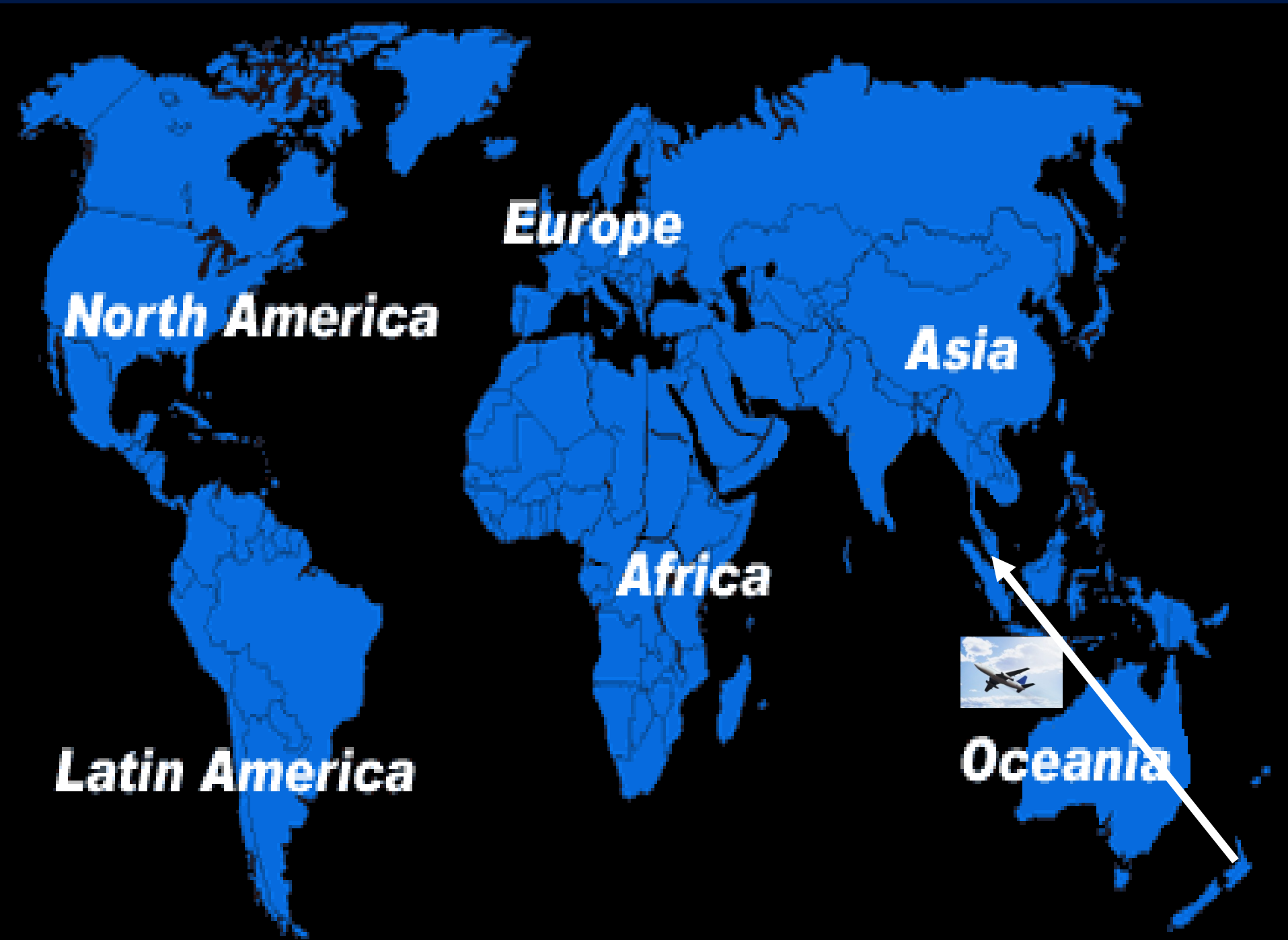


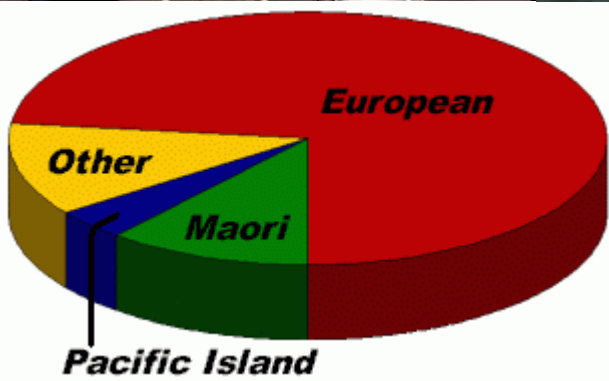
# **Sustainability**

## **The Need to Bridge Disciplinary Silos and the Theory-Practice Divide**

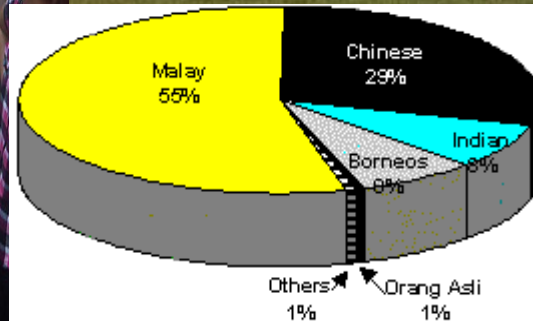
**Professor Kate Kearins  
Auckland University of Technology  
New Zealand**











