

# id21 insights

research findings for development policymakers and practitioners

## The island advantage

### Practices for prospering in isolation

**Island communities display rich and diverse cultures, languages, societies, histories, governance forms and livelihoods. Yet island characteristics such as isolation, restricted land area and limited domestic land-based resources bring about significant environmental and social challenges. The same characteristics also yield opportunities for tackling these challenges effectively.**



Selling the day's catch on Tongatapu, Tonga. Small business, particularly retail establishments on Tongatapu, is now dominated by recent Chinese immigrants. Rural Tongans rely mainly on subsistence agriculture and have coconut, vanilla beans and banana plantations. © Ilan Kelman, 2004

Rapid environmental change, the potential loss of languages and cultures from declining island populations and significant gender inequities are examples of the challenges faced. For instance, the literacy rate in São Tomé and Príncipe is 23 percent lower among females than males. Hurricane Ivan caused damage in Grenada in 2004 valued at ten times the country's annual budget revenue.

However, characteristics such as tight kinship networks, unique heritage and a strong sense of identity, produce closely-knit communities with sustainable livelihoods. Remittances from islander diasporas and circulatory migration between islands and mainlands often boost this.

Traditional knowledge and experience of dealing with environmental and social change in isolation provide islanders (and non-islanders experiencing similar isolation) with skills that give them flexibility to adjust to several changes. These could include sudden events such as hurricanes or volcanic eruptions, creeping environmental changes such as drier or wetter climate, and longer-term social trends such as better internet connectivity and swifter transportation.

This issue of *id21 insights* illustrates approaches available, successes witnessed and challenges overcome for building and maintaining healthy and viable island communities. Contributors to this issue highlight the positive aspects of island life as well as

real threats facing islands and islanders. The objective is to showcase successful experiences and tested ideas which exemplify 'good-practices' and could be adopted by other islands.

Lessons on overcoming island challenges could also apply to small, isolated, marginalised communities, not just islands. Landlocked and remote rural villages, mountain communities and even coastal cities despite their size, have strong parallels with islands. While non-island development approaches are frequently applied in island situations, less transfer occurs in the reverse.

#### Is the island advantage fleeting?

By focusing on certain challenges we might bypass mentioning successes. It is important to stress, however, that challenges and successes co-exist and/or situations could change. The Seychelles, for example, despite successes in environmental management, is suffering from global environmental change, seen partly through coral bleaching. São Tomé and Príncipe has poor literacy rates and gender inequality but is aiming for

economic diversification including taking advantage of increased oil revenues. Yet, economic diversification could bring other

challenges and may not necessarily assist in tackling gender and economic inequalities.

So, the island advantage, it could be argued, is fleeting with multiple views and

perspectives regarding what constitutes a challenge or an advantage. The Maldives and the Seychelles are commended for their 'sustainable tourism' approaches, yet most tourists travel there via commercial jet flights. These flights contribute greenhouse gas emissions leading to climate change and sea-level rises which threaten the islands' environment and, for low-lying atolls, the islands' existence above water. Rather than asserting the hopelessness of the cycle in which tourists ruin that which draws them to the islands, **Rachel Dodds** and **Jerome McElroy** propose policy approaches which can reap rewards while minimising disadvantages.

Migration is another example. While emigration can help by avoiding resource-damaging population growth on islands and bolstering island economies through

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remittances, as seen on Jamaica and Kiribati, this can also dilute identity and culture. Conversely, immigration to islands brings cultural and economic diversity, as seen on Åland and Tonga. But it can also provoke conflict, as seen by attacks on Chinese immigrants and their descendants on Tonga and the Solomon Islands. **Wei Choong** describes the role of the Chinese in the Solomon Islands' economy and how improved openness and inclusiveness in economic, social and cultural decisions can reduce conflict.

