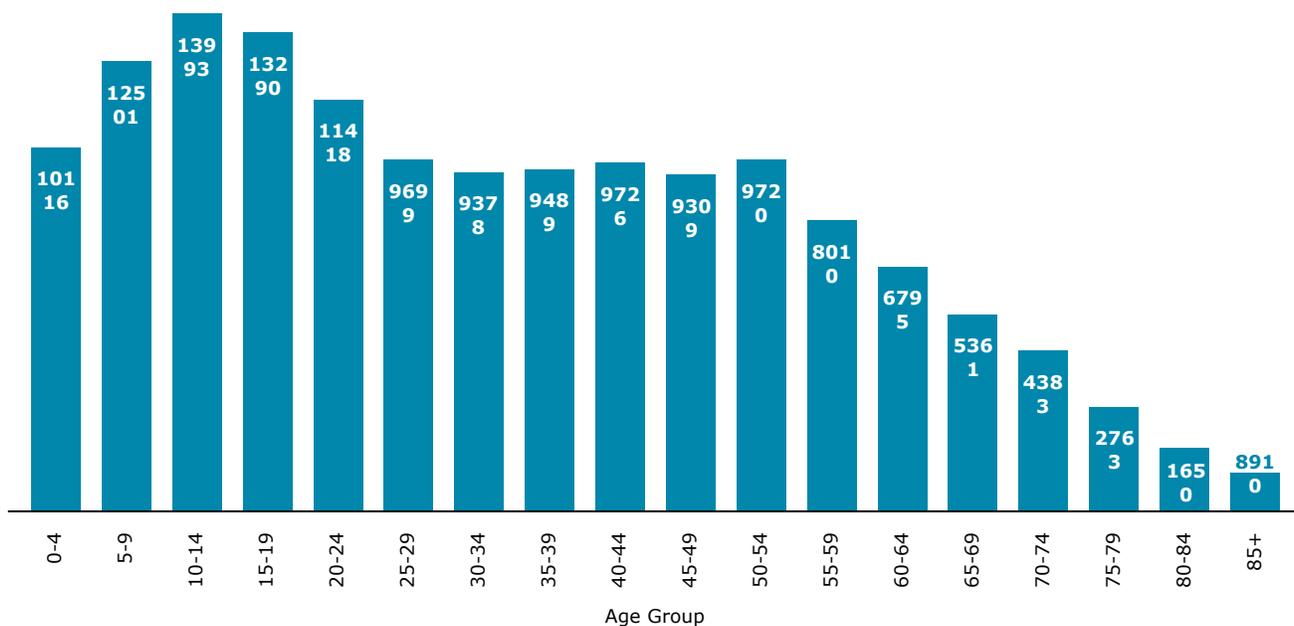
### Proportion of all Māori† (Aged 15+) that have been to their ancestral marae in the last 12 months (June-August, 2013)



Source: Statistics New Zealand, *Te Kupenga*, 2013.

Figure 3

### Māori language proficiency (By age group, 2013)



Source: Statistics New Zealand, *Te Kupenga*, 2013.

## VALUES AND IDENTITY OF URBAN FIRST NATIONS IN CANADA

In comparison, First Nations in Canada who have moved to larger urban centres have also retained their cultural identity and ties to their individual First Nation. Like their Māori, their identity has shifted also during this urbanization.

In 2010, the polling firm Environics Institute for Survey Research conducted one of the largest polls of Canada's urban Indigenous population. It asked urban Aboriginal people a wide variety of questions, but it is the sense of identity and values that is most of interest to this paper.

Although the surveys included First Nation, Metis, and Inuit respondents, the responses are still relevant for this paper.<sup>30</sup>

A main finding is that urban First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit alike maintain great reverence for their heritage and express strong Indigenous pride. Interestingly, the report also found that, "Seven in ten urban Aboriginal peoples also say they are very proud to be Canadian, demonstrating that Indigenous pride and pride in Canada are, in most cases, complementary—not mutually exclusive. Nor is a sense of Canadian identity necessarily evidence of "assimilation" into the non-Aboriginal world." Or as the study puts it another way: "A stronger Aboriginal political identity coincides with a stronger Canadian political identity."

Most aboriginal people living in cities (71 percent) consider their city "home," not simply a transitional place to get a job or go to school. And two-thirds (65 percent) say they like living in the city "a lot." Most urban Aboriginal peoples are likely to feel connected to Aboriginal communities in their cities. More than six in ten of those surveyed said they belonged to a "mostly" Aboriginal or "equally" Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community.

