



# Urban environmental ethics and coastal transformations: remapping the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, in a process of marine spatial planning

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## Abstract

This paper is motivated by recent debates about marine spatial planning (MSP) and a blue economy, pushed worldwide for marine and coastal transitions but discussed by critical scholars as potentially facilitating a neoliberalization of the seas. It engages with an MSP project initiated in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, to formally bargain for a better socio-natural state of the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana (Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari, 2013–2016). The paper is interested in the way *ethics*—proper ways of living—are being problematized and (re)claimed in MSP, and their role in remapping the land/seascape, its socio-nature and power relations. I employ and develop *urban ethics* as a research agenda, which draws together a diverse scope of work, in particular post-political theory, neoliberal forms of governing and ethicization, ontological pluralism and (re)centering alternative/non-hegemonic ethicalities. By disentangling the problematizations, natural-cultural imaginaries and governmentalities in 21 in-depth interviews, I identify four distinct but interwoven discursive strands in regard to the MSP. Two strands stand out as they problematize *ethics* as a means of change. The paper finds transformative potential in a mode of disruption and progressive alternatives to neoliberal beliefs and governmentality, primarily in the (re)centering of non-normative Māori ethicality and knowledge. The paper reveals ethics as a major dimension in environmental bargaining within a neoliberal urban context. Its nuanced understanding of ethics shows ethics' destabilizing role in environmental bargaining, its role in disrupting power structures and colonizing framings, and in supporting alternative imaginations of socio-natural land/sea relations.

**Keywords** Urban ethics · Marine spatial planning · Neoliberal governmentality · Ethicization · Non-normative/anormative ethicalities · Auckland · Aotearoa New Zealand

## Introduction

Policy approaches like marine spatial planning (MSP) or a blue economy (BE) try to provide answers to the question of how to achieve a *better* future for marine and coastal ecosystems and people alike. Despite being shaped and promoted by international and supra-regional institutions, they are locally realized and differ in their practical implementation (Douvere & Ehler 2009; Jones et al. 2016). What they have in common is the aim to tackle increasing risks, conflicts and change by transforming ways of interacting, doing business and living with the sea—so reassembling the human and more-than-human, foremost in coastal spaces (Winder & Le Heron

2017). Projects that aim for a coastal transition and reorganization entail a normative dimension, and are not only political but in many ways “ethical projects” (Ege & Moser 2020). The question whether MSP/BE induce an actual transformation of socio-natural relations and lead “towards more equity-based, democratic decision-making and a fairer distribution of our ocean wealth” (Flannery & Ellis 2016, p. 121) or rather push a neoliberalization of marine management is of concern to academics (Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019; Fairbanks et al. 2019; Clarke & Flannery 2020; Ege & Moser 2020; Flannery & McAteer 2020). This paper engages with the question of a socio-natural transformation and empowerment in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ), where an MSP project as answer to a deteriorating environmental state of the Hauraki Gulf (the Gulf) was carried out in a wider environment of marine transition endeavours. The project involved ethicized and moralized discourse in the form of normative imperatives, reflections and ideas of *good* and *right*

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living and planning for the Gulf such as claims of consensus, collaboration and marine stewardship (Ege & Moser 2020; Aschenbrenner 2023). The paper is interested in this project and its emergent naturalcultural<sup>1</sup> and governmental imaginaries and narratives with a focus on the question in what ways new, *ethical*, emancipatory and potentially disruptive urban marine-environmental geographies have been assembled. At the same time, it critically discusses *ethicization*—the tendency to frame (urban) questions (discourses, conflicts) as questions of ethics—as a form of neoliberal governmentality, by which conflicts and antagonistic positions in environmental bargaining are potentially being depoliticized and *tamed* (Dürr et al. 2019). That way it links to recent critical social scientific work, in which scholars found MSP and BE projects to be assembled around neoliberal logics and principles, and as showing signs of a neoliberal governmentality and post-political state (Tafon 2018; Flannery & McAteer 2020).

The lack of an actual transformation of urban—and marine—socio-natural and power relations is often associated with an absence of “alternative[s] to the [neoliberal] mainstream paradigm and potentially disruptive ideas” (Haughton et al. 2013, p. 231). This absence is—with reference to political philosophers Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière—regarded as a characteristic of a post-political condition, which much environmental and marine politics are said to have arrived in (Swyngedouw 2009; Haughton et al. 2013; Tafon 2018; Flannery & McAteer 2020). The *political*, understood by Mouffe as a dimension of antagonism, contestation and conflict, is being replaced in post-political arrangements by consensus-based politics and a shift to ethico-moral (instead of political) categories. Put in highly simplified terms, the ability to express antagonistic positions to question and disrupt a given order of things is being limited (Mouffe 2005; Rancière 2006; Allmendinger & Haughton 2012). Several authors observed a containment of conflict and progressive elements in MSP favouring neoliberal objectives such as economic growth, efficiency or a narrow definition of sustainable development—often by measures of technocratic-managerial forms of governance, tokenistic participation and claims of singular, objective truths (Flannery et al. 2018; Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019; Clarke & Flannery 2020).

While scholars identified (aspects of) post-political conditions in several MSP projects, some concluded that this does

not mean a general depoliticization of these spaces (Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019). Authors researching neoliberal governance and planning in other contexts described and discussed similar and somewhat complex and apparently paradoxical processes: While neoliberal modes of governance might “foreclose or displace [the] proper political dimension” (Haughton et al. 2013, p. 222), they can be accompanied by a change in state-civil society relationships attributing an increasing role to civil society, including non-governmental organizations (NGO). Greater public involvement and socially liberal identity politics can create open spaces where “everyone is treat[ed] as equal speaking beings” (Haughton et al. 2013, p. 222), and people or groups are able to freely express their political views (Swyngedouw 2005; McCormack 2012). Assessments of and opinions on these processes have been manifold and also contradictory (Speed & Sierra 2005; Kingfisher & Maskovsky 2008; Lewis et al. 2009; Swyngedouw 2009; Haughton et al. 2013; Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017; Bargh 2018). Scholars generally agree that there actually is not *one* neoliberalism or form of neoliberalization but processes and effects like those of (dis)empowerment or (de)politicization that are contextual, complex and potentially coexist (Peck & Tickell 2002; McCormack 2012; Olesen 2014). In terms of researching marine management and politics, this indicates the value, and necessity, of a general openness and “reading for difference” (Gibson-Graham 2008). In relation to this paper, it means going beyond diagnosing a potential post-political condition, by untangling the multiple, tangled truths, narratives and imaginaries and thereby paying attention to disruptions and progressive alternatives to/in (potentially) neoliberal MSP, especially when expressed in *ethical* terms (Flannery & McAteer 2020; Aschenbrenner 2023).

The paper thinks through and with a lens of *urban ethics* (Dürr et al. 2019; Ege & Moser 2020). It understands the project of MSP in Auckland, *Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari* (SCTTTP, 2013–2016), as a process of environmental bargaining (Affolderbach 2011). SCTTTP was initially championed by an environmental NGO and the Hauraki Gulf Forum (HGF), an integrative, statutory body with the purpose to enhance the conservation and sustainable management of the Gulf (New Zealand Government 2000; Peart 2019). Here, environmental bargaining is understood, drawing on Affolderbach, as “a process through which [antagonistic actors] seek to change existing decision-making processes and outcomes [...] to reflect environmental imperatives”<sup>2</sup> (2011, p. 182). The political-economic context of Auckland

<sup>1</sup> In this context, the wording *natureculture* (*naturalcultural*) is used as it draws attention to the plurality of ontologies (or world-makings), also those within and beyond Western philosophical traditions. The closely related concept of *socionature* (*or social nature*), often used in geographical contexts, directs the focus rather on the *production* of hybrid processes and relations. Both concepts draw on the critique of a nature/culture dualism as it is embedded in more *modern*, Eurocentric thinking, and aim to draw attention to the hybridity of processes/objects (Gesing et al. 2019).

<sup>2</sup> The author is aware that “environmental” (*the environment*) is a term often used in a Western philosophical tradition implying a human/nature divide. In the context of SCTTTP, multiple worldviews and knowledges were acknowledged and emphasized. Environmental bargaining in this sense is seen as ontologically more open and integrating different imperatives that aim for a “well-being” of the Gulf.

is one of far-reaching neoliberal reform and relaxing regulatory conditions. SCTTTP took the form of a formal bargaining process without being properly formalized—it was non-statutory but publicly funded, quasi-independent and broadly participatory (Lewis & Murphy 2015; Le Heron et al. 2018). This complies with ideas of, especially urban, neoliberal governance, where a greater role and responsibility is assigned to private economic actors and civil society, thus allowing the formal integration of processes like SCTTTP into a greater neoliberal logic (Swyngedouw 2005; Haughton et al. 2013). The SCTTTP process and its outcomes were intended to be collaborative and consensus-based, and they involved ethical claims-making and questions. A research perspective of *urban ethics* draws these aspects into focus. It brings awareness to normativity and ethics as a register in which environmental bargaining takes place, not only since, but increasingly as neoliberal forms of governing become normalized (N. Rose 2000; Muehlebach 2012; Dürr et al. 2019).