### Challenges become opportunities

Researchers and policymakers frequently note that isolation is 'problematic' for islands. Transport can be costly, infrequent, unreliable, and run by monopolies, encouraging emigration and increasing prices of imported products and services. Quality of island life is generally seen as being less than quality of mainland life.

**Gestur Hovgaard** provides a counter-example from the Faroe Islands, demonstrating how isolated communities can prosper with (or because of?) their isolation. He suggests basing creative livelihood strategies on local tradition, identity and history. The isolation that leads to unique island environments and cultures can be used as the basis not only for survival, but also prosperity – a policy supported by **Iain Orr** and **Graeme Robertson** with regard to island World Heritage Sites. This ethos has been also applied for pooling technical and political resources to generate 'island power' – strength through diversity and collaboration – and is key to understanding the island advantage (see box below).

Similarly, **Sandy Kerr** explores island governance regimes, highlighting different forms of 'autonomy without independence'. Rather than becoming independent states or being entirely assimilated into another state, islands are asserting their jurisdiction in areas they wish to control – such as language, culture, natural resources, environmental regulation, trade and offshore finance – without severing all ties to their governing state. This helps the autonomous

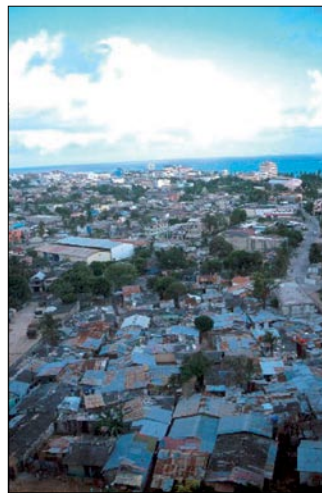
island by keeping its connection to a state with more resources and power. And the governing state takes responsibility for areas of less day-to-day interest for island governance, such as defence and humanitarian relief. While remaining an 'associated territory' might seem an unjust remnant of colonial rule, islands are turning this status to their advantage; often actively opposing full independence.

**Tom Mitchell** and **Katharine Haynes** explore disaster risk reduction for two non-sovereign Caribbean islands: Saint Kitts (part of the Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis) and Montserrat (a United Kingdom Overseas Territory). They show how scientific research can be used to foster an education and learning exchange between academia and those involved operationally in local disaster risk reduction. Traditional and scientific knowledges and approaches meld to produce solutions before a crisis strikes, rather than repeating the pattern where external 'experts' try to direct ongoing disaster situations, generating mistrust and conflict.

### The island advantage

The evidence presented in this issue of *id21 insights* indicates that the island advantage is far more prevalent than is often admitted. However, there are gaps that still need to be addressed:

- Environmental and social changes over past millennia provide lessons for the future. Island anthropology and archaeology should be better applied to address contemporary island change.
- Indices such as the Environmental Vulnerability Index and the Happy Planet Index sometimes rank islands higher than islanders and mainlanders might expect. Shortfalls and constraints



**Fishing and tourism development on the island of San Andrés until recently was 'controlled' by its parent state – mainland Colombia. This has resulted in unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and over-population. More than 73,000 people now live on 27km<sup>2</sup> of land. The island has been designated as a United Nations Biosphere Reserve, which offers possibilities for the local management of marine resources**  
© Sandy Kerr, 2000

in the indices need to be better compared between potential local and non-local misperceptions of island life, as compared to other locations.

- Island states may comprise widely dispersed communities. The effect of different degrees of fragmentation, effective population, size and cultural coherence should be better understood in policymaking, policy implementation and island identity, especially for applying the island advantage.

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### See also

*A World of Islands: An Island Studies Reader, Malta & Canada*, Agenda Academic and Institute of Island Studies, edited by Godfrey Baldacchino, 2007

*Development in Disaster-prone Places: Studies of Vulnerability*, London, Intermediate Technology Publications, by James Lewis, 1999

## Island power

### Pooling technical and political resources

**Island jurisdictions – sovereign and non-sovereign – with relatively small populations, can find it challenging to carry out all their international responsibilities effectively.**

These include patrolling their waters to catch poachers and smugglers or negotiating and implementing international environmental and trade treaties. The Convention on Biological Diversity and World Trade Organization agreements illustrate the legal and technical complications which can arise, often requiring extensive expertise in specific areas to help understand concerns and negotiate solutions.

