



The New Zealand Association for Comparative Law is pleased to invite you to a seminar  
by Thomas Buocz

## **Legal Personhood as a Panacea for Regulating New Technologies? Lessons that Te Urewera and Te Awa Tupua Might Teach**

Most jurisdictions distinguish between the status of legal subjects (“persons”) and legal objects (“things”). Legal subjects are addressed with rights or duties, legal objects are not. The dichotomy of legal subjects and legal objects has recently gained new attention in the context of regulating new technologies in the European Union. It has been suggested that robots and similar machines should be treated as legal subjects rather than legal objects, because they fulfil their tasks autonomously. Although the legal ramifications of such a status change have been discussed extensively on a theoretical level, there has been little effort to test these discussions’ claims against a specific example: a specific status change in a specific jurisdiction with specific consequences for that jurisdiction. Aiming to fill this gap, Thomas Buocz analyses two historic examples of status changes, not in the field of technology but in the field of nature. Te Urewera Act 2014 and Te Awa Tupua Act 2017 have extended the circle of legal subjects in Aotearoa/New Zealand to two new entities, a former national park and a river. Thomas Buocz discusses the consequences of these two status changes for Aotearoa/New Zealand’s legal system. What problems could be solved through the status change? What problems remained? Were new problems created? How do the two newly created legal persons fit in with the rest of the legal system? In his talk, Thomas Buocz attempts to show that discussing these questions can also teach insightful lessons about what status changes can and cannot do for the regulation of new technologies in the European Union.



Thomas Buocz is a research fellow and PhD candidate (Supervisor: Professor Iris Eisenberger) at the Institute of Law, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU) in Austria. His main interests and research areas are technology and innovation law, data protection law, and legal theory.

He completed his Law Studies at the University of Vienna in 2018. While studying, Thomas Buocz spent a semester abroad at the University of Copenhagen and worked as a research assistant at the Institute of Constitutional and Administrative Law at the University of Vienna and at the Institute of Law at BOKU University.

Currently, he is spending a research semester at the Victoria University of Wellington, optimising his PhD thesis on "Binary Categories as a Challenge for Innovation Law" under Professor Petra Butler’s supervision. His research semester is funded by the Austrian Federal Government with a Marietta Blau Grant.

**Tuesday 26 November 2019 at 5.30pm**

**The Moot Room (GB340), Level 3  
Law Faculty  
Old Government Buildings  
55 Lambton Quay, Wellington**

*No RSVPs required*