An “ethicization of discourses and conflicts” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 8) is often considered symptomatic of a neoliberal governmentality and post-political condition. Urban ethical lines of thought, as outlined by Dürr et al. (2019), bring, at the same time, awareness to ethics as antagonism to capitalist, neoliberal logics. Claiming ethics of care, collective responsibilities, commoning, interdependence or affect can provide progressive imaginaries, and be part—or the basis—of attempts to establish an alternative *better* social order, enhanced resourcefulness and to intervene into the economization of marine resources (Tronto 1999; Sevenhuijsen 2000; Amin 2006; Gibson-Graham 2006, 2008; Popke 2006, 2010; St Martin 2007; McCormack 2018; Lewis 2019). It is important to take an explicit focus on these complex, and somewhat ambiguous dynamics of an ethicization, to better understand processes and power struggles in land/sea contexts.

The paper’s objective is to theoretically, as well as empirically, explore and discuss the *informal*—normative and ethical—dimension of urban environmental bargaining, and coastal transition endeavours. Therefore, the paper centres urban ethics in its theoretical approach and research. It draws a distinction between a normative-strategic transition approach and an analytic, poststructuralist point of view on *transformations* (affected by, but not confined to, transition objectives). Its perspective is the latter. Coastal transition initiatives like MSP are said to be in many ways ethical projects—spaces for bargaining and implementing ethico-moral principles (Ege & Moser 2020). This framing facilitates a focus on ethical problematizations and claims-making, in which *good* (right, sustainable, etc.) ways of living are problematized and/or claimed, and their role in remapping urban coastal spaces. Urban ethics as a research perspective opens up a spectrum on which these can be understood—as indicators for

an ethicization linked to a neoliberal governmentality, or as providing progressive naturalcultural imaginaries, and conceptions of subjectivity and responsibility. From this stance, the paper examines Auckland’s MSP. The analysis disentangles the different narrations of SCTTTP subsequent to the planning process. It identifies emergent discursive strands that each interweaves specific problematizations, naturalcultural imaginaries and governmentalities. Ethics are problematized and seen as a mode of intervention in several strands but linked to differing naturalcultural imaginaries and governmentalities. Bearing the diverse interpretations of ethics in mind (linked to a neoliberal governmentality, or as opening up diverse alternatives in neoliberal capitalism), the paper discusses the politics and transformational potential of ethics in and for the remapping of Auckland’s land/seascape.

The paper engages with different conceptualizations of ethics, aiming to acknowledge diverse worldviews and “ethicalities” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). My positionality is one of a Western European (German) author, and *outsider* to Māori viewpoints and ontology. My limited understanding of *te ao Māori* (the Māori world) needs to be mentioned at this point. My intention is to add to critical discussions of normativity and ethics in the fields of MSP, BEs and coastal transitions, while contributing to urban ethics thinking *from the Gulf* as a distinct naturalcultural territory. My own research ethics is linked to a political ecology perspective, concerns of power relations and dynamics, justice, decolonization and environmental sustainability.

## Urban ethics as an agenda for researching coastal transition projects

### Ethics and normativity in MSP and BE practice and research

Questions of a transition/transformation towards a *better* (more sustainable, more resilient, etc.) future of marine and coastal ecosystems and livelihoods have a normative dimension—as have the answers given by international organizations, state authorities, so-called experts and scholars. “Transition and transformation [as buzzwords] are often used interchangeably” (Hölscher et al. 2018, p. 1)—in a growing consensus of a need for change. Brand (2016) notices a mingling of analytic and normative (normative-strategic) dimensions in the transition-transformation debate and proposes a clearer distinction by using *transformation* as a critical-analytical concept. Transition ideas and concepts broadly express “the ambition to shift from analysing and understanding problems towards identifying pathways and solutions for desirable environmental and societal change” (Hölscher et al. 2018,

p. 1). Heidkamp and Morrissey formulate one of the central questions in terms of coastal transitions as: “how can a transition towards a sustainable and resilient but also just and equitable coastal zone be facilitated” (2019, p. 8)? Thus, *transition* holds various ideals, normative principles and assumptions.

The paper utilizes *transformation* to analytically capture the dimensions of normativity in transition endeavours, and to critically understand *emergent* patterns of changes and (unintended) outcomes. The main intention is to differentiate between a normative, problem-centred and *foretelling* transition perspective and a more retroactive, poststructuralist point of view. Emergent ethical, naturalcultural and governmental narratives and imaginaries may be transformative in a way that they break with some of the normative principles and assumptions connected to dominant (initial) transition discourses.

Publications on MSP and BE can be, and often are, understood using a distinction of normative (while normativity-denying) process-oriented and problem-oriented approaches versus *critical* scholarship which challenges and makes apparent issues of normativity (see Fairbanks et al. 2019; Garland et al. 2019 for extensive literature reviews; Flannery et al. 2020). Most often, critical approaches put normative discussions in the centre: They question the *normality* (norms) of MSP/BE arrangements while leading an ethically informed debate on issues of power relations and *what is just* (Boucquey et al. 2016; Flannery et al. 2016; Ntona & Schröder 2020). A clear distinction is hard to make, and it seems that authors are increasingly “embracing the normative” (Olson & Sayer 2009) when accounting for power dynamics in sustainability transitions (Morrissey & Heidkamp 2019), discussing concepts like environmental sustainability and equality in ocean governance (Bennett 2018; Bennett et al. 2019), or by calling for a rethinking of the BE along altered and diverse ethical co-ordinates (Lewis 2019). Nevertheless, these approaches are often relatively abstract, and the question remains in what ways ethics and normativities are discussed and enacted *on the ground*. How do people and institutions negotiate urban coastal life in normative registers? What role do ethics and normativity play in the remapping of the land/seascape? And in what ways does an ethicization lead to an urban coastal reorganization and transformation?

### Urban ethics as a field of bargaining: coastal transitions and neoliberal ethicization

We live, according to Puig de la Bellacasa, in an “age of ethics [where] everything is ethical” (2015, pp. 130–132). Dürr et al. (2019) and Ege and Moser (2020) adopt the term *ethicization* to refer to the conjuncture of

ethics with the rise in ethicized and moralized discourses that has been identified and critically reflected on in the social science and humanities disciplines. Dürr et al. and Ege and Moser pursue and address such a shift in negotiations within cities and urban life. They notice that “questions about urban life have increasingly been raised explicitly as ethical questions” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 1). In the following, the authors describe a research agenda on *urban ethics* that brings negotiations of moral and social ideals, principles and norms in cities to the fore.<sup>3</sup> The aim is to make sense of the role of ethics in urban contexts by understanding when and how urban actors problematize—explicitly or not—*good life* and *living in the right way*.<sup>4</sup> Thus, urban ethics denotes a field of problematizations and interaction, while it also refers to what is problematized and claimed as (un)ethical in this field. Ethical problematizations, and thus urban ethics, are also part and a dimension of environmental bargaining in cities and under urban conditions (Hayter & Patchell 2015; Ege & Moser 2020), as well as of negotiations in marine contexts and over ocean space (Boucquey 2017). Urban ethics functions, in this paper, as a lens to focus on and understand such urban ethical problematizations and claims-makings.

Dürr et al. (2019) observe that “multi-layered ethical questions and rhetoric [which] come to the surface in urban conflicts are difficult to address with conventional frameworks of analysis” (p. 4). Urban ethics as a research approach, then, does not start with or aim to devise a definition of ethics. It takes in and reviews multiple and interdisciplinary theories and conceptualizations of ethics, bringing them into conversation with each other and with empirical research. The relationship between politics and ethics is a question that recurs in this context. Urban ethics approaches this relationship from various analytical perspectives or *perspectivisations*, in particular from a Foucauldian focus on (neoliberal) forms of governing and subjectivation (Rose

<sup>3</sup> Both texts emerged from the work of an interdisciplinary research group on urban ethics funded by the German Research Foundation (2015–2022, see DFG Research Unit Urban Ethics 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Drawing on Foucault (1985) and Collier and Lakoff (2005), Dürr et al. (2019) and Ege and Moser (2020) further conceptualise urban ethics as answers expressed, “practically and theoretically [...] to [the] rather general question: How should one live in the city” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 2)? *Urban ethics* can be understood fourfold, as (1) ethics in the city, (2) when the urban (for example, housing, traffic, pollution, or wider questions of a good and just city) appears as an object of ethical negotiation and reflection, (3) as ethical negotiations that take place under urban conditions, or (4) when ethical postulations are linked to views of what it means to be emphatically urban, so ethics of the urban, of urbanism, urbanity or *Urbanität* (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 3).



