



A view of Nelson's Dockyard from the mountains of Antigua. By facilitating the stay of high-end visitors who could be loosely considered 'digital nomads' — professionals working online who could work from anywhere in the world — Caribbean islands carved a small market to replace their usually high numbers of foreign tourists.

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Building back better:

COVID-19 and island economies

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has been defined as a global pandemic. However, the very few parts of the world that have been spared are islands, especially those in the South Pacific. While the pandemic may have spared many islands the negative health impacts of COVID-19, all countries, islands, and communities have suffered damage to their economies. Against this background, this chapter has two objectives. First, it discusses how tourism and food security have been impacted by the pandemic, building on the duality of island vulnerability and resilience and on the

FRANCESCO
SINDICO

Strathclyde Centre for
Environmental Law
and Governance,
University of Strathclyde
Law School, Glasgow, Scotland



relationship between resilience and sustainability. Second, the chapter develops a policy relevant research agenda linked to the importance of sound ocean governance as an instrument to promote sustainable tourism and food security. Both chapter objectives are informed by data stemming from a global survey carried out by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG) and Island Innovation between March and June 2020. Overall, the chapter suggests the need to formulate a policy relevant research agenda that ensures post COVID-19 recovery packages build back better and move islands towards a more resilient and sustainable future. The agenda must be inclusive and transparent and align with robust island-specific data.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 appears to have spread across the entire planet like a tsunami. From press coverage, it often appears that the entire world has been affected (The Associated Press, 2020). However, a closer look at the data shows that there have been very few places on Earth that have been spared (Orr, 2020). Most of these places are islands and, in particular, islands in the South Pacific. However, after the initial sense of relief and romanticizing of such places as paradises (Royle, 2014) that have not been affected by the global pandemic, the harsh reality kicks in. All places are inter-connected in a globalized world (Ratter, 2018). Hence, even if island nations like Vanuatu or Samoa have not seen cases of COVID-19, their societies and economies have nevertheless been negatively affected (IMF, 2020). The same can be said for islands in the Northern hemisphere, such as the Western Isles in Scotland or Prince Edward Island in Canada (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2020; Yarr, 2020). Despite faring much better than the mainland, they too have had to bear the socio-economic brunt of the pandemic.

IT IS CRUCIAL THAT ISLANDS and their communities recover from COVID-19 not by going back to a business-as-usual scenario, but by building back better.

Against this background, the relationship between vulnerability, resilience, and sustainability has taken on a new dimension. Islands are often considered to be vul-

nerable because of their physical isolation. However, their inherent vulnerability and, in many cases, physical isolation have made them, in a way, more resilient to COVID-19 than their mainland counterparts. At the same time, their resilience is being tested as the global pandemic enters its second — and in some cases even third — wave, keeping islands isolated from the rest of the world. It is crucial that islands and their communities recover from COVID-19 not by going back to a business-as-usual scenario, but by building back better. Post COVID-19 recovery packages need to promote a vision of sustainable island life. This is not only an island where the three dimensions of

sustainable development are present: the economic, environmental, and social aspects. It is also an island where communities take, as much as possible, ownership of the decisions that will drive their future. Rather than looking at all possible aspects of island life that have been disrupted by COVID-19, this chapter focuses on tourism and food security and discusses the extent to which ocean governance is a necessary pre-requisite for building back better from COVID-19 and promoting sustainable island life. The chapter builds on data stemming from a global survey carried out by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG) and Island Innovation between March and June 2020 (Sindico & Ellsmoor, 2020; Sindico et al., 2020) and on the ongoing *COVID-19 Island Insights Series* coordinated by SCELG, the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island, and Island Innovation (Institute of Island Studies, 2021).

This chapter explores the relationship between and among vulnerability, resilience, and sustainability in island studies literature and how this relationship sits within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It discusses how tourism and food security have been impacted by the pandemic, building on the above-mentioned duality of island vulnerability and resilience and on the relationship between resilience and sustainability. The chapter goes on to develop a policy relevant research agenda linked to the importance of sound ocean governance as an instrument to promote sustainable tourism and food security. Ultimately, vulnerability, resilience, and sustainability are all part of islands' unique opportunity to build back better from the COVID-19 crisis.