Inter-island alliances and organisations can pool resources to address such issues better. Sharing specialist expertise amongst different island jurisdictions can yield more effective policy and practice outcomes. A skilled negotiator is often called upon to provide technical advice and support to several national or regional treaty negotiation teams.

The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States supports its members in economic integration, harmonisation of foreign policy, and adherence to international law, amongst other tasks. Practical outcomes include standardising currency, supreme court appeals and civil aviation services across several countries.

The Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission are other examples. They provide scientific, technical and policy advice to their

members on environmental, sustainable development and natural resources topics. The University of the South Pacific and the University of the West Indies are regional multi-campus institutions providing tertiary education services to many islands (and beyond) while pooling administrative and maintenance costs.

Even though these organisations have different mandates and structures, they promote cooperation in island regions characterised by diverse peoples and geographies. By capturing the experience and skills from the entire region, each island jurisdiction can draw on a powerful resource for advice and support. Smallness and diversity can lead to political influence and strength through collaboration.

# What does sustainable tourism mean for islands?

**Deliberate diversification of the economy from low-value agriculture to high-value international tourism (sometimes in combination with off-shore banking) has helped many small islands to prosper.**

Seven small islands – Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Guernsey, Iceland, Isle of Man and Jersey – rank amongst the world's top 20 countries on the basis of per capita income, according to the World Factbook, 2007.

However, in many other islands rapid tourism growth has damaged the fragile ecology and social systems of islands, raising doubts about the sustainability of island tourism:

- Local infrastructure has come under pressure: water shortages and electricity blackouts are common.
- Road works have caused the erosion and destruction of bio-diverse wetlands.
- Construction of large-scale infrastructure projects such as marinas, cruise ship terminals, golf courses and holiday resorts have altered delicate coastlines and defaced mountain-sides.
- Marina development including anchoring, sand mining and sewage discharge has damaged mangroves, polluted lagoons and degraded fragile reefs.

Some of the most successful tourist destinations have also experienced social disruption (Malta, Balearics) and cultural losses (islands of Thailand, Hawaii). Many of these non-sustainable outcomes have been due to:

- the absence of a legacy of environmental protection and/or a heritage of cultural appreciation
- policy focus on short-term economic benefits over long-term social and environmental stability.

However, half a century of tourism has taught policymakers valuable lessons and many islands are now moving towards sustainability.

Highly developed destinations like the Balearics and Malta are implementing sustainable practices, while newer resorts like the Maldives are initiating environmental assessments. Bermuda and the Seychelles, both with a tradition of environmental conservation, share a distinct, self-conscious, upscale tourism identity, and are committed to long-term planning. The British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Mauritius, Northern Marianas and Iceland have avoided excessive tourism dependence by diversifying into other profitable economic activities. Some of these include off-shore financing, sugar

and manufacturing industries and power generation.

In a few warm-water islands, tourism is restricted by limited transport infrastructure which has allowed eco-friendly and other types of low-density, high-yield speciality tourism to flourish. A small airport has prevented the growth of mass tourism in Saint Barthélemy, in the Eastern Caribbean, and has helped it to develop as an up-market destination for French cuisine.

In several isolated cold-water islands like the Shetlands, the Falklands, Antarctica and Greenland, tourism is controlled by a short holiday season, expensive access, and by a focus on extreme adventure and exploration which are not universally demanded leisure activities.