2000), and David Graeber's concept of social creativity (Graeber 2005).<sup>5</sup>

The broad theoretical conversation around the research agenda of urban ethics underlies the research process, and this paper. The specificities of the research context in ANZ, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are summoned into dialogue by place, require the further development of the urban ethics conversation (Timmermans & Tavory 2012; Larsen & Johnson 2017). The (attempted) understanding of urban ethical articulations and problematizations in and around the Gulf requires an understanding of ethics from a point of *ontological diversity*. The very conceptualization of ethics, and what is acknowledged as an urban ethical claim or articulation, is political. This does not mean to define ethics in a certain or different way, but to open up the understanding of urban ethics as a field of coexistence where not only moral and social ideals, principles and norms are negotiated, but the very understanding of *ethical* living in the city in its ontological pluralism (Larsen & Johnson 2017). María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) uses in *Matters of care* the concept of *ethicalities* (ethical ontologies) to capture the plurality of ethical framings/systems, emphasizing the coexistence of multiple non-normative/anormative *ethicalities* with(in) Western-anthropocentric, hegemonic *Ethics*.<sup>6</sup>

Approaching urban ethics from a perspective of ontological pluralism implicates a broadening of the understanding of the relationship of ethics and politics, too. My understanding is that *politics*—or questions of politics—represent an important dimension that links different ethicalities to each other. European colonization has incorporated ANZ in the capitalist world economy, concepts and practices of capitalist production, whereby individual freedom and private property rights have been established and normalized. Nature has been constructed as external to the individual and *culture* (Pawson & Brooking 2002; Christensen 2013; McAloon 2013). An (environmental) *Ethics*, often framed as *modern*, have become hegemonic. It invokes an individual subject, a human/nature dualism (as well as other

categorizations and demarcations) and, what is relevant to this paper, specific ideas and practices of governance (Braun & Wainwright 2001; Latta 2014; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Choi 2022).

It is within this context of a hegemonic *Ethics* that most mainstream ethical projects,<sup>7</sup> patterns and workings of an *ethicization* need to be understood. Theories and interpretation frameworks, such as the perspectivalisations of an urban ethics approach, help to make sense of empirical materials that draw on or invoke urban *Ethics* in the context of Auckland's neoliberal governing environment (Lewis & Murphy 2015). The paper focuses on the following aspects: (1) ethical projects and how they overlap with neoliberal urban governance, foregrounding consensus-oriented techniques, ethico-moral principles and networked arrangements of *governance-beyond-the-state* (Swyngedouw 2005; Ege & Moser 2020a). Ethical projects, their embedded ethico-moral principles and techniques of governing are, in this context, discussed to exclude (antagonistic) voices, systemic critique and the discussion of alternatives. Ethico-moral principles define who (what) is able/allowed to speak (*stakeholder*) and what can be said or imagined (Haughton et al. 2013). The organization of governance (decision-making) in soft planning spaces and horizontal networks of public, private and third sector actors further eliminates opposition and critique, especially as civil society “takes the role of participant and co-initiator of ethical projects” (Ege & Moser 2020, p. 10). (2) Urban *Ethics*' role is further understood as supporting neoliberalizing dynamics as political questions “become individualized, contained in the domain of personal ‘choice’ or lifestyle, seemingly depoliticized as custom or culture” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 133). Responsibility here is transferred to free and economically rational human subjects and their self-conduct (Rose et al. 2006)—asking individuals for an ethical self-formation—for instance, when “marine conservation [...] focuses attention on addressing individual behaviour [...] while ignoring large-scale structural issues” (Flannery & McAteer 2020, p. 271).

Both aspects link back to the question of the ontological politics of urban ethics, making apparent the “colonizing

<sup>5</sup> Rose (2000) theorized *ethopower*, and the dynamics of neoliberal forms of governing and subjectivation in his writings on Third way politics in Western Europe. Urban ethics takes into account Rose's considerations in its perspectivalisation of *techniques of governing*. Urban ethics discourses can, from this perspective, be understood as being intertwined with, and part of, a neoliberal governmentality in which governance is understood in positive means (and not as an exercise of repressive rule). Working through the framework of ethical discourses and in spaces created for ethical reflection, urban dwellers are, then, guided and encouraged to conduct themselves as self-reliant and responsible subjects. Social creativity helps in turn to frame and understand new forms of self-management and subjectivation “from below” (DFG research group on Urban Ethics 2015; Dürr et al. 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Puig de la Bellacasa uses a capital E to denote the hegemonic position of Western, anthropocentric *Ethics*.

<sup>7</sup> Ege and Moser conceptualise campaigns and projects in cities, which aim for or promise “better or more just cities and a better urban life” (2020, p. 8), as ethical projects. Ethical projects are future-oriented, hold a “certain amount of pre-planning, self-awareness and intentional communication [and assemble] policy, technology, buildings, aesthetics and institutions, and [...] an ethico-moral sense of ‘something better’” (ibid., pp. 7–8). They often involve academic research, “be it affirmatively or critically” (ibid., p. 9). Accordingly, coastal transition initiatives that assemble principles of “ecological (‘green’) sustainability, social and cultural inclusivity and openness, participation, collaboration, conviviality, consensus- and community-building, [and/or] transparency” (ibid., p. 7) can be framed ethical projects.

use of Ethics”, as Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) termed it. As ethical projects and urban Ethics take a neoliberalizing and depoliticizing role, they reinforce colonizing framings, principles and practices. (Re-)Centring alternative/non-normative ethicalities, thus, plays an important role in decolonizing and transforming land/sea environments, and are, here, in the focus of *reading for difference*.

### (Re-)Centring progressive alternatives in a field of urban ethics

Māori are the descendants of Ranginui, the sky father, and Papatūānuku, the earth mother. Kin-based relationships connect the ancestors of forests, wild/cultivated food plants, the ocean and waterways, wind and people, and all other life forms (human and more-than-human entities) (Makey 2021, p. 7). Human beings “inherited the mana (ancestral power) to harvest the offspring [of their ancestors] but the aim is to keep these exchanges in balance, so that the life force remains strong and healthy (*mauri ora*)” (Salmond et al. 2019, p. 46). Māori ethicalities see relationships as mutually embedded and reciprocal, and involve both rights and responsibilities to care for other life forms. “Rights to take particular species were passed down genealogical lines and through relationships of alliance and friendship” (ibid.), and have been maintained by reciprocal care, use and occupation.

Ethics of care and alternative modes of responsibility that see humans and more-than-humans enmeshed in complex, life-sustaining relationships are also at the centre of feminist approaches that seek alternatives “to the subjects and spaces of liberal-democratic political theory” (Popke 2006, p. 506) and a better social order (Gilligan 1982; Fisher & Tronto 1990; Tronto 1999; Held 2006). Fischer (2020a, b) observed ethics of care as a specific articulation of urban ethics in the practice of urban environmental caring relationships in Auckland, ANZ. The author shows how care ethics and practices are entangled with neoliberal institutional setups in Auckland and cannot easily be separated from their neoliberal context. Trnka and Trundle (2017) open up a way of understanding these entanglements with their conceptualization of *competing responsibilities*. The framing points out the need to appreciate the nuances of *multiple responsibilities* in researching urban ethical projects. While Trnka and Trundle acknowledge the existence of and research on neoliberal projects of *responsibilization*—the divestiture of obligations from the state onto individuals—they stress the value of looking “beyond [this state] to examine modes of responsibility that extend, challenge, or coexist with neoliberalism’s emphasis on a particular kind of individual” (2017, p. 3) subjectivity. To read for ethical co-ordinates of care, interdependence or reciprocity can be understood as a performative act and normative stance, as well as fundamental

to the deconstruction of a capitalism that is often depicted as monolithic, rational and morally indifferent (Gibson-Graham 2008; Dürr et al. 2019; Lewis 2019).

### Research method and analytical focus

SCTTTP’s formal bargaining process lasted from September 2013 to December 2016, and the plan was published in April 2017. National government reviewed the non-statutory plan and developed the government action plan *Revitalising the Gulf*, published in June 2021. This analysis draws on 21 qualitative interviews conducted between 2018 and 2020.<sup>8</sup> Thus, data collection took place after the official process ended, while discussions around its implementation were ongoing.

The material encompasses 29 h of interviews, with the average interview lasting 1.44 h (median value: 1.19 h). The paper and research are backed by extensive desk research, document and media analysis, which went into the acquisition of interview partners as well as into the subsequent chapter of this paper. Interview partners were selected based on their knowledge of and responsibilities in SCTTTP—as diverse as possible and a large coverage of the different planning spaces—as well as by their specialized knowledge about general activities and relations in and around the Gulf (see Table 1). The in-depth interviews followed a guideline with four sections, each of which included a narrative and open-ended first question, followed by more specific follow-up questions. The sections included questions on: (1) the Hauraki Gulf, personal interrelationships with the area and its more-than-human elements, (2) a person’s activities or institutional background and their understanding of their position and work, (3) SCTTTP, one’s perception of and role in the process and (4) general urban living with, in and around the Gulf, *ethical* behaviour and one’s envisioned *Gulf future*. Interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed (exactly verbatim).

Following Timmermans and Tavory (2012), the process of data analysis and theory building can be understood as abductive analysis.<sup>9</sup> The process of data analysis was inspired by “grounded theory’s [...] methodological guidelines of iterative rounds of coding and memo writing” (ibid, p. 169). The coding process started with assigning detailed

<sup>8</sup> The research was conducted in the context of the interdisciplinary DFG research group on Urban Ethics, and was aligned, among other things, with its research schedule.