ISLAND VULNERABILITY, RESILIENCE, AND SUSTAINABILITY

One of the risks in undertaking any study on islands is to lump all of them into one category. During my collaboration with the Scottish Government regarding the consultation leading to the first ever National Islands Plan (Scottish Government, 2019), one of the questions I was most frequently asked by islanders attending the consultation events was, "How are you going to capture the differences between my island and the rest of the Scottish islands?" (Sindico & Crook, 2021). This is not an academic question; it is an extremely important policy relevant question that should always be kept in mind by researchers attempting to explore a topic that may be relevant for islands as a whole. However, once we are aware of the question, we should not dismiss our attempts as futile or arrogant. If done humbly and aware of the inherent limitations, studies like this one that draw on examples from islands around the world can shed light on practices, which can then be explored further by stakeholders and policy-makers on other islands. It is important not to put too much emphasis on identifying "best" practices, or even "good" practices, especially in the absence of objective

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metrics and indicators. However, collating and sharing policy relevant practices is a knowledge exchange activity that has value per se. With this in mind, I now move on to explore how the concepts of vulnerability, resilience, and sustainability have been framed within the island studies literature and how they relate to the COVID-19 crisis.

Vulnerability has often been attributed to islands, especially in the context of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (Philpot et al., 2015), because of their size and remoteness (Guillaumont, 2010). Exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity are all features that would make SIDS more or less vulnerable in the wake of climate change (McNamara, 2019). Access to and quality of livelihood resources, financial security, and climate-change experiences are three further proxies to determine a SIDS's vulnerability (McNamara, 2019). However, this correlation between SIDS and vulnerability has been criticized by others who value the characteristics that allegedly make islands vulnerable as positive assets (Kelman, 2018). Furthermore, some contest the emphasis on SIDS' vulnerability to climate change (Kelman, 2018; Malatesta & Schmidt di Friedberg, 2017). While climate change negatively affects islands through increased sea level rise, ocean acidification, and damaged ecosystems, islands (and mainlands) will also be more or less vulnerable because of other non-physical characteristics often related to governance and corruption (Baldacchino & Kelman, 2014).

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Building on the critique of island vulnerability opens the door to a better understanding of the more nuanced relationship between vulnerability and resilience (Bertram & Poirine, 2018). As mentioned earlier, the physical location of an island would appear to make it inherently vulnerable. However, “the islandness characteristics which can create vulnerability to climate change can also support SIDS' resilience to climate change” (Kelman, 2018, p. 160). Furthermore, while the concepts of vulnerability and resilience may differ, their conceptions are

more easily reconciled (Philpot et al., 2015).

Summing up the discussion so far, an island can be vulnerable to a physical or structural shock, or a combination of the two. For example, an earthquake coupled with poor housing planning makes an island and its community vulnerable. Resilience can be understood as the capacity to overcome such shocks and return to the status quo. This approach to resilience comes from ecology (Townsend et al., 2003), according to which there can be “two nuanced meanings of resilience: (1) how quickly a system might return to stability after being disturbed; and (2) the extent to which a system can be disturbed without breaking down” (Kelman & Randall, 2018, p. 354).

However, in the island studies literature, framing resilience in this way has been criticized because it does not sit comfortably with island realities, since the latter are not static.

“[I]sland lessons in the context of resilience reveal particular limitations in the ecological definition, in terms of taking ‘resilience’ to mean that a system has a specific state which it should retain or to which it should return or bounce back after a disturbance. Island societies thrive on openness and change, [...] Embracing change makes island communities able to continue island life; that is, change makes them resilient.” (Kelman & Randall, 2018, p. 354)

Later, Kelman and Randall (2018) clarify this tension between resilience and sustainability through the example of migration. If we were to take resilience and sustainability in their static definitions, an islander who cannot migrate because she does not have the necessary financial resources to move would be considered resilient, but “their situation is hardly sustainable in not having enough resources to be able to make choices” (Kelman & Randall, 2018, p. 360). Resilience should not be considered as the capacity of an island and its community to return to an original state after disturbance by a natural or human shock. A resilient island will be an island that is not only able to bounce back from a crisis, but does so in a way that promotes a thriving society (Kelman & Randall, 2018). In other words, an island that builds back better.