Here is a snapshot of the values of the First Nations sample in the study:

Education is the top life aspiration for First Nations peoples, followed by a good job or career, and

raising a family. Like Métis and Inuit, they define a successful life primarily in terms of family and a balanced lifestyle. Yet, status First Nations peoples are among those most likely to identify a strong connection to one's Aboriginal heritage as another important element of a good life. Similarly, First Nations peoples are among the most likely to express the hope that future generations have stronger cultural connections, and to believe that being part of a healthy community has an influence on personal health.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, urban First Nations had values and life aspirations that were not very different from the mainstream population. They wanted a good life and a good life for their children. The only real difference is their distinct Indigenous identity that they wanted to see preserved for themselves and their children. The government—in working with Indigenous communities and organizations—can certainly do that for First Nations in their urban environment.

It is also important to stress this finding from the study: "Majorities of urban Aboriginal peoples are happy with their lives. Health, connection to their Aboriginal heritage and socio-economic status are all factors that affect their level of happiness, but homeowners and those who are very satisfied with their jobs are most likely to say they are very happy."

Despite the continuation of some pathologies and criminality, First Nations in cities have the potential to be happy and to be settled in meaningful lives in cities.

In terms of their connection to Indigenous organizations and lobby groups, Canada's urban Aboriginal population is divided.

Or as the study puts it: "Less than half of urban Aboriginal peoples feel well-represented by existing Aboriginal political organizations. Individuals active in the Aboriginal political system are more likely to feel such organizations speak for them."<sup>32</sup>

This compares to the Māori experience where a dense network of Māori cultural and political institutions and associations are located throughout the cities. In some cases, Māori agencies deliver government services to Māori city residents. Not surprisingly, the Māori urban identity is much more grounded and solid. With strong support from the federal government, it is hoped that urban First Nations would have this strong identity as well.

The Environics Institute study also established that urban First Nations people still faced problems in the cities. Or as the study put it: "First Nations peoples in Canada are most likely among urban Aboriginal peoples to report some type of serious involvement in the criminal justice system (i.e., they have been a witness to or a victim of a crime, have been arrested or have been charged with a crime). More than half lack confidence in the system, yet this proportion is no higher than among Métis (who are less likely to have had serious involvement)."

On another negative side, many urban Aboriginal people feel they are viewed in negative ways and many have personally experienced negative behavior because of their Indigenous identity. Obviously, these are two areas that need significant work, in both Canada and New Zealand.

The study authors also found that the city was an excellent source of Indigenous culture. It read: "The city is a venue for the creative development of Aboriginal culture. One of the most optimistic findings from the UAPS is the strong sense of cultural vitality among urban Aboriginal peoples in Canadian cities. By a wide margin, First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit think Aboriginal culture in their communities has become stronger rather than weaker in the last five years. This is particularly true in Toronto and Vancouver, where residents are both more aware of Aboriginal cultural activities in their city and participate in them more frequently."

The study also highlighted that urban Aboriginal people were "fairly confident in their ability to maintain their cultural identity in an urban setting."

So, in the end, there is much potential for urban First Nations to feel grounded and happier in their lives and to live a life where their culture and identity is secure and meaningful. This is in contrast to a life on the reserve where poverty and dysfunction are endemic and where culture may be secure but you have it at the expense of everything else that is important in life.

## OTHER PATH FOR FIRST NATIONS?

For a long time, it has been evident that the reserve system in Canada (and the reservation system in the United States) has been a failure. The evidence is similar in the United States where reservations have bred dependency and pathology. It's time to swallow that hard truth and it is time to look beyond North America where this experiment has been a failure to other places for both inspiration and emulation.

This paper, as was shown, argued that the New Zealand Māori are one model to find insight in and to emulate as much as possible within this context. Obviously, New Zealand and Canada are different and had different histories and trajectories. Plus, New Zealand is much smaller and has only one treaty for its Indigenous peoples. Canada is very large and has many treaty relationships. The path towards official mass urban migration would be full of many challenges and obstacles. To a large extent, this is recognizing the realities of political economy in Canada that transcends Indigenous issues. Communities in Canada survived as long as they had economic rationales and existed closer to markets and transportation networks. The problems facing small Indigenous communities are not unlike the challenges facing small non-Aboriginal rural villages across Canada.

There will be tremendous resistance to this policy orientation from First Nation communities and First Nation organizations that have a vested interest in maintaining the reserve system and protecting their specific tribal interests.

But it is hoped that First Nation organizations and governments at all levels will see the hopefulness inherent in this proposal. First Nations in Canada do not have to live segregated and in economically dismal conditions. They also don't have to assimilate into the broader culture and forget their identities. They can adopt a middle path of integration in Canada's cities with significant government in relocation and helping create cultural and social institutions. In the end, this vision is more hopeful and realistic.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The federal government adopt an official policy supporting and encouraging voluntary relocation of First Nation communities to urban centres.
- The federal government make it official policy to ensure First Nation language and culture is preserved in the new urban environment.
- Shifting monies towards First Nation cultural and language retention in the cities, including full access to Indigenous language immersion programs.
- If it deemed desirable, provincial governments work with Ottawa and First Nations to allow First Nations agencies to deliver government services to urban First Nations.

## ENDNOTES

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