<sup>9</sup> Timmermans and Tavory argue in their paper *Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis* for “abduction, rather than induction [as a] guiding principle of empirically based theory construction” (2012, p. 167). Coming from

**Table 1** An overview of the interviews included in the paper. It differentiates between interviews and interviewees as some interviews involved more than one interview partner. The interviewees' numbers are used in the paper for citation purposes (Int1, etc.). The table also involves columns with information on interviewees' background, as well as the research period when the interview was conducted

Interview	Interviewee (Int.)	Expert knowledge on/expert background*	Research phase**
1	1	SCTTTP, Social Sciences	1
2	2	SCTTTP, Planning Consultant	1
3	3	SCTTTP, Stakeholder Working Group	1
4	4	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	1
5	5	SCTTTP, Auckland Council	1
6	6	Independent Planning Consultant	1
7	7	SCTTTP, Environmental Conservation	1
8	8	SCTTTP, Social Sciences	1
8	9	SCTTTP, Social Sciences	1
9	10	SCTTTP, Waikato Regional Council	2
10	11	SCTTTP, Marine Biology and GIS	2
11	12	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	2
12	13	SCTTTP, Auckland Council	2
13	14	SCTTTP, Department of Conservation	2
14	15	SCTTTP, Hauraki Gulf Forum	2
15	16	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	2
16	17	SCTTTP, Planning Consultant	2
17	18	SCTTTP, Auckland Council	2
18	19	SCTTTP, Recreational Fisheries	2
19	20	SCTTTP, Hauraki Gulf Forum	2
20	21	SCTTTP, Department of Conservation	3
20	22	SCTTTP, Ministry for Primary Industries	3
21	23	SCTTTP, Mātauranga Māori	3

\*Some respondents were active participants or formally involved in SCTTTP, while others provided insights into SCTTTP through their profession or work for relevant agencies

\*\*Research phases: Oct-Dec 2018 (1), Feb-Apr 2019 (2), Jan-Apr 2020 (3)

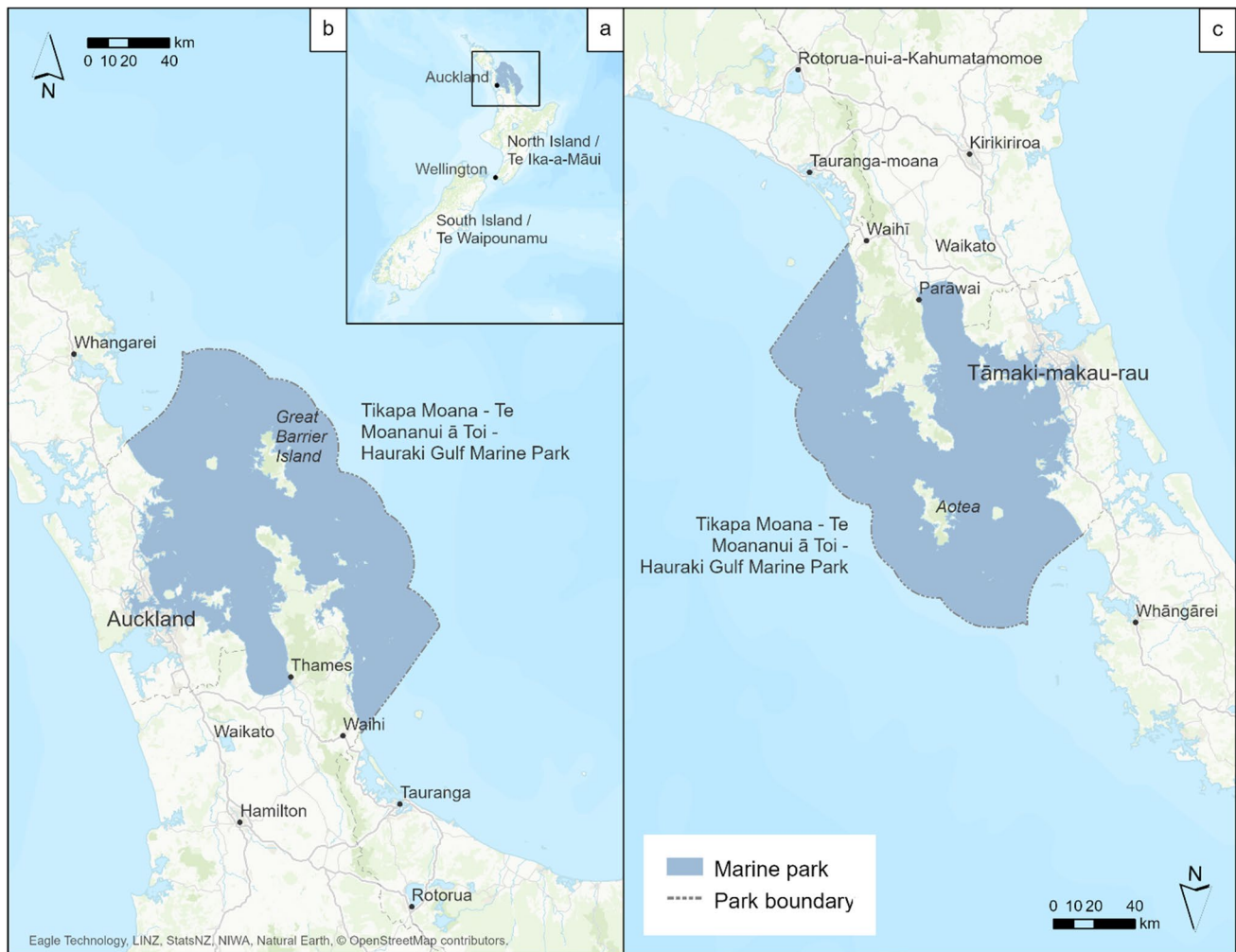
Footnote 9 (continued)

critique of grounded theory's principle to have new theory emerge from empirical data without theoretical preconceptions, they suggest *abductive analysis* is a "creative inferential process aimed at producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence" (ibid.). In this process, they attribute an important role to an actor's social and intellectual position (in-depth knowledge of multiple theorizations, theoretical sensitivity) to be able to identify unanticipated and surprising observations, and to recognise when findings do not fit in existing theoretical frameworks. Timmermans and Tavory still acknowledge grounded theory's methodological guidelines (memo writing, coding) to "facilitate theory construction through processes of revisiting, defamiliarizing, and alternative casing" (ibid., p. 169).

memos to text passages followed by open coding (Mey 2011). Memos also helped in the later process to link codes to each other, and to revisit and test concepts and thoughts in relation to findings. They, thus, facilitated my conversation with text passages (codings) and codes against the background of my theoretical knowledge and continuing theoretical readings. The software programme MAXQDA was used for the qualitative data analysis process. Besides using the memo and open coding functions of MAXQDA (resulting in over 2000 codings and over 200 memos), the built-in creative coding tool helped to visualize and organize codes and their relations, and to conceptually abstract codes by grouping and renaming them. This step was repeated throughout the process, taking care not to jump to conclusions or make later alternative interpretations impossible through premature abstraction.

Timmerman and Tavory (2012) assign an important role to the theoretical sensitivity and embeddedness of the researcher in the process of analysis and theory building. My formal involvement in the urban ethics research group, my in-depth knowledge of their discussions and interdisciplinary work and their relatively open approach to analysing, understanding and conceptualising ethics helped to guide my analysis. To untangle the multiple, tangled truths, narratives and imaginaries emerging from SCTTTP, the analysis started from problematizations of SCTTTP: what is narrated as the "problem in need of intervention" (Flannery & McAteer 2020, p. 271) to which SCTTTP (MSP), and more specific project elements, were highlighted and constructed as answers? A special focus was given to ethics as forms of problematization, so explicit and implicit articulations of (un) ethical ways of living/conduct. Ethics could be either subject of a problematization or (part of) answers that were constructed. To analytically capture urban ethics, the research followed Dürr et al., according to whom "urban ethics [...] express, practically and theoretically, answers to [the] rather general question: How should one live in the city" (2019, p. 2)? This question guided the analysis looking for claims and articulations of this kind. From there, underlying rationalities, in the form of naturalcultural and ethical imaginaries and claims, were explored. Finally, interest was on the entanglements of these rationalities and problematizations, and in how they (help to) define "who and what should be governed and how and by whom it should be done" (Flannery & McAteer 2020, p. 271).

Theory building was processual and took place (to some extent) in the research group's collaborative space, where texts and theories were discussed. Empirical material and working papers were exchanged and discussed in workshop formats, also with external scholars who repeatedly attended workshops as guest reviewers. The specific



**Fig. 1** **a** The location of the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana in Aotearoa New Zealand and more specifically, on the North Island/Te Ika-a-Māui (according to a Western worldview). **b** The area and location of Tikapa Moana/Te Moananui ā Toi/the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park

in more detail (also according to a Western worldview). **c** The same detailed view of Tikapa Moana/Te Moananui ā Toi/the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park according to a Māori perspective (own images after DOC 2022; HGF et al. 2016).

conceptualization of urban ethics in this paper resulted not least from the fractions and tensions that I experienced when discussing empirical materials and findings which did not fit with a dominant Western philosophy and key concepts of ethics, subjectivity, agency or equality/justice (see also Timmermans & Tavory 2012). An alternative theoretical framework had to be found to understand the multi-layered use and problematizations of urban ethics in Auckland. I still do not claim that this framework is the only or necessarily *right* one. I acknowledge that theorization, like knowledge, “is inextricable from context and the people who [...] create it” (Artelle et al. 2021, p. 289; Okun 2021). Thus, I would like this paper to be understood as a contribution or argument in a theoretical debate that should be agonistic and ongoing.

