Changing Island Economies

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Islands as Vulnerable

Research and popular media:

• Islands as vulnerable, fragile, remote (economy, ecology)
• Need outside help to solve their problems (e.g., Small Island Developing States & Rising Sea Levels)
Islands as Resilient/Entrepreneurial

Counter narrative:
• Islands as resilient, high economic and political capacity
• Islanders as resourceful, mobile.
• A “World of Islands” perspective
• Ability to navigate and influence political and economic relationships (political entrepreneurship)

Poem by Derek Walcott
(the Schooner Flight, 1979)

“Open the map. More islands there, man,
Than peas on a tin plate, all different size,
One thousand in the Bahamas alone...
There are so many islands!
As many islands as the stars in the Night”
Scale

- Is small size a weakness or a strength?
- Entrepreneurs - easier access to decision-makers
- No local market so exports are an early and natural step
- Interconnectedness is an imperative for survival
Islandness

• “A construct of the mind” (Platt)
• Living “a life closer to nature” (Conkling)
• “A heightened sense of place” (Vannini & Taggart)
• Islanders: the integration of economic, social and physical environments is more transparent (sustainability is real and observable)
• What is the impact of islandness on business and political decision-making – positive, negative, or mixed?
1) Building Intellectual Capital

• Very few Island Studies programs, especially compared to other regional/area studies fields

• No Bachelor’s or PhDs

• All island studies scholars terminal degrees are in cognate fields (geography, biology, anthropology, sociology, history, environmental studies)

• Our world is becoming more insular; need to understand island environments to address bigger issues
2) Measuring Success

- Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Human Development Index (HDI) may not be best measures of well-being
- Many islands perform well according to these measures
- Nauru as an example of short-term high GDP resource exploitation
- The value of Vulnerability and Resilience Indices
- According to these measures, openness and integration = greater vulnerability and risk

- So how do we measure and monitor success?
3) Building on the Strengths of Islands and Islanders

Islander Characteristics:

• Strong sense of place and belonging
• Strong social relationships
• Occupational plurality (“Jack or Jill of all trades”)
• Authenticity (tourists and consumers value authentic experiences & stories)
• The importance of the island diaspora
• Returning Islanders who bring experience, ideas, global contacts, resources
4) All Islands are Important: SIDS and SNIJJs

• Small Island Developing States (SIDS) = 38+
• SubNational Island Jurisdictions: > 100
• Territories, Dependencies, Provinces, States
• Some autonomy but ambiguous political relationship with metropole/former colonial power
• Often perform very well economically versus SIDS
• Need more research comparing SIDS and SNIJJs
5) Islands as Living Labs

- Closed, “pure” systems
- Darwin and evolution on the Galapagos Islands
- New life emerges on Surtsey, Iceland
- Anthropologists and the social life on small islands (e.g., Margaret Mead)
- New applications of the living lab metaphor:
  - Renewable energy and carbon neutrality (Samso, Gotland, El Hierra)
  - Success of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)
James Randall

- Born in Toronto, Canada
- Economic geographer and university professor by profession
- Lived on Prince Edward Island for only 7 years
- An “Islander by Choice”