IF RESILIENCE IS ABOUT DRIVING an agenda for a better island following a state of vulnerability, the question becomes: what kind of future does that island want?

By looking at resilience in this more dynamic way, it implies change and progression, which brings resilience much closer to the meaning of sustainability. In fact, the latter is about continuity and forward-thinking. If considered from an ecological perspective, resilience and sustainability appear almost irreconcilable. However, resilience and sustainability should not be framed as static concepts, but as multi-faceted and complex, especially within an island setting. If considered in this manner, vulnerability and resilience can only be fully and properly understood if framed together with sustainability. If resilience is about driving an agenda for a better island following a state of vulnerability, the question becomes: what kind of future does that island want?

Depending on your definition of sustainable, a sustainable island may be one that is amenable to the direct involvement and participation of island governments and communities. In fact, conceptualizing sustainability as the action of going forward is too vague and in some cases meaningless. From its first use in the late 1980s, ‘sustainability’ has become a heavily politically-charged and value-laden term. A business-as-usual societal model that only focuses on economic growth with little attention to the effects on the environment and retaining or, worse, increasing social inequality, is not sustainable. A path will only be sustainable where the three areas are considered together and in an integrated fashion (Bugge & Voigt, 2008; Cordonier Segger & Khal-fan, 2004). Sustainable development requires attention to multiple factors and often

is undermined by poor governance structures, lack of finance, and corruption, which can play even more havoc than extreme events exacerbated by climate change (Baldacchino & Kelman, 2014).

Sustainable development has been embraced by islands from an early stage. The 1994 *Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States* (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 1994), followed by the *Mauritius Declaration* and *SAMOA Pathway* in 2005 and 2014, respectively (United Nations, 2005; UNGA, 2014), put sustainable development front and centre of SIDS' political agendas (Baldacchino & Kelman, 2014; Douglas, 2006).

Vulnerability, resilience, and sustainability all play a role in the COVID-19 narrative. In fact, COVID-19 has been a shock to the heart of the entire international community. In a way, the whole world has become vulnerable. However, the features which, according to some, make some islands vulnerable, such as their isolation and small size (Easter, 1999; McGillivray et al., 2010), in fact became their best assets in confronting the pandemic. In other words, island characteristics often seen as vulnerabilities have become strengths. The best way to cope with COVID-19 was, in some cases, to reinforce such characteristics by cutting off geographical ties with the mainland completely. One could go as far as to say that some islands were resilient vis a vis the pandemic because of their isolation and small size.

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Overall, some countries have reacted better than others to the COVID-19 shock and return (or attempt to return) to the pre-pandemic reality. These resilient jurisdictions have often been islands, such as New Zealand and Taiwan. However, at the same time, there is a need to move beyond COVID-19 in a way that does not simply revert back to the pre-pandemic status quo. Rather than just being resilient according to the narrower and more static conceptualization of simply returning to an original state, the challenge is to become sustainable in the face of current and future crises. An ideal outcome for countries hit by COVID-19 is to develop packages that drive their socio-economic recovery towards a sustainable path.

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TOURISM AND FOOD SECURITY

On some islands, the relationship between vulnerability, resilience, and sustainability can be explained through the prism of tourism and food security during COVID-19. In fact, there are examples of how both sectors have adjusted and moved towards more resilient approaches during the pandemic. This section will draw on both of these aspects before exploring the role of ocean governance in a post COVID-19 world island setting.

