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Māori Tribal Organisations and New Institutional Economics

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the iwi (Māori tribal) organisations established in New Zealand in the 1980s and 1990s to manage resources being transferred as a result of Treaty of Waitangi settlements and the devolution of government services. The research has two objectives. Firstly, it aims to document iwi organisations’ establishment and operation from the viewpoint of those working inside the organisations. Secondly, it compares insider perspectives with economic theories concerning the causes, consequences and development of economic institutions.

To address the first objective, the research gathers qualitative data for three iwi organisations and uses these to construct case reports. An inductive comparison across cases finds that while the underlying motivation for creating the iwi organisations is a desire to live as Māori, the immediate stimuli are opportunities negotiated with government. Iwi are chosen, in preference to other Māori groups, because of their size and traditional status and organisational success is dependent on meeting the requirements of both members and external parties.

To address the second objective, the research examines a number of theories from new institutional economics which assist understanding of the empirical findings. To adequately explain iwi organisations as a whole, however, and to assess the relative explanatory power of the theories, they must be connected into a single explanatory framework. The research constructs a framework using the concept of social capital, understood as the combination of all the socio-economic institutions operating to make collective action possible. The framework proposes that socio-economic institutions can have an influence and value independent of other forms of capital.

Viewing new iwi organisations through the constructed theoretical framework casts them as intermediaries, managing relational contracts between tribal members and external parties. The relational contracts with members constitute bonding social capital and are characterised by informal institutions of high intrinsic value, considerable relationship-specific social capital, transferability across tasks but not persons, and a preference for voice over exit. Relational contracts with external parties are primarily instrumental in value and formal institutions play a significant role; they show variability in the importance of informal institutions, relationship-specific social capital, transferability and preference for exit over voice.

The thesis presents an insider’s view of new iwi organisations and then translates this view into the concepts of new institutional economics. In doing so, it contributes to two discussions: first, on the appropriate way to understand new iwi organisations; second, on the appropriate way for new institutional economics to understand society’s economic institutions.
Dedication

Ki tōku whānau, me te arohanui
Nō koutou te kaha
He Mihi - Acknowledgements

‘Ehara tēnei mahi i te mahi takitahi, he mahi takitini.’

‘This work is not that of one person, but of many, many people.’

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1 A glossary of Māori terms and a note on the use of Māori in the thesis is included in Appendix Two: Glossary of Māori terms, 378. With respect to this page, the acknowledgement in English in the second half is an approximate translation of the Maori text.
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