## Tourism in Selected Small Islands, 2003

| Island                   | Visitor Spending per Resident (US\$) | Average Daily Visitors per 1000 Residents |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>HIGH IMPACT</b>       |                                      |   |
| British Virgin Islands   | 15,797                               | 350                                       |
| Saint Maarten            | 13,500                               | 225                                       |
| Aruba                    | 11,900                               | 215                                       |
| Cayman Islands           | 11,693                               | 238                                       |
| Turks and Caicos Islands | 14,951                               | 170                                       |
| US Virgin Islands        | 11,693                               | 108                                       |
| <b>MEDIUM IMPACT</b>     |                                      |   |
| Northern Marianas        | 6,841                                | 62  |
| Antigua/Barbuda          | 3,960                                | 78  |
| Palau                    | 3,400                                | 55  |
| Seychelles               | 2,956                                | 42  |
| Maldives                 | 1,152                                | 4   |
| Mauritius                | 769                                  | 16  |
| <b>LOW IMPACT</b>        |                                      |   |
| Samoa                    | 299                                  | 11  |
| Tonga                    | 133                                  | 15  |
| Vanuatu                  | 345                                  | 7   |
| Cape Verde               | 239                                  | 4   |
| Micronesia               | 157                                  | 3   |
| Marshall Islands         | 85                                   | 2   |
| Kiribati                 | 68                                   | 2   |

The above islands are listed in order of levels of impact based on the Tourism Penetration Index (TPI) (not shown in the table). The TPI is a measure of the overall economic, social and environmental impact of tourism. The selected islands try to show the global spread of tourism and its different intensity across the major oceanic basins. They indicate that the most tourist-penetrated region is the Caribbean, the least is the South Pacific, with medium-impact destinations scattered across both regions as well as the Indian Ocean.

Note: Visitor spending per resident is calculated as:  $[(\text{Tourists} \times \text{Stay}) + \text{Day Trippers}] / [(\text{Population} \times 365) \times 1000]$

Source: Island Data

[www.islandstudies.ca/Island%20DataJerryMcElroy.xls/file\\_view](http://www.islandstudies.ca/Island%20DataJerryMcElroy.xls/file_view)

*Deliberate diversification of the economy from low-value agriculture to high-value international tourism (sometimes in combination with off-shore banking) has helped islands to prosper*

Although every destination must shape its own path, a generation of island tourism experience suggests that success can come from:

- proactive and strategic planning over the long-term
- public environmental education and community participation in tourism decision-making
- diversification beyond exclusive dependence on tourism
- broad policy acceptance on limitations to growth.

Achieving these elements, in whole or in part, will ensure islands are moving towards profitable tourism that is socially acceptable to the host population and environmentally sustainable for future generations.

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**See also**

*Malta's Tourism Policy: Standing Still or Advancing towards Sustainability?* Island Studies Journal, 2(1), pages 47-66, by Rachel Dodds, 2007 (PDF)  
[www.islandstudies.ca/journal/ISJ-2-1-2007-Dodds-pp47-66.pdf](http://www.islandstudies.ca/journal/ISJ-2-1-2007-Dodds-pp47-66.pdf)

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# Islands on the margins

## *Coping with global restructuring*

**Technological and institutional modernisation have put considerable pressures on Nordic Atlantic island economies such as Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands. Local communities dependent on fisheries have developed 'coping-strategies' that include networking and strong local institutions. And many are economically successful despite the challenges.**

These island economies are resource dependent, relying heavily on fisheries. The geography and climate are relatively harsh and travelling and freight is costly. Yet, these economies are highly modernised and technologically advanced and – as in all Nordic welfare states – have high levels of social services and strong municipal institutions.

A resource dependent fisheries economy usually has settlement patterns of small and scattered coastal villages. Such small villages tend to respond to pressures of globalisation by taking up generally accepted market-friendly economic policies. However, local practices also contribute to the dynamics of globalisation. So, how do local communities on isolated islands respond to the threat of marginalisation?

