

For this essay I would like to look at Kaitiakitanga further and will base this essay on that method. This essay will examine the advantage and disadvantages of applying Kaitiakitanga to modern economies at both a local and global level, in an effort to make modern economies more sustainable. I will be looking at and using New Zealand government policy documents, research from Geert Hofstede and along with other studies on indigenous knowledge.

A brief description of Kaitiakitanga

“Kaitiakitanga” is a Maori concept deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual values of Aotearoa (New Zealand). It is often seen translated as “guardianship” or “stewardship”, Kaitiakitanga embodies the responsibility to care for and to protect the natural environment for not just the current generations, but for future generations. It reflects the Maori world view, or “ te ao Maori”, which sees humans as interconnected with the land (whenua), waterways, forests and animals. These natural elements are not merely resources to be used, but they are instead considered as living entities with “ mauri” (life force), deserving our respect and care.

At its core Kaitiakitanga emphasises cooperation between all people and nature. It is a relational concept, recognising that the well being of humans is intrinsically tied to the health of the environment, For the Maori(Indigenous community of New Zealand) this responsibility is inherited through “whakapapa”(genealogy), which connects all individuals to their ancestors and also to the natural world. Therefore we can see that Kaitiakitanga is not just solely about environmental protection, but goes further as it is also a cultural and spiritual duty.

In practice Kaitiakitanga influences how Maori communities manage natural resources, ensuring sustainable use while preserving biodiversity. However globally it offers a valuable framework for the rethinking of human relationships with nature in the face of the ever increasing environmental challenges.(doc.govt.nz.globalassets.2024) and (teara.govt.nz.2024) and (treasury.govt.nz.2024).

Assignment 2 Essay

What are the advantages and/or disadvantages, in a modern economy of applying anthropological awareness of indigenous and traditional approaches to the relationship between human communities and their ecological habitat, locally and globally?

We find ourselves living in a world where all economies are struggling to deal with huge environmental issues, climate change, deforestation and the loss of biodiversity, which are just a few. These issues clearly expose the limitations of growth-centric economic models, which are clearly showing us that the current ways we are doing things and that our obsession on profits and growth, are really just not working. We therefore need to change our ideas and views and search for a method that will prioritise the taking care of our environment , along with the people who live in it.

One such method is the concept used by the Maori (Indigenous) people of New Zealand, called Kaitiakitanga. This method teaches all that people and nature are deeply

connected and that we all have the responsibility to protect the earth, not only for ourselves but future generations that will come after us. (teara.govt.nz.2024)

There are of course many challenges of implementing Kaitiakitanga on a large scale, especially when economic priorities and cultural differences can and do get in the way of positive change.

The benefits of using Kaitiakitanga in modern economics

Sustainability and long term management is the key.

The core of Kaitiakitanga is the idea that we need to look after the environment, with a commitment to sustainability and prioritising ecological health, so that it can go on to support future generations. In New Zealand these beliefs are not just cultural, in fact Kaitiakitanga also forms part of the laws of the country. One example of this is the Resource Management Act (RMA) implemented in 1991 (legislation.govt.nz.2024), where Kaitiakitanga emphasises the importance of safeguarding land, water and Taonga (treasures) for collective well being. This act ensures that all decisions about land, water and other resources take into account the Maori way of seeing the world. The Maori Fisheries Act of 2004 (legislation.govt.nz.2024), uses Kaitiakitanga principles into marine resource governance, balancing sustainable fish stock management with Maori customary rights. This co-management model blends traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary regulatory frameworks, which can offer a blueprint for sustainable resource use in all modern economies. (legislation.govt.nz.2024)

We can see that this way of thinking is far more future focused, than the short term profit driven systems, that we are more accustomed to seeing in the world today. The cultural researcher Geert Hofstede (Hofstede.1980) speaks of something similar with his cultural dimension of “long term Orientation” underscores the alignment of Kaitiakitanga with future focused decision making. This is in contrast to short term profit motives dominating many industries. He also states that societies that focused on the future tend to make better decisions when it comes to sustainability. So therefore if industries such as farming, forestry and fishing adopted ideas of Kaitiakitanga, this would make them more sustainable and help in avoiding environmental disasters. (Hofstede.1980). One example of this is the sustainable forestry practices in Aotearoa, New Zealand, where Kaitiakitanga is incorporated to ensure long term viability, reflecting a deep respect for Whenua (land) as a living entity, this is in stark contrast to exploitative models we are used to seeing. (legislation.govt.nz.2024).