Vulnerability, resilience, and sustainability in the tourism and food security sectors during the COVID-19 crisis

The discourse on island vulnerability, resilience, and sustainability has been challenged during COVID-19. I have already mentioned how island features that some would consider to make them vulnerable were in fact some of the best weapons against COVID-19: small size and isolation, for example. At the same time, COVID-19 has very suddenly challenged some islands' strongest socio-economic assets. In other words, what one day was very strong on an island may have become very fragile the next.

Tourism is clearly a stark example in this respect. Islands whose economies relied heavily on tourism became very vulnerable. In fact, many islands are heavily reliant on their tourism sectors (Graci & Maher, 2018) and lockdown measures and travel restrictions turned many of these islands starkly quiet in periods that would otherwise be bustling with foreign visitors (Sindico et al., 2020). Cruise tourism, for example, came to an almost complete halt in the summer of 2020 (Renaud, 2020). Tourism is not only a source of income, but also provides a wide range of direct and indirect jobs to island economies. Island resilience therefore depended on how such islands coped with COVID-19 related tourism vulnerability. On some islands, there have been examples of immediate innovative projects geared towards supporting the workforce in the tourism sector. For example, in Jamaica, a programme called Level Up aimed to give jobs to those from the tourism sector that found themselves unemployed (Sindico et



Cruise ships — like this one docked in St. John's harbour on the island of Antigua in 2019 — became just a memory in 2020 when cruise ship tourism came to an almost complete halt around the world.

al., 2020). Keeping to the Caribbean, other measures included direct financial support, which was particularly important for workforces such as taxi drivers and coach drivers who saw their income reduce substantially from one day to another. On other islands such as Barbados and Jamaica, retraining programmes were developed to upskill people

working in the tourism sector (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020). Finally, Barbados developed a clear link between the recovery of tourism post COVID-19 and enhancing green energy and sustainability:

“The one exception identified is the Barbados Tourism Facility which offers loans to the tourism sector. Funds provided are expected to support links with local agriculture, and use of renewable energy, in addition to job retention and upskilling of local staff.” (ILO, 2020, p. 43)

Ed Bartlett, Jamaica's minister of tourism, describes Jamaica's workforce training program to bolster tourism recovery, June 2020.



CaribbeanNationalWeekly

In addition to tourism, and despite the fact that food supply chains did not break down, COVID-19 has reminded us of the fragility of island food security (Connell & Lowitt, 2020). ‘Island food security’ refers not only to the possibility for island communities to have enough food, but also for such food to be affordable and conducive to a healthy lifestyle. On some islands, food produce from agriculture and fisheries is already being disrupted by climate change (Barnett, 2020). Furthermore, food security also relies heavily on market forces and on the presence and power of a specific island in international trade (Connell et al., 2020). Their geographic nature and socio-economic aspects can make some islands, like Prince Edward Island in Canada, particularly vulnerable when it comes to dealing with food security. In fact, according to a response from Prince Edward Island to the survey on islands and COVID-19 led by SCELG and Island Innovation, “We [Prince Edward Island] are a very vulnerable island to food insecurity due to the combination of isolation, export economy, and northern climate. Many seed stores are now selling out, as people scramble to begin home gardening” (Sindico et al., 2020, p. 8).

The paradox I wish to highlight relative to food security during the COVID-19 crisis is that, while some islands may possess enough land and the necessary climate to produce enough food to feed their population, a significant proportion of island food production is geared towards the tourism sector. In other words, COVID-19 has revealed on some islands the paradox of high yields of agricultural production geared towards the tourism sector (Sindico et al., 2020). The moment tourism became vulnerable, these food security related paradoxes became apparent and they now require urgent discussion.



Vesey's Seeds in York, Prince Edward Island began selling out in early spring 2020 as people scrambled to begin home gardening in their concern over food security, caused by COVID-19. John Morris, Globe and Mail

Resilient tourism and food security practices during COVID-19

Similar approaches have been taken to deal with the tourism and food security crisis by islands and their communities in response to the global pandemic. Staycations and 'buy local' movements share the same focus on moving away from relying on external markets and rediscovering domestic audiences.