## Emergence of SCTTTP in a discursive, urban ethical field

### The shifting and contested governmental land/seascape of the Hauraki Gulf Tikapa Moana

The city of Auckland is surrounded by three natural harbours. The Waitematā Harbour adjoins and encompasses Auckland’s CBD, waterfront and main port, and connects the Tāmaki isthmus by way of the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana with the Pacific Ocean (see Fig. 1a-c). The Tāmaki isthmus was first settled by Māori in the fourteenth century. European colonization and its desire for land has radically and violently disrupted, devalued and obscured the distinct geographies, ways of knowing, relational and



humanly-decentred systems and ethicalities in the Tāmaki area (Smith 2012; Tadaki et al. 2022). Following the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi—“the key document upon which the authority to govern [ANZ] rests” (Tadaki et al. 2022, p. 40)—by Māori kin group leaders and the British Crown in 1840, William Hobson purchased the land on the Tāmaki isthmus to build Auckland. Today ANZ’s most populous city boasts a population of 1.6 million (Stone 2013, p. 33; Fischer 2020b).

Several iwi and hapū (tribes, subtribes) have later sought compensation for, and reclaimed the unfair alienation of their Tāmaki lands and waters. Many claims still remain unsettled. They increasingly involve challenges against settler-colonial framings of relations among land, water(ways) and people, and possessive individualism (Pawson & Brooking 2002; Salmond et al. 2019; Rowe 2021). Approaches to claims settlement and of redresses vary in ANZ. Settlements under the Treaty include statutory acknowledgments and property vesting, co-management arrangements or the granting of legal personality to more-than-human entities. Since the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act passed in 2011, iwi and hapū can make claims to customary use and ownership of the foreshore and seabed. This question of customary title has proved to be “a contentious issue between Māori and the NZ government and Māori and non-Māori” (Sullivan 2017, p. 39). As Sullivan (2017) shows, arguments of public property and access were played out politically against redress and customary rights in the beginning of the 2000s, making apparent existing discriminatory structures, differing cultural values, understandings and political ideas of citizenship, nation and justice. Since 2011, settlement claims for at least 19 iwi and hapū of the Gulf region were made, and still were being negotiated when this article was drafted. These settlements will significantly remap the land/seascape (HGF et al. 2016).

The management of the Gulf today is regulated by diverse legislation with responsibility divided between institutions. At times, these differing “agendas [...] struggle to converge” (Forster 2016, p. 321). The Resource Management Act (RMA) 1991 provides a broad national framework, and delegates operational functions to regional/local authorities (HGF 2009). The national discourse was coined in “a time when neoliberalism was gaining prominence as a political project [and when] regulation of the environment was expected to reflect neoliberal imperatives” (Forster 2016, p. 323).

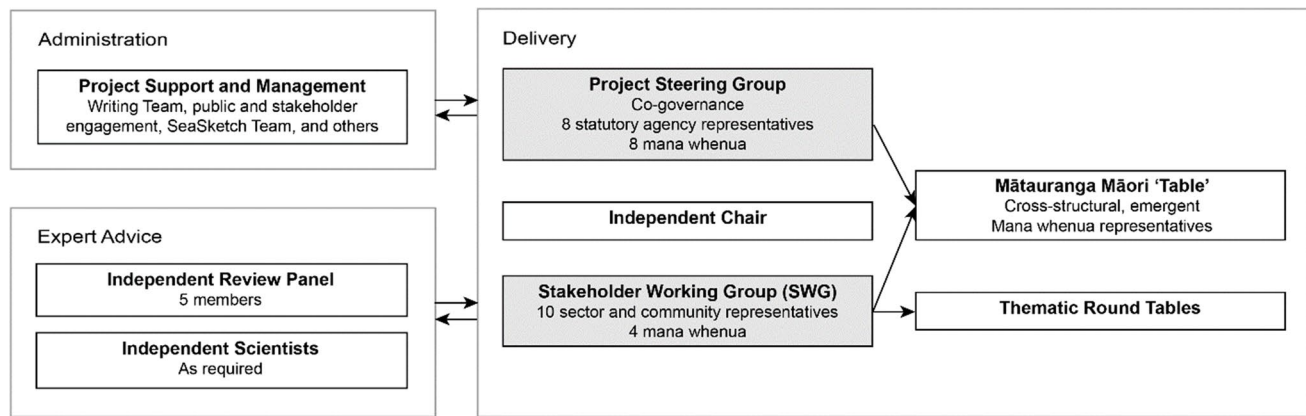
Forster sees this reflected in a resource governmentality that fosters efficiencies, government-at-a-distance and increased public participation. Public engagement has been “adopted as key mechanisms for creating environmental subjectivities” (ibid., p. 323). Other relevant national frameworks that regulate the management of the Gulf are the conservation agenda of the Department of Conservation (DOC),

most popularly put into practice by establishing marine protected areas (MPAs), and the Ministry for Primary Industries’ (MPI) fisheries management. The national agenda simultaneously supports recognition of Māori authority and environmental interests, and sustainable development.

In 2000, the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act was passed into law. Its objective was the integration and hence improvement of the environmental management of the Gulf. The act is regarded more holistic than, for example, the RMA, also in terms of articulating the holistic relationships of Māori with the Gulf. It established the HGF, which consists of representatives of the Gulf’s responsible and adjoining national and local authorities, and iwi and hapū (HGF 2009; Peart 2017; DOC 2022).

National government agendas and imperatives at times clash with Auckland’s political goals, which as a *super city* located on the Gulf not only takes on a powerful political and administrative role but also affects the Gulf through infrastructure, developments or pollution levels. National government’s “desire to position Auckland as a globally competitive city that acts as a dynamo for the [ANZ] economy” (Lewis & Murphy 2015, p. 100) contradicts local political projects, imaginaries and ethics (of e.g. sustainability or social inclusion). Lewis and Murphy (2015) view the guiding spatial imaginary and governmentality of *liveability* as the middle road between national and local interests. Auckland’s spatial plan, which follows the narration of making Auckland the *world’s most liveable city*, frames the Gulf area both as an asset and a competitive advantage, while it pronounces the need to ensure its integrated and sustainable management (Auckland Council 2012). Neoliberal imperatives and governmentality prevail in specific urban projects assembled around the Gulf. Waterfront development, negotiations of the port’s future, attempts to protect Bryde’s whales from ship collisions (Aschenbrenner & Winder 2023) as well as Auckland’s broader water management (Acosta García et al. 2020) have evoked efficiency, collaboration, public-private-partnerships, participation and the formation of environmental subjectivities. Aspects of capitalist settler structures and neoliberal dynamics also manifest in today’s demographic structure around the Gulf: Representatives of a *white* affluent middle class settle in many districts at the inner Gulf, waterfront and the Waitemata (Murphy 2008; Fischer 2020b; Stats NZ 2022; Aschenbrenner in press).

The field of ethical negotiation in Auckland can therefore be identified as *urban* (see Dürr et al. 2019). Not only do ethical negotiations take place *in* the city and *in* urban coastal environments (e.g. regarding its infrastructure, pollution levels, or the number of users and interests), but ethical negotiations take place *under Auckland’s urban conditions* through its neoliberal urban governmentality and politics, specific demographic structures, and juxtaposition of institutions, projects, and interests. Māori ethical systems



**Fig. 2** The project structure of Sea Change Tai Time Tai Pari including the three spaces: administration, expert advice and delivery. A co-governed project steering group and stakeholder working group were responsible for the delivery of the plan. For this, thematic roundtables

are distinctively *urban* as “traditional relationships to the environment, whakapapa [genealogical relations] and the practice of kaitiakitanga [a reciprocal ethicality of guardianship]” (Walker et al. 2019, p. 2) have been challenged through urbanization, limited opportunities to connect with nature and the state of Auckland’s ecosystems. At the same time, an ethics of *urban* coastal living is negotiated, claiming new urban practices and ways of connecting to and caring for the urban coastal space.

### Emergence of Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari as an urban ethical project

SCTTTP emerged at a time when MSP was gaining momentum worldwide. The Auckland Plan 2012 held a directive to implement MSP in the city’s marine areas (Auckland Council 2012). The HGF published a series of reports reviewing the Gulf’s management and governance (HGF 2009, 2010a, b), as well as an environmental state report in 2011 with the intention to disrupt and lobby for change (HGF 2011b; Int15). The HGF’s report *Spatial planning for the Gulf* (HGF 2011a) assembled MSP as an approach to counteract utilization pressures, and to reach integrated, conservation and sustainability-focused resource management. Local iwi/hapū co-initiated SCTTTP as members of the HGF, while they, carrying out kaitiakitanga, have long had aspirations to reinstate the Gulf’s mauri (life force) and enact Māori values and principles (Int4).