A different way of viewing nature.

We know and see that many modern economies just see the environment, as a pile of resources to be used for their own benefit. Yet Kaitiakitanga sees that the natural world is not only alive, but is also connected to humans, in fact it positions humans as interconnected with, rather than separate from, the natural environment. The environment is not just something to use and exploit, but it has a Mauri (life force) and therefore deserves care and respect. This perspective is already having an effect on new government policies in New Zealand, one example is the Waikato River Authority, which is responsible for overseeing the health of one of the country's most important rivers, they are using Kaitiakitanga as a guide for any decisions that are made. These initiatives prioritise ecological health and cultural benchmarks for resource management. By using

this approach, it insures that the river is treated as more than just a water source, but instead as an integral part of the community.(legislation.govt.nz.2024)

Luckily, globally, this way of thinking is being implemented . Indigenous ideas like Kaitiakitanga are similar to concepts from others parts of the world, one example is Buen Vivir, in the Andean region of South America, which also emphasises living in harmony with nature and rejecting extractive capitalism. These approaches challenge modern economies to think beyond just profit, but to consider the ethical treatment of the planet. (Acosta and Abarca.2018).

Effective both locally and Globally

While Kaitiakitanga is deeply rooted to the Maori culture, its principles are more than relevant to the rest of the world. We have seen that Indigenous knowledge systems similar to this,are increasingly being recognised for their ability to address global environmental issues. One example of this is the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), (sigs.un.org.2024) which emphasises the importance of indigenous stewardship can play in tackling change and achieving biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. New Zealand has also become a leader in marine conservation by using Kaitiakitanga principles to inspire global conservation with discussions on sustainable ocean management.

Adopting Kaitiakitanga informed approaches we will see that global economies tackle such issues as deforestation, water scarcity and habitat destruction

The challenges of using of using Kaitiakitanga in modern economics.

Cultural clashes with modern economics

The one major challenge is that Kaitiakitanga does not easily fit in with the way that most profit driven, modern capitalist economies work. Kaitiakitamga focuses in the community well being and long term environmental care, whereas a capitalist system will often prioritise short term profits and efficiency. In New Zealand, industrial farming will sometimes go against the principle of Kaitiakitanga, by damaging the land and the water which Maori communities care so deeply about.

This tension is not unique to New Zealand. Researchers like Arturo Escobar (Ascobar.1995) assesses the dominance of Western economic models that marginalise indigenous knowledge, describing these systems as incompatible with traditional world views. Arun Agrawal (Agrawal.1995, pp 413 -439) underscores the huge divide between scientific and indigenous structures, which complicates efforts to integrate Kaitiakitanga into mainstream economic policies. Reconciling these differences requires more than just good intentions, it would actually demand a total structure change and fundamental shift in economic and governance structures.

The risk of misuse or tokenism

Another problem that arises is that indigenous beliefs and ways, like Kaitiakitanga , can sometimes be used in a superficial or indeed harmful way. Such an example of this is the

way that companies might borrow Maori words and/or symbols, to give the impression that their products seem more “eco friendly”, without actually changing their practices. This kind of method known as “greenwashing” not only undermines the environmental goals, but it also disrespects the Maori culture. This again shows the difficulty of reconciling collective ecological responsibility with individualistic, market based systems.