Not necessarily limited to islands, tourist operators made themselves attractive to local islanders as a way of (partly) plugging the gap left by overseas tourists. In regions like Sicily, islands became particularly attractive in the summer of 2020 for mainland domestic residents who replaced foreign visitors (Mariano, 2020). On other islands, such as Prince Edward Island in Canada, tourism was mainly limited to second homeowners and visitors who had a genuine link with the island (Cyr, 2020). Prince Edward Island also agreed to create an "Atlantic Bubble" to allow visitors from neighbouring Canadian provinces to enter the island (Ross, 2020). Similar approaches took place elsewhere, such as with the creation of the "Bailiwick Bubble" between the Channel Islands of Guernsey, Sark, Herm, and Alderney (States of Guernsey, 2020). Another policy, especially on islands in the Caribbean, was to attempt to attract long stay visitors by building a "COVID-19 free" brand. By facilitating the stay of high-end visitors who could be loosely considered as 'digital nomads' — professionals working online who can, hence, work from anywhere in the world — those islands tried to carve a small



“Fill your table in Andalucia” was a campaign by the Andalucian government to encourage its residents to buy local Spanish produce and revive the local economy.

market for themselves to replace the usually high numbers of foreign visitors (Johanson, 2020). Other measures focused on strengthening ‘test and trace’ schemes to provide an image of a serious and resilient island in the face of the global pandemic (e.g., Iceland; see Hosie, 2020).

Moving to food security, ‘buy local’ schemes and campaigns became prominent on several islands, like Spain’s Canary Islands (Sindico et al., 2020) and several islands in the Caribbean (ILO, 2020). In the post-pandemic future, the driver behind a better food sector should not only be to produce enough domestic produce for the sustenance of the island community. Rather, in addition, it can be used as an opportunity to diversify the economy of those islands that rely heavily on one sector (i.e., tourism). At the same time, more sustainable practices may be fostered by linking the agriculture sector with the tourism sector, through agritourism (Ammirato & Felicetti, 2014) or slow tourism (Andrews, 2008; Özdemir & Çelebi, 2018). Moreover, by promoting ‘buy local’ policies, not only will island economies be strengthened, but they will also reduce the volume of imports that ultimately contribute to an island economy’s carbon footprint.

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Ultimately, islands, their communities, and policy makers have come up with imaginative and immediate actions to deal with COVID-19. By doing so, they have proven to be resilient, but clearly this is not enough going forward. The global pandemic has operated (or should operate) as a wakeup call for islands who rely extensively on tourism, with some suggesting that the move towards sustainable tourism is now not a question of *if* it will happen, but *when* it will happen (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Similarly, the paradoxes apparent in the food systems on some islands call for a rethinking of the sector, making food security a key policy area and one that should strive for greater sustainability.

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OCEAN GOVERNANCE, TOURISM, AND FOOD SECURITY: DEVELOPING A POLICY RELEVANT RESEARCH AGENDA

In many parts of the world, islanders have not looked to the sea for their well-being but to the land for their survival. While this reluctance to rely on the sea can be explained in a number of ways (Kelman & Stojanov, 2021), it is time to reconfigure the relationship between the ocean and the islands and their communities. The need to move beyond COVID-19 presents a unique opportunity. However, rather than focusing on the specifics of how the oceans can become an even greater opportunity for more sustainable tourism and food production, I will frame a policy relevant research agenda based around three more general observations.

First, efforts should be made to fully understand the sectors of the economy that COVID-19 may have made more fragile. Tourism and food security are of course two areas already discussed in this chapter that may be particularly important for islands, but other areas should also be considered, such as digital connectivity (Sindico et al., 2020). Access to reliable and affordable internet can open opportunities to island communities. Improved digital connectivity can attract people and jobs to an island, reversing depopulation. It can also enable critical public health services to function remotely, as well as enhance education opportunities. However, criticism of sectors negatively impacted by COVID-19 will not on its own lead to change, and it will be important to reach out to the key public and private players that feed into or are impacted by those sectors.