The bargaining initiative was joined by statutory agencies—in particular Auckland Council, Waikato Regional Council, DOC and MPI. A joint narrative of integrating competing interests and aspirations was established (*many values, one story*), and assembled with principles of consensus, collaboration, participation, balancing the

were established from the stakeholder working group. At the same time, a Mātauranga Māori group formed, bringing together Māori members of the stakeholder working group and the project steering group (own image after Campbell-Reid 2013; Peart 2019)

different (recreational, cultural, economic and environmental) spheres, and treaty justice and co-governance into an ethical project (Campbell-Reid 2013). They mirrored a participatory project design which involved a co-governed *project steering group* and a *stakeholder working group* (SWG), in which individuals, iwi/hapū and interest holders were commissioned to develop the MSP (see Fig. 2). Interestingly, use of geospatial data and formal mapping, otherwise dominant MSP elements, was limited in the process. A web-based mapping software (SeaSketch) was developed for the process, but not used due to high complexity, key gaps in information, lack of resources and legal uncertainties (Peart 2019). Participants noticed the bargaining and shifts of *values* as a major element and outcome of the process, and as considerably more important than spatial zoning (Int7, Int23).

### Results

The subsequent chapter analyzes interviewees’ narrations of SCTTTP and disentangles the different discursive strands that each interweave specific problematizations, natural-cultural imaginaries and governmentalities. The interest is in how ethical imperatives are embedded in these strands. The research findings indicate not *one story* or overall narrative emerging from SCTTTP, but rather many imaginaries, discursive strands and *values*. Some are more linked to established planning views and assumptions, while others might hold greater transformative potential in terms of remapping hegemonic power, socionatural relations and natural-cultural imaginaries. The following points identify the different discursive strands by their contradictions with each other as well as the roles that interviewees attributed to ethics/ethicalities

as forms of problematization and modes of intervention. Different discursive strands were interwoven in interviews, and not necessarily distinct to one interview or particular characteristics of interviewees. The role an interviewee had in SCTTTP was in many cases reflected in their narration.

### Conventional, formal planning discourse

A conventional and formal planning discourse was identified from the critical voices on SCTTTP of mainly institutional representatives (local councils, DOC and MPI) (Int10, Int11, Int13). Institutional representatives framed MSP as an instrument to find consensual resolutions to user-user and user-environment conflicts, whereby conflicts were understood to result from a large number of users, diverse interests and strong conceptions of marine/coastal space as common space. Responsibility for the tense environmental situation in the Gulf was also seen in the national government's growth agenda for Auckland (Int13, Int20), and, more generally, urban and population growth (Int7, Int10, Int15, Int21).

From a conventional planning view, SCTTTP was regarded rather critically. The main critique focused on a lack of legitimacy, and representational problems in the SWG. Interviewees criticized the lack of inclusiveness of the SWG, whose members were selected as self-responsible *individuals* over a large group of public and private sector representatives. They were regarded as neither democratically elected, nor having the required role of *spokespersons* for interest groups, thus lacking the mandate of civil society as well as private sectors. Members were said to have failed to report back to and connect with the private sector and the public (Int10, Int13, Int22). Interviewees also criticized limited and selective engagement with expert and scientific knowledge, and little application of mapping tools, resulting in few tangible process outcomes (Int10, Int11).

On the one hand, agencies regarded themselves solely as partners and facilitators in this governmental logic. The planning was meant to be conducted in the SWG, a networked, flexible and experimental space of *stakeholders* and treaty partners (Swyngedouw 2005; Haughton et al. 2013). I found neoliberal planning ideas and ethics of consensus, agreement, (cost-)efficiency, and the necessity of getting a social mandate for future (infrastructure) development and spending invoked by interview partners. On the other hand, interviewees stressed formal planning requirements, in particular electoral accountability. As a result, interviewees criticized SWG members for their *solo run*. I interpret this as internal contradiction in planning logics in a neoliberal urban context. Interviewees wished for an *empowerment* of SWG participants asking them to become active participants in the planning (Int4), while their acting outside of the intended participatory framework seemed to be regarded as problematic. Interviewees also referred to *empowerment* in

relation to the role of Auckland community groups (Int1, Int10, Int13, Int15, Int21). Also in this case, *empowerment* rather took the meaning of nudging “urban dwellers’ involvement in [desired] courses of action” (Foucault 2008 cited in Acosta García et al. 2020, p. 5). Int10, for example, commended the work of community groups working to create pest-free islands, and expressed interest to have them “going from the land into the shore of those islands”. This overall fits with observations of ethical projects being inter-related with neoliberal modes of urban governance, where collaborative engagements come to the fore and responsibilities are increasingly transferred to non-state actors resulting in a changed role of civil society, an obfuscation of conflicts of interest and difficulties to contest local government (Ege & Moser 2020; Fischer 2020a, b).

### Marine conservation discourse

Marine conservation interests, in particular an increase in the number of MPAs, were, according to Peart (2019), an important initial impetus for SCTTTP. In this context, interviewees with links to marine conservation interests (Int7, Int14) stressed the need for spatial zoning. Int7 juxtaposed scientifically evidenced spatial zoning solutions, and “people [who] emotionally hated [...] the idea” of MPAs. I observed a binary opposition being constructed between objectivity/rationality/sciences and subjectivity/affects/emotions, while opposition to MPAs was delegitimized by locating it in the second realm (Int7, Int14).

Responsibility for change was ascribed to agencies/decision-makers (“you need regulation”, Int7), while a logic of consent politics and *buy in* was expressed: “you need [...] public support for the politicians to regulate things that work” (Int7). Particularly Int7, who had a marine conservation background, framed civil society as a transition initiator, and collaborative participatory processes as spaces of disruption and “new elements” (see also Int20). Besides supporting a conventional framing of collaborative planning spaces and the role of civil society as working with and supporting local government, interviewees also ascribed collaborative planning spaces the role to get “people to act on the good stuff” (Int7). This supports theorizations of ethical projects being intertwined with techniques of governance that create spaces for ethical reflection, creating affects and encouraging certain *good* behaviour—in this case acting as rational subjects that understand and act on scientifically proven marine conservation measurements, primarily MPAs.

Furthermore, human-Gulf interactions, in particular diving and snorkelling, especially when carried out in MPAs, were narrated as immersive, attachment building, educational, and thus being crucial for the building of good, pro-environmental behaviour (Int7, Int20). The imaginary of a “deeper understanding of the Gulf” (Int7, Int15) was central,

and can be identified as a guiding ethico-moral principle assembling personal passion, emotional attachment, consternation, awareness and comprehension of degradation processes. This also shows how ethical pro-environmental behaviour and the rational understanding and support of conservation measures are deeply intertwined in a marine conservation discourse. Overall, the question of a formation of urban dwellers as conservation-oriented subjects can be understood as central to this discourse. This self-formation is partly ascribed to an individual self, while it seems relational in that it emerges in relational spaces and from human and human–environment relations.

### A new ethics for the Gulf

Several interviewees pointed out that much of the value of SCTTTP was in informal changes—shifts in peoples’ understandings and behaviours, and in the narratives and principles that lead resource valuations and assumptions (Int1, Int17, Int20, Int21). SWG members, non-institutional process facilitators and support staff primarily held this view. Interviewees problematized political leadership, unethical user behaviour and generally a multiplicity of users, interests and (one-sided) viewpoints. While the multiplicity of users, interests and viewpoints was framed as problematic in terms of overuse, they were also regarded as threatening consensus and harmonic integration among people and groups—mostly unchallenged imperatives (Int6, Int7, Int8, Int10, Int18, Int22). Both, political leaders’ ethics and peoples’ ethical behaviour were problematized in terms of the state of the Gulf. Decision-makers and agencies were ascribed self-interested, sectoral behaviour (“Often their [HGF members’] own values conflict with those that are supposed to be the champion for the Gulf [...] they tend to cancel each other out”, Int20). Private market actors (esp. farmers/fishing industry) and urban recreational users (esp. recreational fishers) were said to, often intentionally, perform irresponsible, ecologically degrading behaviour: “Boats [...] are [...] plundering the shoreline” (Int3)/farmers “choos[e] not to recognize that what they do has impacts at the coast and the sea” (Int8)/fishing industry’s “untrue behaviour, [...] fraudulent [and] thieving” (Int19).

Changes in peoples’ behaviour, and a new ethical relationship to the Gulf, voiced as care, kaitiakitanga, guardianship, championship/acting as a *voice for the Gulf*, were proposed by interviewees as the main outcome of SCTTTP, and key measures of change (Int4, Int5, Int7, Int15, Int20). I see, thus, the problematization as well as construction of *new* urban ethics of the Gulf in the centre of this discursive strand. The emphasis on care, interrelationships and a collective responsibility as champions or guardians of the Gulf point, from a perspective of ontological diversity, to a divergence from an understanding or use of Ethics (or an ethicization), working

as a further individualization and shift of problems into the domain of personal lifestyle or choice (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Still, the emphasis by interviewees on techniques of governance that create spaces for a reflective process of ethical understanding in which one becomes a caring voice of the Gulf, by some described as a moment of personal enlightenment (Int5, Int7, Int19, Int20), rather follow than challenge ideas and subjectivities of an Ethics hegemonic.