Scholars such as Tuck and Yang (Tuck and Yang.2012, pp1-40) argue that this type of cultural misappropriation is part of a much broader pattern, where indigenous knowledge is stripped of its meaning, just to fit into Western systems. If we want to see Kaitiakitanga work and be successful, it needs to be adopted in a way that fully respects the whole of the Maori values and not just to be used as a branding tool or indeed an empty gesture. Tokenistic adoption risks reinforcing systemic inequalities rather than actually addressing the environmental challenges.(teara.govt.nz.2024).

Scaling up is not easy.

Kaitiakitanga works well in a local context, where it is closely ties to Maori culture and the specific ecosystems, However scaling it up for the global industries is the tricky part. For example the traditional Maori forestry practices focus on small scale, sustainable use, which is then difficult to reconcile with the demands of the large scale timber production for the global markets. (govt.nz.2024).

Fikret Berkes (Berkes.1999), who studies traditional ecological knowledge, warns that by trying to simplify or “ universalise” indigenous practices, we often end up stripping them of their original meaning and effectiveness by oversimplifying . Therefore if we need to apply Kaitiakitanga beyond New Zealand, we will require a way to figure out how to keep its core principles intact, at the same time as adapting it to different settings.

What can modern economies learn from Kaitiakitanga ?

Collaboration and better policies.

Kaitiakitanga shows that policy can be inclusive and sustainable policy development, if it respects indigenous knowledge. In New Zealand, laws like the Resource Management Act along with the legal recognition of the Whanganui River as a living entity, clearly demonstrates how indigenous principles can shape meaningful policy both on a national and international level. (govt,nz.2024). Globally, such approaches could inspire far better international agreements, like those under the Paris Climate Accord and the UN, by emphasising a shared responsibility for the environment. (sigs.un.org.2024)

When looking at the work of Elinor Ostrom’s (Ostrom.1990) on the management of shared resources, in which we see that it aligns closely with Kaitiakitanga. Ostrom (Ostrom.1999) argues that collective, community lead governance is often more effective than top -down control. Modern economies could therefore learn from this and create systems that would encourage co-operation, instead of the usual way of competition always, as a way of sharing the environmental challenges which we face worldwide.

Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity

Geert Hofstede (Hofstede.1980) has shown and hi-lighted in his research on cultural dimensions , the importance of respecting diversity. Kaitiakitanga teaches us that including indigenous perspectives can lead to far better environmental outcomes. However this requires genuine partnerships with the Maori communities and other indigenous communities , where not only their voices are heard, but also their autonomy is fully respected.

Rethinking economic growth

Kaitiakitanga aligns with the growing ecological movement, which is looking for a rethink when we view economic growth. Ecological economists Daly and Farley (Daly and Farley.2011) argue for a steady state economy, where the economies need to move away from constant growth, but instead focus on more ethical and sustainable relationship with nature.

Therefore by us all embracing Kaitiakitanga and similar, modern economies can take steps towards a more balanced relationship with the environment, one that values well being over the endless consumption.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay we have seen how Kaitiakitanga offers a powerful example of how indigenous knowledge , passed down from generation to generation over the centuries, can help solve modern environmental challenges. Its focus on sustainability, ethical resource use and long term thinking provides a valuable contrast to the short term, profit driven models, that unfortunately for all, dominates today's economies. However we must also take into account that adopting Kaitiakitanga and other indigenous communities beliefs, is not without its challenges. Cultural clashes, risks of tokenism and difficulties in scaling up must be addressed with great care and respect.

If we were to make Kaitiakitanga or similar work, we would need far more than just policy changes, we need a shift in how we all think about the relationship between people and the planet. This would require genuine collaboration with the Maori and other indigenous communities, a commitment to cultural sensitivity and a willingness to prioritise sustainability over profit, which I fear could be the major sticking point.

If however we ensured Kaitiakitanga and other methods were carried out correctly , we could see that they could inspire a global movement towards a future, where we see that people and nature could thrive together. This really could be the catalyst for a shift to a far more harmonious and sustainable future for all worldwide.

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