

2021

The Most Important Thing, The People!

Marie Haley

The Seventh Generation Tours New Zealand, marie@theseventhgeneration.org

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jsr>



Part of the [Human Geography Commons](#), [Indigenous Studies Commons](#), [Strategic Management Policy Commons](#), [Tourism Commons](#), and the [Tourism and Travel Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Haley, Marie (2021) "The Most Important Thing, The People!," *Journal of Sustainability and Resilience*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jsr/vol1/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the M3 Center at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Sustainability and Resilience by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

Publisher's Note: Journal of Sustainability and Resilience (JSR) (ISSN:2744-3620) is published bi-annually by the Sustainability and Resilience Institute (SRI) of New Zealand. The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of SRI. SRI remains neutral about jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

The Most Important Thing, The People!

Marie Haley

The Seventh Generation, New Zealand

Received: 20/12/2020 Revised: 03/01/2021 Accepted: 06/01/2021 Published: 20/01/2021

How to cite: Haley, Marie (2021). The Most Important Thing, The People!. *Journal of Sustainability and Resilience*, Volume 1, Issue 1, Article 6.

Abstract: This paper looks at indigenous concepts from New Zealand Maori and American Indians that offer philosophy for long term resilience and human-centred decision making. For true resilience, individuals, businesses and governments need to be adaptable, decisive and make long term changes. Operational changes need to come from a change of mindset and cannot return to old systems. Covid-19 has highlighted placing humans at the centre of decision making. This paper looks at the case study of The Seventh Generation Tours, in Akaroa New Zealand and the indigenous concepts of turangawaewae, knowing our connection to place and environment, manaakitanga, hospitality and kaitiakitanga, guardianship. This paper argue that for resilience, a system must have a strong mauri (lifeforce) and look at resilience planning on a multi-generational timescale.

Keywords: Covid-19, indigenous knowledge, kaitiakitanga, manaakitanga, resilience, turangawaewae.

Author profile



Marie Haley is the founder and guide of The Seventh Generation. She was born and raised on Banks Peninsula, a seventh-generation direct decedent of Akaroa's first French settler. She grew up on the family farm following her Grandfather's footsteps and his Grandfather before. From the age of six, she knew that she would devote her life to the conservation of native species and protect the incredible beauty of New Zealand. In her work as a wildlife ranger and Wildside coordinator, this dream has become a reality. With The Seventh Generation, she wants to share her passion and knowledge with other people to provide a deeper understanding and local connection to her special place's history and nature.

Introduction

He aha te mea nui o tea o?

What is the most important thing in the world? He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata. It is the people, it is the people, it is the people. This Māori proverb or Whakatauki is commonly used in New Zealand, especially in reference to looking after the environment. These words hold true today in a world facing the pandemic of Covid-19. What is the most important thing in facing this crisis? It is the people and how we care for each other, our leaders decisiveness and compassion, and our scientists' clarity in communication, and it is the public being able to trust in their government.

Human-centred Decision Making

It is only when we genuinely place people first that we can build a better world. In New Zealand, we placed the wellness of people first and shut down our economy fully, with one of the strictest lockdowns in the world, we 'went hard and we went early', resulting in the elimination policy of Covid-19 and economic recovery that defied expectations. What was good for the people was good for the economy. However, we have seen around the world that this does not hold true in reverse, for an example the UK worst hit oecd economy with a contraction of 20.4% in the second quarter, this came after a delayed and at times incoherent response with aspects of the economy and travel remaining open (OECD, 2020).

It is thought that Covid-19 has been transmitted to humans from wild bats sold at market as meat. Around the world as human populations grow and the export of products to wealthy economies push humans ever deeper into the natural environment, diminishing the mauri (pronounced *maw.dee*) or lifeforce of the natural environment.