Interviewees highlighted multiple governmental techniques (report writing, a common project vision, exemplary stories of degradation and success, participatory planning, round tables, informal planning spaces) for building consensus around the common, ethical narrative of *caring for the Gulf’s health*. Guardianship/kaitiakitanga, health of the Gulf/mauri, championship/acting as *voice of the Gulf*, *gift and gain* (compromise agreement) were further noticed to create common concepts and ground for good behaviour, thus *ethical* ground. Many can be read as *boundary concepts*—they largely adopt Māori concepts and principles, and link them to a Western equivalent (Int13, Int14, Int17, Int20). Change was expected to take the form of “ripples” (Int20): spreading from the SWG to individuals, groups, businesses and philanthropic funds, who then would take *responsible* actions and induce change (Int6, Int17).

There are similarities to conventional planning and conservation logics regarding ideas of environmental subjectivities, and an individual and collective responsabilization in this discursive strand. There are also contradictions—particularly with a conventional planning perspective, regarding their ideas of who is legitimate to participate, and what is the scope and form of participation. The imaginary of SCTTTP as a space for an ethical transition comes with claims that it should be individuals, who participate, decide and speak for the Gulf. Their legitimacy is justified by an active, inter-generational, affective Gulf relationship, by knowledge, environmental awareness, the willingness and ability to conduct collaborative behaviour (Int2, Int20). Instead of acting as *stakeholders*, participants (and officials) should “take off [their] mandated spokesperson hat” (Int12), and act as champions for the Gulf. The main scope of participation is seen in the creation of a mutual understanding, collective and individual ethical formation, for which trust and a certain isolation from *outside* influences is needed (Int4). This conflicts with a logic of stakeholder and public engagement and appears to be a main reason for officials criticizing the SWG’s work (Int13).

### Emergent ethicality and claiming non-normative naturalcultural relations

Interviewees highlighted informal shifts in the context of both anormative or not-yet-normative (while Indigenous) naturalcultural imaginaries and ethicalities. Mostly Māori



interviewees called attention to persistent, postcolonial injustices (Int16: “The inequity that goes on between Māori and Non-Māori, that’s a huge one”). Injustices result from colonial land occupations, repression of te ao Māori and the enforcement of colonialist worldviews, property constructs and governmental systems and frameworks (Int4, Int12). Treaty rights (consultation, representation) were noticed to be regularly violated, particularly when Western management systems like MPAs are enforced. Burdens and costs for the fair enforcement of treaty rights have, to a great extent, been carried by the colonized (Int4, Int15, Int16, Int23). Interviewees problematized the Gulf’s mauri (life force and vitality) as being in need of restoration. This was observed to not be the *responsibility* and agency of autonomous individuals or groups, but responsibility and care arise from and exist in a complex, relational system of genealogy, reciprocity, rohe (tribal homelands) and the agency of the more-than-human:

“I describe it as an obligation or like a responsibility that’s handed down through generations of Kaitiaki [trustee, minder, guardian, caregiver] or Māori that live on their land, proper to an area and to certain resources. So it’s a responsibility of those people to care for their land the way it cares for them, so I guess it’s a reciprocal relationship between the land and the people [...] Well it’s not just a caring person, it’s the actual responsibility that they have. And so if you’re not doing your job, then you’re not really being a good person, yeah, you’re not taking on the responsibility as coming from that land” (Int16).

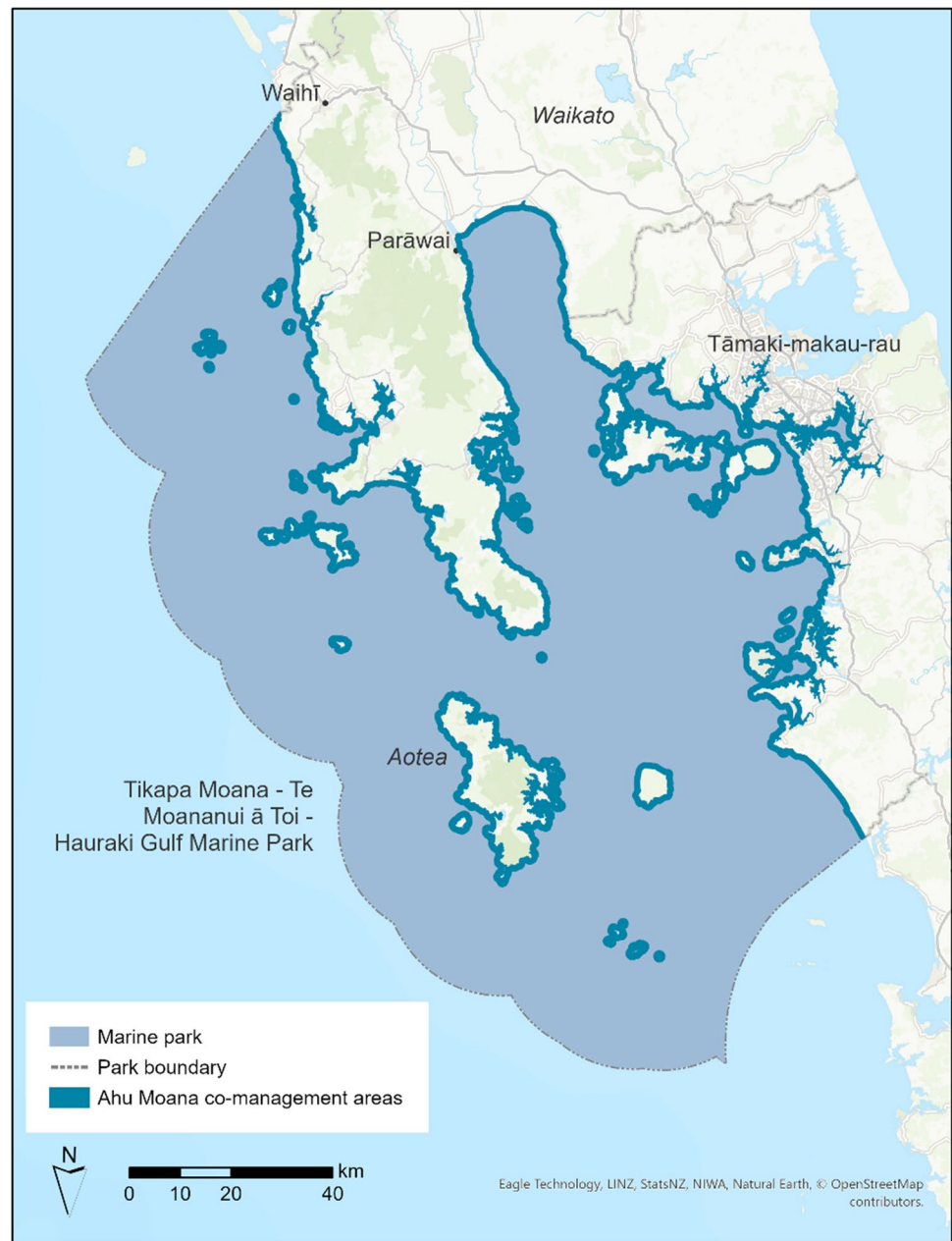
An ethicality, divergent from a hegemonic, anthropocentric and neoliberal understanding, is apparent. It was and is affected by the consequences of colonization which involve constructed boundaries that interrupt relationships, governance norms that rely on framings where “the environment exists to serve the human” (Int12), and a decrease of mauri.

SCTTTP is, in this context, understood as a *journey*—emergent, maturing, an “evolving, living process” (Int12, Int16, Int23). It is here that interviewees highlight informal/semi-formal shifts. Int12 expressed happiness that “one of [SCTTTP’s] aspirations was restoring the mauri [...] to the Hauraki Gulf”. Int23 stressed “the importance of us being able to see ourselves in the plan [and] the process”. A shift towards greater acknowledgment of te ao Māori, and “getting better” (Int23) at treaty partnership issues—thus equity—was appreciated. Int23 expressed the aim to “get to a place of harmony” (Int23), a balance, between worlds/worldviews. Interviewees still stressed the need to differentiate between Māori and non-Māori concepts, and the different responsibilities and rights (under the treaty) coming with them. The concept/term of *kaitiaki* was particularly identified as important in terms of Māori environmental autonomy, self-determination and consultation rights, and thus is, and needs to be, differentiated from non-Māori perceptions of environmental guardianship (Int16, Int23, see also Forster 2016).