# The Big Question

- We have stunning resources...
- We are living beyond the carrying capacity of our planet ...
- There are issues and problems we need to individually and collectively address to ensure a sustainable future...

**SO HOW DO WE BECOME SUSTAINABLE?**





# Intellectual Concepts

- Sustainability the capacity to endure
  - an aspirational goal,
  - a dynamic systems state of environmental, social and economic prosperity that can keep going indefinitely to the benefit of all
- Sustainable development
  - a process defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development - which may / may not lead to such a state



# Sustainable Development

*“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:*

*The concept of ‘needs’, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and*

*The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs” (WCED, 1987, p 43).*



# Needs?





# Limits?



# Philosophical Explanations

- Emphasising intergenerational equity
  - Emphasising social justice
  - Emphasising limits to growth
  - Emphasising ecosystems
  - Emphasising morality
- 
- Fundamentally querying the bases of capitalism



# Political Economy of Capitalism

- Private actors allowed to own and control the use of property and resources in accord with their own interests
- Invisible hand of pricing mechanism coordinates supply and demand in markets in a way that is presumed to be in the best interests of society
- Limited role for government in terms of responsibility for 'peace, justice and tolerable taxes'



# Owners of capital take risks and reap benefits





**Others suffer through any externalities**





# Recent Research

MIT Sloan Management Review and Boston Consulting Research

- Survey of 2,874 managers/executives from 113 countries
- 70% of companies that have placed sustainability on their management agendas have done so in the past six years; 20% have done so in just the past two years
- Two-thirds of respondents said that sustainability was critically important to being competitive in today's marketplace, up from 55% in the 2010 survey
- Most companies are struggling to define sustainability in a way that is relevant for their businesses
- 31% of respondents say their companies are currently profiting from sustainable business practices





# The Business Case for Sustainable Development

- *Sustainable development is good for business and business is good for sustainable development* (WBCSD)
- Effective design can yield resource productivity improvements
- Enabling technologies now exist to provide for eco-innovations
- Improving resource productivity can lead to higher economic growth than business-as-usual, while at the same time reducing pressures on the environment and enhancing employment





# Against the Business Case

- Capitalism privileges privatisation of profits over socialisation of losses
- There is often a trade-off between sustainability and competitiveness
- Values do not readily translate into behaviours
- Business engagement may be more rhetorical than substantive
- Sustainable development is made up of different often incompatible elements that are seen as beyond the mandate of business





# What is needed to promote sustainability?

- Leaders, champions, and change agents
- Regulation and/or voluntarism
- Disasters, shocks, shortages
- Creative solutions
- More advanced technologies
- Education, knowledge and skills
- Collaboration and team work
- A different consumption ethic



# What can we do as **individuals**?

- Experts from a range of disciplines can develop the skills to work together
- We can work to define problems and get others to assist us to develop and implement solutions
- We can seek to engage with people
  - who care about where they live, work and play
  - who are prepared to take decisions with a view to the long- term
  - who do not substitute talking for action when action is really what is needed
  - who are prepared to embrace change



# What kind of **enterprises** will contribute to sustainability? (1)

- Organisations that do not seek profit at all costs
- Organisations that do not take undue risks as they appreciate their connections to and responsibilities for the environment
- Organisations that take a long term 'glocal' view
- Organisations that conserve resources, and 'look after' products across their lifecycle



# What kind of **enterprises** will contribute to sustainability? (2)

- Organisations that take social equity seriously
- Organisations that work with rather than against the interests of diverse stakeholders
- Organisations who work within the spirit of international conventions and frameworks to **co-operate** rather than **compete** on matters of fundamental importance





# What sort of academics will make a difference?

- Academics who engage with **non-trivial issues**, who ask the **big questions** and encourage **reflexivity, critique and social action** on the part of their students
- Academics who are theoretically promiscuous, whose work is **practice focused** – not just practice-based – and whose work **celebrates good practice and decries bad practice**, and also offers a realistic prescription for enhanced performance



# What hope?

## Concluding Thoughts

- Move beyond talk to taking substantive action
- Take people with you
- Work with the prescripts of positive psychology
- Hail and be part of honest and substantive efforts to address needs (especially of the world's poor) AND limits (especially ecological ones)
- **Work for the biggest prize – life itself**