Second, efforts should be made to better understand the unsustainable aspects of a pre-COVID-19 island economy. For example, what environmental pressures have been embedded in the 'old normal'? It is only through better understanding the environmental, health, and other challenges faced by islands that they can be looked at in

new and innovative ways in a post COVID-19 world. Similar to the tourism sector, key players and stakeholders in these island dimensions need to be identified and given a seat at the policy table.

Applying these first two general observations to the tourism and food sectors within the context of ocean governance, sound and reliable island-specific data becomes crucial (Zhong & Wu, 2020). What is the relationship between the seas and oceans surrounding an island and its economy? How many direct and indirect jobs in the tourism and food sectors rely on the ocean? How has COVID-19 affected such numbers? And what is the relationship between the ocean-related tourism and food sectors not only with economic indicators, but also with environmental and social considerations? Are ocean-related economic sectors harming the environment? Are people working in these sectors being treated fairly and are their rights being protected? These are all questions that need to be asked and that need to be at the heart of an inclusive process to move beyond the pandemic. However, this leads me to a third general observation.

All stakeholders need to be open and willing to listen to each other's views and, where necessary, work collaboratively to find equitable solutions that provide broadly acceptable outcomes for all interested parties. For example, can islands find ways to adapt from carbon intensive and resource intensive tourism models to more niche, sustainable, and targeted models? Ideally, islands that are heavily reliant on tourism should open up policy and economic conversations capable of uncovering ways to offset the most negative effects of unsustainable practices, while considering different forms of more sustainable tourism practices (Reis & Hayward, 2013). At the same time, they should identify and pursue opportunities to diversify their economy to incorporate other sources of income beyond tourism. All the questions mentioned earlier need to be put on a table around which all relevant island, ocean, tourism, and food stakeholders are seated. Key procedural matters become as important as the substantive questions dealt with in this conversation. Who decides which stakeholders are to be invited to the table? How will such invitations take place? Once they are seated, how will their voice be heard? Finally, and ultimately most importantly, how will the input of all relevant stakeholders help shape future post COVID-19 policies aimed at shaping more sustainable tourism and food island practices? This chapter does not have answers to these questions, but the process of identifying questions and challenges is the beginning of a larger process that needs to be taken forward by island policymakers and stakeholders. However, before adding a few comments specifically on the ocean dimension of tourism and food security, I wish to stress that these procedural matters should be considered in line with access to information, public participation, and access to justice, which have become human rights in most regions of the world (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1998; United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018; United Nations Environment Program, 2010).

Of course, any policy relevant research agenda requires the necessary efforts and



Protestors say they are fighting a 'David and Goliath' battle against the world's biggest cruise ship lines, which want to create a deeper, larger port in the Cayman Islands by dredging in an area of coral reefs. [BBC News](#)

steps to diagnose the pre-COVID-19 state of play. Island-specific data and a thorough understanding of such data is paramount to building back better. Just as important is the process to build back better on an island's own terms (Graci & Maher, 2018) and not through models dictated by other countries or by the mainland in the case of countries with islands. The suggested policy relevant research agenda should be applied to the relationships between ocean governance and tourism and ocean governance and food security. As argued earlier, in some cases tourism plays a dominant role in island economies. COVID-19 recoveries provide an opportunity to revisit the balance islands are striking between the legitimate benefits of tourism-fuelled economies with other legitimate interests, such as environmental protection. From this perspective, the seas and oceans surrounding islands cannot simply be treated as being for the recreational benefit of foreign tourists alone, but should be treated as socio-environmental and cultural assets over which island communities have a sense of ownership. This is not about abandoning tourism altogether, but about finding ways to diversify and embrace different approaches that continue to be lucrative sources of income, while also preserving the islands' environmental integrity and cultural identities. One of the ways to find such a balance is by deploying the suggested policy-driven research agenda. One example of where it could be piloted to reconcile the difficult tension between ocean conservation and immediate economic profit is in the Cayman Islands, where there has been an ongoing debate about whether to proceed to build a new port in an area of pristine coral reefs (Sindico et al., 2020). Another country where the inclusive policy relevant research agenda could reap positive benefits is in The Bahamas, where

there have been calls to diversify the economy by drawing attention to increased agriculture as a way to ensure food security (Sindico et al., 2020).