Narratives of how rights were claimed in SCTTTP indicate the oppositional role of Māori in a colonial governing system (Forster 2016). Māori interviewees recounted how they built up relationships and connections beyond formal process structures, and thus managed to put an initially unfair process on hold, which significantly improved SCTTTP’s outcomes (Int4, Int16). The idea of *Ahu Moana*—near-shore, nurture areas co-managed by local iwi/hapū and communities—arose from these spaces and was inscribed into the final plan (see Fig. 3). *Ahu Moana* can be interpreted as creating (experimental) spaces for Māori ethicality and practices. They remap the Gulf’s coast according to place-based, reciprocal and genealogical care relationships, principles of self-determination and treaty partnership. Such spaces are meant to “empower coastal marae [meeting houses] to be self-determining in terms of what actually goes on [...] in their harbour” (Int23) and offer an alternative to MPAs, non-Māori concepts which are considered exclusive to Māori needs and practices: “it was an idea that’s born out of Māori philosophy and practice, and yet brings in the idea of marine protected areas or semi protected” (Int12).

Restorative justice and decolonising settler-colonial hegemony, property constructs and governance stand out as key imperatives, and significant aspects in environmental bargaining (Affolderbach et al. 2012). While, in the strands already discussed, problematizations and claims are made *inside* a hegemonic settler-colonial worldview, this strand problematizes and challenges that worldview’s very hegemony, instead favouring ontological pluralism and autonomy (Parsons et al. 2021). Living well (of humans and more-than-humans) is problematized not (primarily) as an issue or responsibility of individual subjects (or groups) but fundamentally linked to decolonization, self-determination and a *healthy* ethical system (ethicality). Ethical claims-making and problematizations that focus on individual responsibility and ethical subject formation can be contradictory to these claims, if not allowing for ontological pluralism. Contradictions occur in the case of remapping the marine area according to conservation logics, with MPAs spatially excluding alternative ethicalities. Adopting Māori *ethical* concepts, while framing them within Western logics and/or governmental systems, indicates cultural appropriation. In its design, SCTTTP endorsed a bicultural approach, having for instance separate meeting spaces according to Western customs and Tikanga Māori. In the process, interviewees saw this being watered down, where conflicts with a conventional, neoliberal planning logic and principles such as efficiency became apparent (Int23; Forster 2016). *Ahu Moana* remaps the Gulf according to an alternative ethicality, also for non-Māori communities. What this means in terms of urban power relations and social justice needs further exploration, and is yet to be seen in practice (see also Aschenbrenner 2023). Finally, dismantling colonial power structures involves redress, territorial sovereignty and autonomy. One needs to

**Fig. 3** A map of Tikapa Moana/ Te Moananui ā Toi/the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park depicting the near-shore ahu moana (ocean nurture) areas planned to be co-managed by local iwi/hapū and communities (according to a Māori worldview; own image after DOC 2022; HGF et al. 2016)



be aware of the risk of shifting these discussions to an *Ethical* dimension. The SCTTTP plan acknowledges accordingly that it “must not dilute or otherwise affect Treaty settlements” (HGF et al. 2016, p. 34).

## Discussion and conclusion

The need for change and socionatural transformation is pervasive in times of urgent social problems and ecological crises, including in marine and coastal areas and not least in Auckland, ANZ. Many scholars identified the predominance of neoliberal capitalist beliefs and practices as

a/the central problem in terms of today’s unequal power distribution, and a hindrance to socionatural change (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016; Tafon 2018; Schulz et al. 2022). Post-political theorists discuss the absence of alternatives and agonistic positions as a major factor hindering change, and draw a relation to “de-politicized imaginaries of pluralist consensus” (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 5), and a conjuncture of ethicized and moralized discourse. This paper was motivated by recent debates about MSP and BE, which are pushed worldwide as instruments leading to a marine and coastal transition, but discussed by critical researchers as, in practice, often facilitating a neoliberalization of the seas and post-political state/depoliticization of marine and

coastal planning and management. My objective was to bring together theorizations of ethics and MSP/BE debates to further explore questions of normativity, socionatural transformation and empowerment in marine and coastal spaces. For this, I utilized and thought through *urban ethics*.

The focus on urban ethics helped to understand SCTTTP, an MSP project initiated to bargain for socionatural change in the Hauraki Gulf Tīkapa Moana (Auckland), as an ethical project. SCTTTP was initiated as a formal environmental bargaining process, and it assembled various ethico-moral principles of project design, realization and outcomes. SCTTTP's designers acknowledged different worldviews, values and knowledges within the project's framework, which emphasized integration, collaboration and consensus agreement. This distinguishes the process from other post-political MSPs, where a diversity of actor perceptions was neglected and/or unconsciously aligned within a hegemonic agenda (Tafon et al. 2018; Aschenbrenner & Winder 2019). It also indicates differences to forms of environmental bargaining, where environmental ethics, values and interests were claimed to be, in large part, in conflict with those of oppositional groups (Affolderbach 2011; Affolderbach et al. 2012). In SCTTTP, bargaining took place in an urban ethical field. A shared and accepted socionatural transition ethics prevailed over conflict and antagonism, and urban environmental ethics appeared to be a means to facilitate a coastal transition. From this perspective, SCTTTP can be read as a process of neoliberal ethicization, in which difference is acknowledged but conflict is replaced by participatory, *soft* planning spaces, where civil society takes the role of co-initiator, participant and even plan developers. Politics are moved into an ethical field, where a neoliberal governmentality characterized by environmental subject formation and responsabilization prevails.

However, the urban ethics agenda that the paper promotes makes aware how a "rationalist ethics discourse and the governmentality with which it is associated often obscure actual ethical antagonisms, complexity and subaltern critique" (Dürr et al. 2019, p. 2). The paper's objective was to disrupt this potentially colonizing framing. Thus, reading for difference in the form of non-normative/anormative ethicalities was an essential part of the paper's theoretical and research approach. Taking a retrospective point of view, I disentangled the different discursive strands that emerged from SCTTTP, and analysed them for their (ethical) problematizations, naturalcultural imaginaries and governmentalities. The results reveal ethical antagonisms and contestation. They show how fundamentally different discourses and worldviews underlie peoples' narratives of SCTTTP, and that not *one* narrative evolved. Ethics are, in the case of the first three strands (conventional, formal planning/marine conservation/ an ethics for the Gulf), problematized and emphasized as a

mode of intervention for change—framed in terms of individual *ethical* conduct and responsibility. In the lines of the third discursive strand, ethics and the constitution of a common ethics for the Gulf build the rationale for SCTTTP, a legitimacy for participation, and thus play a role in claiming alternative governance and decision-making structures, and in remapping power relations in the Gulf. This *ethicization* of the governance of the Gulf conflicts with conventional planning logics of electoral accountability, and third sector *stakeholder* engagement. Still, all three strands link to a Euro-Western ethicality and neoliberal form of government.

The fourth discursive strand disrupts the hegemonic ethics discourse. In this case, the paper speaks of a Māori ethicality or ethical system to make visible the ontological difference and politics of environmental ethical problematizations and claims-making. Making claims for *living in the right way* in terms of a Māori ethicality entails claims for and the necessity of decolonization, self-determination and holistic (human and more-than-human) well-being. (Re) claiming an alternative, Indigenous ethicality and natural-cultural relations shows the greatest potential to disrupt existing power relations and remap the Gulf with respect to alternative/non-normative *resource* valuations. Norms and hegemonic naturalcultural imaginaries—and their *mapped out manifestations*—are contested, while Ahu Moana makes visible alternative land/seascapes, management and governmental practices.

The final SCTTTP plan takes up the idea of reframing peoples' naturalcultural imaginaries of and relations with the Gulf as a transformative element. It creates a bicultural framing and assigns a Māori ethicality to *Gulf communities*. While this means asking people to live in a *better* way, the plan utilizes *ethics* not as code of conduct (such as in the case of an *ethics for the Gulf*) but assembles notions of land/seascapes as legal personalities, the need to adjust human/more-than-human relationships, and for reciprocal responsibilities (HGF et al. 2016, p. 35). This points to a remapping of the ethical co-ordinates in the Gulf area, and an intervention in the neoliberalization of the seas. At the same time, one should be aware of the actual post-planning discourse in Auckland as shown in the paper. Taking an urban ethics viewpoint makes clear the risks of translating this emergent ethics of the Gulf in ways of an ethicization (thus reinforcing neoliberal, depoliticizing dynamics) and/or culturally appropriating and watering down Māori ethicality (thus reinforcing colonizing dynamics).

The implementation of the non-statutory SCTTTP process was brought ahead with the publication of the government action plan *Revitalising the Gulf* in June 2021. While it put into action some of the *harder* (technical-managerial) actions recommended in SCTTTP, the contribution of *softer* (informal) changes and ethics to a socionatural transformation is still for the most part uncertain. Further

research, especially on the practical implications of *ethics*, is thus needed. A focus on ordinary ethics in the Gulf and Auckland, and on Ahu Moana—as mapped realities of an emergent Gulf ethicality, and formally acknowledged pilot projects for “effective kaitiakitanga and guardianship in the Gulf” (DOC et al. 2021) —would be potential, valuable starting points for such explorations.

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**Data Availability** The interview data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the author, after prior review and as far as the anonymity of interviewees can be preserved. The data are not publicly available as they may contain information that could compromise the privacy of interview participants.

## Declarations

**Competing interests** The author declares no competing interests.

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