Mauri or lifeforce remains strong when a system is resilient, adaptable to change and able to withstand shocks and survive, perhaps in an altered but still healthy state. An example of this is a strong and healthy river with native vegetation supporting the banks and filtering the waters with good insect and fish life and an abundance of predators such as nesting birds. A river such as this can withstand an earthquake rockfall that blocks the flow and diverts the water, it will find a new path and continue. A river that is polluted, denuded of plant life, where the water becomes hot and lifeless, loses its mauri and when disaster strikes this dead river will gouge out sediment from exposed land, causing larger landslides, have a high sediment load and the flow will dam and then flood causing increased impact downstream, on the farmland and settlements below. The whole river system has mauri, and this lifeforce continues hundreds of miles out to sea.

This is just one of nature's examples of interconnectedness, life flows and all aspects in a system are connected (Hussain, 2019). In fact, it is impossible to ignore or remove one aspect of a system without changing the whole. Humans have psychologically removed themselves from nature, placing themselves above or beyond it, but we cannot remove ourselves from the natural world in which we live and depend upon. Humans need to become conscious again of our place within natural systems, so that we can improve the mauri/lifeforce of humans, and of the nature as a whole.

When we view the world this way, we see that to place humans first, we must consider the environment we live within. For human resilience we need system resilience in our environment. In the first wave of Covid-19 the highest death rates occurred in populations that were not as healthy, living in highly polluted manufacturing centres

such as Lombardy in Italy (Stewart, 2021). Or, from groups that have high rates of diabetes and heart disease such as African Americans, often stemming from lack of access to healthy natural foods, healthcare, exercise and education (referred to as food poverty and food deserts) as reported by Bleasdale *et al.* (2011). These populations were not as resilient to Covid-19 as the environments they live had a diminished mauri.

This pandemic has increased our awareness of the need for clear and open scientific communication, decisive human-centred leadership, kindness and tolerance, universal support systems (economically and vaccine distribution), environmentally conscious decision making adaptability of all aspects of working life, and the need for resilience (Hussain, 2021). It is likely that when we look back, we will see that Covid-19 was a change point in history, where changes that were already arising were accelerated. Where old systems and old ways of doing things could no longer be maintained. New systems must be more resilient to survive future shocks.

In New Zealand domestic tourism has surged, in the example of Akaroa, a small seaside town an hour's drive away from the second largest city of Christchurch, accommodation suppliers have had their best winter ever, attractions, restaurants and shops have done well (TVNZ, 2020). But domestic tourists spend 17 times less than international tourists on holiday (RNZ, 2020), and tour operators are hurting with a collapse of bookings. While there is government funding to support businesses to adapt, there is not a network of support to help operators face this financially and mentally difficult situation. The question on many operators' minds is how long will this last and can my business survive until the return of tourism. It is this that ultimately will put the greatest pressure on a return to normal tourism model, the need to get old tourism back at the same numbers or greater as soon as possible, those businesses that

adapt most readily and rapidly are likely to be resilient in the long term.

However, suppose we can take Covid-19 as an opportunity to contemplate and alter our philosophy so that our business models are also permanently altered. In that case, we can look to indigenous knowledge to understand long-term resilience and cultures that have survived and adapted for centuries or millennia. An American Indian concept is for seven generations, "when you sit in council for the welfare of the people, you must not think of yourself or of your family, not even of your generation... make your decisions on behalf of the seven generations coming, so that they may enjoy what you have today" (Oren Lyons, Seneca Nation), or better than we have today!

Case Study

The Seventh Generation is a tour company based in Akaroa, New Zealand. The tours focus on natural and cultural history and the natural environment and operate on three indigenous concepts. First, turangawaewae; knowing our place to stand, where we feel powerfully connected. Second, manaakitanga; hospitality, the sharing of kai (food) and the powerful oratory of storytelling that connects people to place and culture. Finally, kaitiakitanga or guardianship that arises out of knowing your place and your connections in place, to family, to community, to land, water, air and all our brothers and sisters; the creatures that are now, that were and that will come. Gifted to us from our ancestors, protected by us and improved for the seventh generations after us.