In conclusion, developing a policy relevant research agenda does not lead per se to more resilient and sustainable islands. However, it is a first necessary step to ensure that a post COVID-19 recovery package fully takes into account key substantive and procedural elements needed to ensure that islands do not go back to business-as-usual scenarios, but build back better going forward.

CONCLUSIONS

COVID-19 presents a unique opportunity for a new start. Islands and their communities should not consider business-as-usual and the 'old normal' as the goal to return to quickly. Doing so would probably lead to cutting corners undermining environmental protection.

Against this background, the relationships between vulnerability, resilience, and sustainability have taken a new dimension. Islands are often considered vulnerable because of their physical isolation and small size. However, their inherent vulnerability has made them, in a way, more resilient to COVID-19 than mainland counterparts. At the same time, their resilience is being tested as the global pandemic continues its second wave (and, in some cases, even third), keeping islands isolated from the rest of the world. It is crucial that islands and their communities recover from COVID-19 not by going back to a business-as-usual scenario, but by building back better. Post COVID-19 recovery packages need to promote a vision of a sustainable island life. This is not only an island where the three dimensions of sustainable development are present: the economic, environmental, and social aspects. It is also an island where communities take, as much as possible, ownership of the decisions that will drive their future. In order for islands to build back better on their own terms, this chapter has suggested the need to formulate a policy relevant research agenda in order to ensure that post COVID-19 recovery packages align with robust island-specific data and bring all necessary island stakeholders to the table. Tourism and food security are two very relevant areas of island life, society, and economy that will benefit from being part of an inclusive and transparent policy relevant research agenda.

I conclude this chapter by acknowledging several challenges and hurdles when suggesting a policy relevant research agenda to build back better from COVID-19. First, akin to what is mentioned in the first section of this chapter about considering all islands into one category, clearly the policy relevant research agenda will need to be tailored to the characteristics and needs of specific islands. A very important point is, for example, to fully appreciate the different governance structures present on islands and, in particular, the power and normative competences present within sub-national island jurisdictions. The regional dimension of some islands is also significant,

especially when it comes to their adherence to procedural matters related to access to information, public participation, and access to justice in environmental matters, which are particularly prominent in both the European and Caribbean and Latin American contexts. It will also be important to study and understand the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals and how the latter can help (or not) move islands towards a more resilient and sustainable future (Centre for International Sustainable Development Law, 2020). The second challenge is that many countries and regions may have already started and, in some cases, fully developed their post COVID-19 recovery packages. The suggested policy relevant research agenda is not futile in this case, but should be considered to scrutinise the adopted or recommended agenda to ensure that it does indeed build back better and does not just repeat past errors imposed by voices external to the island setting. Unfortunately, we can already see that, in some cases, post COVID-19 recovery packages are not going in the right direction and are contributing to investments in fossil fuels rather than climate friendly projects (Vivid Economics, 2020).

In conclusion, I am fully aware that the policy relevant research agenda suggested in this chapter is just a sketch of what it could and should look like. However, it should be considered as the beginning of a journey that island communities and their policy makers need to decide whether to embark on and how to take forward. What is clear is that COVID-19, despite all the suffering, also comes with a silver lining. It provides us with a moment to interrogate ourselves and to start a process to build back better. Tourism and food security are two of many other areas that need to be included in such a process. Just like seas and oceans surround all islands, wherever they are, it is important that all island-specific processes to build back better are framed around solid efforts to promote sound ocean governance. By embarking on such a journey, islands will build back better and become more resilient and more sustainable.

THE SEAS AND OCEANS surrounding islands cannot simply be treated as being for the recreational benefit of foreign tourists alone, but should be treated as socio-environmental and cultural assets over which island communities have a sense of ownership.

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