### **Economic re-structuring**

Klaksvík is a typical industrialised fishing village on the Faroe Islands, and a good case in point. Throughout the 20th Century, Klaksvík witnessed nearly unlimited growth in population and wealth. With nearly 4,700 inhabitants, it is today one of the bigger fishing villages in the Nordic Atlantic. The economy here was, and is, founded on long-distance fisheries, coastal fisheries and a large fresh fish processing plant, supported by an extensive network of related service providers.

However, a collapse in the Faroese economy in the early 1990s resulted in a widespread political collapse and out-migration from Klaksvík. However, after this, the local community recovered on its own in an extraordinary manner.

The first step towards building and restructuring was taken by getting together key decision-makers and others from the local community. They agreed to keep the local economy in local hands, quickly re-start production, and build and maintain trustworthy relations with external creditors and the international market. The tradition of small scale solutions, and using local-to-local and local-to-international networks came to the rescue.

### **Local coping strategies**

Coping strategies are different in different areas. Yet, some general features are crucial as Klaksvík's experience shows:

- Local history and identity are

## Islands as World Heritage Sites

**No less than 95 out of 851 UNESCO World Heritage Sites are distinctively insular. This means their management plan and buffer zones:**

- effectively cover an entire island or group of islands
- include complete islands whose features are crucial to the site's heritage value, or
- the site includes social or natural processes characteristic or symbolic of the whole island.

The sites can be grouped by island features:

- Atolls and reefs (Henderson Island, Belize Barrier Reef)
- Coastal island ecologies (Vietnam's Ha Long Bay, Panama's Coiba National Park)
- Colonial island settlements (Gambia's James Island, Apravasi Ghat in Mauritius)
- Island archaeology (Bahrain's Dilmun, Malta's Megalithic Temples)
- Ecosystems found only on one island (Madeira Laurisilva, Tasmanian Wilderness)
- Island lifestyles (Pico Island Vineyards in Portugal's Azores, Norway's Vega Archipelago)
- Monasteries, churches and shrines (Monastic Island of Reichenau in Lake Constance in Switzerland, Churches of Chiloé in Chile)
- Oceanic islands (Brazil's Atlantic Islands, New Zealand's Sub-Antarctic Islands)
- Prisons and fortresses (South Africa's Robben Island, Senegal's Gorée Island)
- Strategic island cities (Venice, Santo Domingo) and
- Volcanoes (Italy's Aeolian Islands, South Korea's Jeju Island).

Increasingly, the World Heritage Convention has been concerned with the imbalance between sites chosen for their cultural heritage

crucial attributes for developing social solidarity which is needed for handling crisis and transition: Klaksvík's long tradition of small scale entrepreneurship and local ownership was vital in its re-building.

- Involving institutions beyond the 'market' are important to balance out global pressures: Klaksvík's municipality, for example, took an overall responsibility and represented the locality generally; and the local bank provided substantial capital at a time when no one came forward to finance investments.
- Openness to, and networks with the international world help: the Klaksvík 'marketplace' which is founded on social relations, and having 'glocals' (mediators for local and global interaction) helped it to recover.

### **Strategies for small settlements**

Fisheries dependent localities adopt strategies which are compatible with what they are historically good at, namely changing and adapting their forms of social organisation. But the solution for isolated settlements is neither just adapting to nor de-linking from the increasingly globalising economies. Instead, it is important to:

and those chosen for their natural heritage criteria (with a small but growing number of 'mixed' sites and 'cultural landscapes'). Here, we find a marked contrast between the 756 'non-island' sites (including many on island states like Indonesia, Japan, Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom where the sites do not have distinctive insular features) and the 95 island sites (see table below).

#### *Non-island sites that...*

|                        |     |     |
|------------------------|-----|-----|
| meet cultural criteria | 604 | 80% |
| meet natural criteria  | 129 | 17% |
| are mixed              | 23  | 3%  |

#### *Island sites that...*

|                        |    |     |
|------------------------|----|-----|
| meet cultural criteria | 56 | 59% |
| meet natural criteria  | 37 | 39% |
| are mixed              | 2  | 2%  |

Two lessons can be drawn. First, the boundaries of islands help define their distinctive cultural and natural features. Second, the relative isolation of islands has been a powerful driver of social development and evolutionary change, helping keep the natural world as part of human culture too. Islanders could teach larger communities much about living in harmony with natural ecosystems.

