



Journal of Marine and Island Cultures

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EDITORIAL

Island development: Local governance under globalization



KEYWORDS

Island development;
Sustainability;
Globalization;
Local governance

Abstract Issues surrounding island development have generated a growing volume of research. What does it mean to develop? How can island communities maintain control over development processes to the benefit of the local economy, rather than seeing economic flows enter and exit the island with little or a primarily negative impact? And how important is local knowledge for edifying local governance and enhancing potentials for innovation in island development? Island histories have repeatedly been forwarded as exemplars and ‘lessons’ for global learning on (un)sustainability. To consider these issues, we have selected a number of papers from among the presentations given at the International Geographical Union’s Commission on Islands Conference, *Island Development: Local Economy, Culture, Innovation and Sustainability*, which took place in the Penghu Archipelago, Taiwan, 1–5 October 2013. These papers serve as examples of how the processes of globalization have penetrated the borders and changed the political and economic structures of islands. They also explore how island-based innovations in science, technology, culture, and formal or informal governance might contribute to sustainable island development.

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Editorial

Issues surrounding island development have generated a growing volume of research, including ‘models’ of island development as well as critical analyses of challenges facing the local economies and cultures of island societies, not least in the context of concerns regarding globalization and sustainability.

What does it mean to develop? How can island communities maintain control over development processes to the benefit of the local economy, rather than seeing economic flows enter and exit the island with little or a primarily negative impact? And how important is local knowledge for edifying local governance and enhancing potentials for innovation in island development? Island histories have repeatedly been forwarded as exemplars and ‘lessons’ for global learning on (un)sustainability (Tsai et al., 2013).

Sustainability depends on robust and resilient social/cultural/ecological systems, for which biocultural diversity is crucial. In the slow processes that create global biological and cultural diversity, islands have played a more significant role

than their proportion of the global population and landmass would suggest. With bounded spaces, islands also provide fertile fields for observing what globalization involves: the crossing of boundaries and supplanting of borders (Clark and Tsai, 2002). Recent studies regarding the penetration of financialization into the biocultural geographies of islands further indicate the advance of “processes of commodification and privatization of environment, entailing enclosures of resource commons and displacement of people, livelihoods, knowledge and practices” (Clark, 2013, p.129). How do island communities respond to these challenges?

To consider these issues, we have selected a number of papers from among the presentations given at the International Geographical Union’s Commission on Islands Conference, *Island Development: Local Economy, Culture, Innovation and Sustainability*, which took place in the Penghu Archipelago, Taiwan, 1–5 October 2013. These papers serve as examples of how the processes of globalization have penetrated the borders and changed the political and economic structures of islands. They also explore how island-based innovations in science, technology, culture, and formal or informal governance might contribute to sustainable island development.

Peer review under responsibility of Mokpo National University.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.imic.2014.12.001>

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In this special issue, Persoon and Simarmata (2014) study the islands of the Mahakam Delta in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, revealing how the changing of ‘marginality’ of the islands depends on changing perspectives concerning new resources and the development of shrimp ponds. In the 1990s, demand for shrimp was booming, and the delta represented a kind of new frontier lacking any government control. Over the years, new settlements were constructed, and informal forms of land rights were finally established. The spirit of ‘regional autonomy’ in 1998 contributed to this development. The paper also seeks to provide the lessons to other marginal areas that “Marginality is not a fixed characteristic, it is a specific point of view” and that it is important to maintain the spirit of the right to the island.

From another Indonesian island, Karanrang Island in the Spermonde Archipelago, Nurdin and Grydehøj (2014) present the intersection between an informal governance system and environmental protection in a small fishing community. The findings from interviews with Karanrang fishers reveal that the destructive fishing practices (toxins and bombs) are bound up with the region’s *punggawa-sawi* political and social system of patron-client relationships. The driving forces of these destructive fishing involve the demands of regional markets and the failure of formal and informal governance. This represents an important lesson for the region in terms of sustainable marine resources, and as the authors point out, it highlights the importance of recognizing the links between local environment and culture.

In order to understand coastal and marine social-ecological dynamics and the influence of capitals, Wu and Tsai (2014) analyze the changing fishing communities of the Penghu Archipelago, Taiwan with a 110-year historical review covering the period of 1900–2010. This study conceptualizes a capital-based framework for investigating the adaptation and transformation of a social-ecological system on the temporal scale. It also examines how human society adapts to marine natural resource problems under various challenges of global change. The results show that human-made capital (i.e., physical, human, and social capital) is inadequate with respect to sustaining marine natural resources. Appropriate investment in human-made capital is required for solving the problem. The crucial challenge is to invest in social capital so as to create functional institutions with local communities that employ physical and human capital in a sustainable manner.

Urbanization is unavoidable for islands located near mainland areas and centers of economic development. Pons and Rullan (2014) present empirical research illustrating the changes caused by the rapid Mediterranean coastal urbanization on Balearic Islands over a 50-year period (1956–2006). The data, analytical charts, and maps reveal clear trends for urbanized island development both in coastal urban and sub-urban areas. The comparative study of different islands of this archipelago also presents interesting results: The size of the islands and their connections to the outside world largely explain their different degrees of urbanization.

Have islands had the right to choose their own development paths under global or regional political economic driving forces? In the article ‘Enclosing Resources on the Islands of Kinmen and Xiamen: From War Blockade to Financializing

Natural Heritage’, Tsai and Chiang (2014) examine two islands historically positioned in a geographically strategic location for coastal defense. In 1979, the central government of the People’s Republic of China selected Xiamen islands as a special economic zone. While in 1995, the Taiwanese authorities established a national park on Kinmen to protect historical, cultural, and natural heritage. This article analyzes these divergent developmental paths through comparative case studies involving forms of enclosure. Changing relationships, the impact of the sudden re-opening of borders, new forms of enclosure under globalization, and regional flows of capital and labor are discussed.

The studies on this theme issue serve as examples of how the processes of globalization have penetrated the borders of islands and changed the development paths, underlining the importance of keeping priorities on ‘the right to island’ for the benefit of local people. The development paths of both fishery communities and island cities analyzed in this issue also demonstrate the significance of island-based physical and human capital (in terms of adaptive innovations in infrastructure, culture, social network, and formal or informal governance) and how these can contribute to sustainable island development.

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Available online 28 January 2015