Towards an `Āina-Based Sustainability Model

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Intent
Create a new sustainability paradigm, one based on traditional land use practices/epistemologies
What Hawaiʻi Faces

• Hawaiʻi will bear the brunt of unsustainable practices/policies failures before other communities
  – 80-95% of our food/goods are imported (Dept. of Ag)
  – Vulnerability to Natural Disaster
  – Geo-political trends/peak oil

• KEY ISSUE: We are unsustainable by design
How We Are Responding

• Seeking solutions via importing new models
• Problems with the term “sustainability”:
  – Lack of clarity: Sustainability is being used as general term: it has many variants with specific applications
  – Replicating the problem: These models are rooted in the same mindsets/paradigms that created current problem
  – Greenwashing/Neo-classism
Opportunity

Re-articulate a paradigm that is rooted in the mindsets and traditions that allowed Polynesians to live in our finite bio-system for thousands of years.
Key Tasks Before Us

• ID what is “sustainability”?
• What is sustainability in a Western/continental context? In a Hawaiian/island context?
• KEY: ID 21st century iterations of traditional epistemologies.
Western Land Use Construct

Judeo-Christian: Genesis = Dominion
Monarchy, Church, Lords and Serfs
Enlightenment – Rise of Merchant Class
Age of Exploration/Colonialism
Industrialization
Global Capitalism

ANTHROPOCENTRIC WORLD VIEW
Traditional Land Use Models

- Kumulipo- we are related to the landscape: Land and resources were the body-forms (kinolau) of deified ancestors
- Built upon the concept of familial obligation- Chiefs/staple crop were the “elder siblings” that were to be served
- Land was managed in discreet ahupua`a- all that was needed to survive was contained within.
- Role of konohiki to maintain ahupua`a bio-systems

BIOCENTRIC WORLD VIEW
Traditional Economy

• Wealth ≠ Money
• Wealth was determined by the ability to grow food, and to maintain the population to do so
• Very different from feudal systems
  – Commoners (maka`ainana) were not tied to the land
  – Land was not owned
  – Land and maka`ainana = wealth

BIOCENTRIC WORLD VIEW
Traditional Spirituality

- Sacred = Practical. No pre-contact word for religion or nature.
- The idea of an ancestral, sentient landscape created self-regulating behavior- supported idea of mutual relationship with the ecology

BIOCENTRIC WORLD VIEW
## Dichotomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western land use models</th>
<th>Traditional land use models</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>are anthropocentric; key function = extraction for wealth generation.</td>
<td>are bio-centric; key function = maintaining the bio-system in situ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Designed for continents</td>
<td>Designed for islands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Production for Export</td>
<td>Trade occurs when surplus above regional needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value captured in monetary system</td>
<td>Value captured in land, people, `ike</td>
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Post-contact/Modern realities

• Western contact can be understood as the clash between anthropocentric and biocentric traditions

• Native governance was deposed, and replaced with an anthropocentric, extractive model
  – Population crashes ensued: human and natural resources

• This model continues to be practiced to this day, thus predicating the need for “sustainability initiatives”
Anthropocentric Land Use in Hawai`i

- Factors in cheap oil as a constant
- Preserves a single component of the bio-system to export in order to generate revenue to purchase imports
- Key aim is to sustain a commodity.
‘Āina-based Sustainability

‘Āina does not translate to “land” it translates to “that which feeds” = was translated that way by anthropocentric world view

Four Integrated Components of ‘Āina-based Sustainability- or Konohiki’s Metrics of Assessment

- Sustain Natural/Living Systems (Waiwai)
- Sustain: Human Populations (Kanaka)
- Sustain Knowledge Systems (‘Ike)
- Sustain Political Rights to Land (Mana)
Challenges to `Āina-based Sustainability Model

• Under current anthropocentric model
  – Mana: Prime agricultural land mismanaged-urban sprawl, military occupation
  – Waiwai: Water is diverted- urban/industrial agricultural demands, natural stocks depleted
  – Kanaka: Former stewards dispossessed-Hawaiians at the lowest rungs of socio-economic ladder
  – `Ike: traditions disregarded- bio-centric notions devalued

*Reality: It is illegal to practice bio-centric lifestyles in anthropocentric private ownership models.*
Practitioners of ʻĀina-based Sustainability

- Ka`ala farms/MA`O Organic Farms
- Represent different components:
  - Ka`ala: Walk with ancestors
  - MA`O: Ancestors walk with you.
- Fulfill the role of konohiki within contemporary anthropocentric context
- Two organizations have mutually important relationship
Ka`ala Farms: Mala Kahiko

- Revitalized lo`i complex- in the face of fierce “anthropocentric” opposition (i.e. illegal)
- Practices Aina based sustainability via- bringing back water/kalo, governance, kinship and `ike= return of `aina
- Repository for traditional bio-centric sciences and technologies
- Allows opportunity “walk with ancestors”
MA`O Organic Farms: Mala Auwana

- 24.5 acre organic farm
- Social enterprise- bulk of work force is community youth who work as college interns:
- 3 Tenets: Modern iteration of traditional practices, Contextualize Education, and Create Sustainable Industries in community
- Space where ancestors “walk with you”
Lessons from the Frontline

• We need to create Systemic Shifts
• We need to accrue power within our communities/practices
• We need new “Frames of Reference”
Kanaka-nomics

- **Challenge:** “Hawaiian” is now synonomous with “poverty”. Loss of land/connection means we are becoming less rural Hawaiians more poor Americans. Lack of economic opportunity make us complicit in environmental degradation

- **Opportunity:** The economies of the future will favor those who have best sustainability paradigm. Tap into ancestral sciences and technologies of sustainability to underpin/shape our new “green industries”

- **Goal:** The most impoverished indigenous communities can return to their traditional practices/values while creating personal wealth and developing profitable, sustainable industries.

- Using bio-centric values to flip market economy- generating revenue to support Aina (rather then exploiting land/people to maximize $)
Goal: 'Ike-demics

- Challenge: For generations, community youth perform poorly in academic settings.
- Opportunity: Develop a Pre-K to Post-employment pipeline that prepares community youth for academic achievement via engaging them in direct, applied, and entrepreneurial learning environments- farms, studios.
- Creates the “Prac-ademics”- calluses on hands and brains. Develops leaders needed to navigate Hawai‘i’s future challenges of diminishing resources.
Social Enterprise as a tool to enact `Aina-Based Sustainability

**Social**

- Grants

**Enterprise**

- Revenue

**Executive Directors:** Vision

**Business Managers:** Business Direction

**Elders**

**Program Directors**

**Programmers**

**Interns:** Generate Revenue via Enterprise while being Empowered by Social mission

**Community Empowerment**
Closing Thoughts

- **Culture as Innovation**: provides precedent to meet contemporary challenges
- **Islands are Not Continents**: inherent flaws in this belief are evident
- **Kinship not Stewardship**: practical spirituality
- **Practitioners Need to Lead**: Move from an attitude of “Having a place at the table” to “Dragging the table to community”
Haina `ia Mai ana ka Puana:

`Aina Based Sustainability shows that what will be good for Hawaiians will be good for everyone. Conversely, it also shows that what prevents Hawaiians from practicing kinship with their bio-system is inherently un-sustainable

MAHALO!