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**See also**

World Heritage Sites

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>

Island sites (a full list and analysis)

[www.globalislands.net](http://www.globalislands.net)

- develop strategies compatible with globalising economies, based on practices which make sense to those involved
- look at places as creative spaces for life qualities (providing alternative opportunities for work, leisure and housing)
- cross local, regional and even national boundaries to promote knowledge on practices, planning and research which are of particular interest for island economies and their lifestyles.

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**See also**

*Globalisation, Embeddedness and Local Coping Strategies: A Comparative and Qualitative Study of Local Dynamics in Contemporary Social Change*, PhD Dissertation, Department of Social Sciences, Roskilde University, Thesis No. 29/2001, by Gestur Hovgaard, 2000

*How to Make a Living in Insular Areas – Six Nordic Cases*, Nordregio Report 2006:1, Stockholm: Nordregio, by Margareta Dahlström and others, 2006 (PDF)

[www.nordregio.se/Files/r0601.pdf](http://www.nordregio.se/Files/r0601.pdf)

*Innovations in the Nordic Periphery*, Nordregio Report 2004:2, Stockholm: Nordregio, edited by Nils Aarsæther, 2004 (PDF)

[www.nordregio.se/Files/r0403.pdf](http://www.nordregio.se/Files/r0403.pdf)

## Island minorities

### *The Chinese in the Solomon Islands*

**The Solomon Islands has been marred by ethnic tensions and urban riots since the late 1990s. The Regional Australian Mission to these islands is currently attempting to maintain law and order. The arrival of new Asian (predominantly mainland Chinese) migrants has further complicated development.**

Asians first came to the South West Pacific Islands during the time of European exploration, colonialism and barter trade in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Chinese immigrants arrived as indentured labourers or traders. They later settled on the islands, participating in their social and cultural life. They also became instrumental in establishing the local cash-based economy, which now operates in parallel with the traditional village-based barter and subsistence economy.

#### Urban-rural links

Over 80 percent of the people on the Solomon Islands live in rural areas and many depend on their environment for livelihood survival (for example, fishing). The sea has

been their main source of income and most livelihoods are subsistence based.

Over generations, the Chinese established important rural-urban links on the islands. Surplus products from villages were traded for basic imports and sold by the Chinese in the urban retail sector. The Chinese and their established socio-economic relationship with the indigenous people have been important for the local economy. They have had access to global social and economic networks, regional markets and capital investment.

#### Changing dynamics

Today, the Chinese diaspora is changing. There are differences between the old Chinese minority and new Chinese and Asian immigrants. The Pacific has become a place of economic interest to many of its Asian neighbours for its vast natural resources such as forestry and fisheries. Many companies are not locally owned and the profits of many activities including illegal logging leave the country. This has left many indigenous people and the older generation of Chinese questioning their role in their own local economic development – asking whether it is for their benefit or the rest of the world.

Livelihoods can prosper if social and economic policies address the issue of access to basic services and employment. Also, local cultural systems and beliefs play a key role in the management of the cash economy. Recognising

this and involving the island ethnic minorities in the planning and development of the local economy are important for overcoming repeated conflicts and re-establishing secure livelihoods.

Key recommendations include:

- providing economic incentives that build the skills of indigenous people (for example, subsidies or sponsorships for shop-owners to provide business skills training to indigenous staff)
- amending and enforcing immigration, customs and trade regulations to combat the increase in transboundary crime such as smuggling, illicit drug and arms trafficking, and illegal logging which is linked to the new Chinese diaspora
- encouraging participation of new migrants in community-based development programmes
- involving the Chinese minority in rural development programmes linked to current economic activities.