This is digging deep into a new resilience level, with one central tenant running through these three concepts: connection to place. Turangawaewae literally means to dig in your toes, ensuring that your toes (your roots) are in deep enough to weather a storm, so that you can stand tall and remain, despite short term difficulties or economic hardship. Knowing your connection to place can ground you and

provide a sense of permanence despite the strongest storm of change. Ultimately, this is a reconnection of your lifeforce with nature, a becoming whole. Manaakitanga is the sharing of these stories of place, it's history, people, natural environment and future, and grounded in the sharing of the kai/food that comes from that place, it is a communion, an act of sharing. From a deep sense of connection to the whole, or reconnection to our place within the natural system, understanding arises often as love and a natural sense of guardianship or kaitiakitanga, wanting to protect what is an extension of yourself.

Building resilience needs to be a long-term mindset for constant adaptability, with deep centred groundness to the permanent. Thus, we anchor ourselves to the unchanging so that we can rapidly change, for this we need to find what is always true; our connections in story to place. This deep connection brings change across a culture, and ultimately across the world.

Conclusion

Indigenous cultures around the world have lived in landscapes for centuries, millennia to tens of thousands of years. Over these expanses of time, many changes have occurred, cultures have changed but internally there is resilience and adaptability that allows the population to learn philosophies of sustainability that allow them to survive with limited resources and without the vast imported

wealth that we rely on in our 'developed' economic models today. Our way of living has hit a crisis point with Covid-19, and we expect greater crisis points to come in the foreseeable future largely because our philosophies and values are cast adrift from the natural systems that support us.

If we look to natural systems and indigenous ways of knowing, we can see that a resilient system has a strong vitality or lifeforce (mauri), it is healthy and humans that live in that system are healthy. When we know where we are from and build strong connections to place (turangawaewae), we are able to share this knowledge with others (manaakitanga), and developing a strong sense of guardianship (kaitiakitanga) for this place and culture, making decisions that will sustain it for many generations into the future.

He aha te mea nui o te ao? What is the most important thing in the world? He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata. It is the people, it is the people, it is the people. People must be at the centre of our decision making. Not for this generation only, but far into the future and with a mind far into the past. It is our ancestors who give us strength, for us to know who we are, to know where we are from and to know how far we have progressed as a society. When we know where we are grounded and know who we are, we build a deep connection to the landscape and community around us, we become part of the natural world and



Figure 1. Akaroa in lockdown in summer season when cruise ships would normally bring up to 6000 passengers

guardians of place and stories. When we hold humans at the centre, what is good for the people is good for the land and the economy. Only then we can choose that which creates the most good and the least harm.

Publisher's Note: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the Sustainability and Resilience Institute New Zealand official policy. The institute remains neutral about jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



© 2021 by the authors. The article is submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

References

- Hussain, A. (2019). *Transport Infrastructure Development, Tourism and Livelihood Strategies: An Analysis of Isolated Communities of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan*. Lincoln University, New Zealand
- Hussain, A. (2021). A future of tourism industry: conscious travel, destination recovery and regenerative tourism. *Journal of Sustainability and Resilience*, 1(1), 1-9.
- OECD (2020). *GDP Growth - Second quarter of 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/newsroom/gdp-growth-second-quarter-2020-oecd.htm>
- RNZ (2020). *Lack of tourist dollars could leave a \$12.9b hole*. Retrieved from <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/431300/lack-of-tourist-dollars-could-leave-a-12-point-9b-hole>
- Stewart, C. (2021). *Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases in Italy as of January 5, 2021, by region*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1099375/coronavirus-cases-by-region-in-italy/>
- TVNZ (2020). *Bumper winter forecast for Akaroa after tourism takes Covid-19 battering*. Retrieved from <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/bumper-winter-forecast-akaroa-after-tourism-takes-covid-19-battering>