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#### See also

The People's Survey Pilot, Report for the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands, by ANU Enterprise PL and the Australian National University, 2006 [www.ramsi.org/node/134](http://www.ramsi.org/node/134)

## Autonomy without independence

**Islands around the world display wide-ranging levels of political, cultural and economic autonomy. At one end is full independence and at the other total assimilation within a governing 'parent' state. Between these opposites lie an increasing number of islands that seek autonomy without independence.**

Limited resources, small size and isolation mean that island economies are often highly unstable. When development opportunities do arise, an island may have neither the capacity nor the jurisdictional powers to manage the activity. Consequently, ownership and control of such development is frequently dominated by off-island interests.

**Many islands now seek increased autonomy while remaining part of their parent state**

Fishing, tourism and extractive industries are often controlled by off-island interests. The search for profit routinely pushes the scale of activity beyond the limits of sustainability. Effective management of island resources requires local control but achieving this is not easy. Independence gives total control of resources, but the governing state may be unwilling to cede sovereignty. Also, administrative burdens of sovereignty can be high for small states. Instead, many islands now seek increased autonomy while remaining part of their parent state.

New opportunities exist for enhanced island autonomy. Modern information technology allows islands to participate in global networks, such as trade networks

which link them directly with other countries. Many islands develop cultural and political links with other islands (for example, through the Island Games Association or the Global Island Network).

International laws and agreements provide opportunities for islands to increase their autonomy. In the Galapagos Islands, the United Nations World Heritage status has resulted in the enactment of the Special Law of the Galapagos. This gives the islands control over fisheries and tourism. Mainland Ecuadorian interests are now excluded from exploiting the islands' resources, creating the opportunity for sustainable resource management.

The number of Sub-National Island Jurisdictions around the world is increasing. These arrangements give islands the autonomy to control internal resources and policies without the burden and risks of full independence. Effective arrangements often display the following features:

- an external source of influence which can encourage the parent state to relinquish control over island resources (for example, Easter Island/Rapa Nui, a UNESCO World Heritage site)
- alliances with other islands, used to lobby for special arrangements in international fora (for example, the Conference of Peripheral Maritime

Regions around Europe)

- economic relationships with other countries helping reduce dependency on the parent state (for example, the Falkland Islands leasing fishing rights to Japan)
- a strong sense of identity or indigenous island culture that drives local political elites to pursue, attain and protect autonomy (for example, Baffin Island/Nunavut, Corsica)
- shared values and common goals necessary for the effective management of island resources (for example, Shetland Islands, Gotland).

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that local control of resources automatically leads to sustainable resource management. In the event of competing local claims to island resources, individual groups must be prepared to compromise in order to reach agreement. Local groups would have to place a higher value on the success of the management process (or island autonomy) than their own claim on resources.

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#### See also

'Exploring Sub National Island Jurisdictions' special issue of *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 95 (3) edited by Godfrey Baldacchino and David Milne, 2006

*Islands at the Crossroads: Politics in the Non-Independent Caribbean*, Ian Randle Publishers Kingston, edited by A.G. Ramos and A.I. Rivera, 2001

'What is Sustainable Island Development About?' *Ocean and Coastal Management*, 48 (7-8), pages 503-524, by Sandy Kerr, 2005

## Routes to island disaster resilience

Disasters are a significant feature of life for many small island developing states. Vulnerability indices commonly include a high percentage of small island developing states among countries considered most disaster prone.

Despite their exposure to disasters, there is limited investment in disaster risk reduction (DRR) in small island developing states compared to the money spent globally on disaster relief.

While there are many reasons for this, such as limited donor financing or lack of political will, recent research on Saint Kitts and Montserrat in the eastern Caribbean highlights the low priority islanders give to reducing disaster risk in relation to economic growth, protecting cultural heritage and safeguarding local identity. It is also worth noting that Saint Kitts and Montserrat have experienced numerous disasters throughout their history.

Only 22 small island developing states (of the 51 defined by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs) are signatories to the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action (a non-binding international commitment to DRR). It is important to find ways to increase DRR in the political and public consciousness.

However, finding routes to island disaster resilience requires an improved understanding of how the particular ways of island life influence action with respect to DRR. Drawing on the findings of research on Saint Kitts and Montserrat, we consider how issues of trust in scientific information and of deliberative decision-making require careful attention.

### Contested science

The relationship small island developing states have with the science of disaster risk is different to that of other countries. Few people in any society have an accurate understanding of disaster risk and it is commonly left to hazards scientists, and disasters and emergency managers, to assess and highlight risks and promote preparedness and mitigation.

Small island developing states have few local scientists and scientific information about disaster risks mainly comes from foreign scientists, whose work is often financed by sources external to the island. Where local perceptions of disaster risk and desired outcomes differ from those of foreign scientists, questions of trust and legitimacy arise. Scientific knowledge can then become politicised in different ways to achieve certain goals and views, and attitudes often become

A local islander and an external scientist discuss disaster resilience on Montserrat  
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polarised and entrenched, increasing levels of vulnerability.

### Deliberative processes

As we face growing uncertainties magnified by climate change, we need to recognise that:

- all available knowledge on small island developing states must be brought together, in an effort to achieve the optimal path to disaster resilience
  - expert knowledge that is often held by foreign scientists can serve to increase the vulnerabilities of societies dealing with high levels of uncertainty and severely limited human resources
  - local people have more accurate and valuable knowledge needed for building resilience
  - deliberative and inclusive decision-making processes for questions of how to manage disaster risks and uncertainties should be institutionalised to help promote equity in the diverse voices of different people representing local, bureaucratic and scientific knowledge.
- Research from Montserrat and Saint Kitts shows that multi-disciplinary external research teams experienced in the design of participatory decision-making can successfully launch such processes. These programmes must help initiate, or build the capacity of, sustainable strategies and platforms for DRR. External visits from concerned 'experts' must not be left until disasters are imminent or ongoing, when tensions magnify divisions and conflict.

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#### See also

*Volcanic Island in Crisis: Investigating Environmental Uncertainty and the Complexity it Brings*, Australian Journal of Emergency Management, 21(4), pages 21-28, by Katharine Haynes, 2006  
[www.ema.gov.au/ajem](http://www.ema.gov.au/ajem)

*Early Participatory Intervention for Catastrophe to Reduce Island Vulnerability (EPIC)*, International Journal of Island Affairs, 14 (2), pages 56-59, by Katharine Haynes, Ilan Kelman and Tom Mitchell, 2005



## Useful web links

Global Islands Network  
[www.globalislands.net](http://www.globalislands.net)

International Scientific Council for Island Development  
[www.insula.org](http://www.insula.org)

Island Resources Foundation  
[www.irf.org](http://www.irf.org)

Small Island Developing States Network  
[www.sidsnet.org](http://www.sidsnet.org)

Small Islands Voice  
[www.smallislandsvoice.org](http://www.smallislandsvoice.org)

Small Island Cultures Research Initiative  
[www.sicri.org](http://www.sicri.org)

Forum for Island Research and Experience  
[www.fireonline.org](http://www.fireonline.org)

International Small Islands Studies Association  
[www.geol.utas.edu.au/isisa](http://www.geol.utas.edu.au/isisa)

Island Studies  
[www.islandstudies.ca](http://www.islandstudies.ca)

Island Vulnerability  
[www.islandvulnerability.org](http://www.islandvulnerability.org)

Islands of Globalization  
[www.movingislands.net](http://www.movingislands.net)

Building Tourism Resilience in Small Island Developing States  
[www.sids-tourism.org](http://www.sids-tourism.org)

SPIDER Network  
[www.spidernetwork.org](http://www.spidernetwork.org)



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