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Published in:
Journal of Marine and Island Cultures

DOI:
10.1016/j.imic.2013.10.001

2013

Journal of Marine and Island Cultures (2013) 2, 128–136

Journal of Marine and Island Cultures

www.sciencedirect.com

Financialization, sustainability and the right to the island: A critique of acronym models of island development

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Received 24 September 2013; accepted 16 October 2013
Available online 21 November 2013

KEYWORDS

Financialization;
Sustainability;
Right to the island;
Island development;
MIRAB;
PROFIT;
SITE

Abstract The penetration of financialization into the biocultural geographies of islands builds upon processes of commodification and privatization of environments, entailing enclosures of resource commons, environmental destruction and displacement of people, their livelihoods, knowledge and practices, with implications for sustainability. Against this background I critique the growing literature on acronym models of island development, arguing for more careful consideration of issues concerning democracy, human rights and sustainability. Drawing on the 'right to the city' literature, I highlight the importance of the 'right to the island' in an effort to move beyond the policy imperatives of MIRAB, SITE and PROFIT. Exercising the right to the island involves cultivating radically pluralistic democracy through struggles for alternative island futures. In so doing it problematizes what it means to develop and achieve sustainability.

Introduction

> *The eco-cratic view likes universalist ecological rules, just as the developmentalist liked universalist economic rules. Both pass over the rights of local communities to be in charge of their resources and to build a meaningful society.* (Sachs, 1993, *xvii*)

> *Those who would take other people's place should have very good reason, and ... the question of how they would feel if the positions were reversed, is an appropriate test of whether the reason is good enough. (Smith 1994, 276)*

In the slow processes that create global biological and cultural diversity, islands have played a more significant role than their proportion of global population and landmass would suggest. With the deepening of our understanding of the genesis of these two diversities, they have increasingly been linked together in the concept of biocultural diversity, signifying that interest in one necessarily entails consideration of the other (Maffi, 2001). Sustainability depends on robust and resilient social/cultural/ecological systems, for which biocultural diversity is crucial. Thus, island studies constitute a vital node of sustainability science. A prevalent and increasing threat to

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Peer review under responsibility of Mokpo National University.

Production and hosting by Elsevier

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.imic.2013.10.001

diversity, and consequently to sustainability, is the propagation of a monoculture of 'free' market competition as natural, rational and good, homogenizing thought and action (Michaels 2011) while facilitating the financialization of ever more spheres of life. The growing literature on island development that is fashioned by acronym models has yet to engage with these matters, the tacit assumptions of the models rather contributing to the monoculture. It is against this background I aim in this paper to (1) problematize financialization and its implications for island sustainability, (2) critique ideal type 'models' of island development, and (3) forward the principle of the right to the island as a means to strengthen social and political processes conducive to fostering just and sustainable island development.

Financialization and sustainability

Financialization is commonly understood as a "pattern of accumulation in which profits accrue primarily through financial channels rather than through trade and commodity production" (Krippner, 2005, 174), and is associated with the ascendency of shareholder value as a mode of corporate governance, the increasing political and economic power of a rentier class, rapid pace of financial innovation and volumes of financial flows that dwarf real economic activity (Krippner, 2011). The rent-seeking behaviour of finance capital and landed developer interests drive the commodification and privatization of space/nature (including the 'second nature' of built environments), and the formation of market relations, extending the process wherever social relations retain characteristics of commons, hindering the free flow of capital investment (investment type 2; see below). Once commodified, environments are increasingly securitized, treated as pure financial assets, and, turned liquid, enter the orbit of rent-seeking finance capital: as potential sites for investment, or disinvestment, depending on their valuation in the calculations of finance capital (potential yield to shareholders). The penetration of financialization into the biocultural fabric of socio-ecological systems builds upon these processes of commodification, privatization and securitisation of environments. The financial sector, "ever in search of new fields to securitize" (Mirowski, 2013, 215), actively engages in the creation of conditions allowing nature "to circulate as financial capital" (Prudham, 2007, 259), entailing enclosures of resource commons and displacement of people, their livelihoods, knowledge and practices.

Profound institutional changes have taken place since the 1970s with the global ascent of neoliberal politics, entailing extraordinary growth of income inequalities and the opening of new frontiers for accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2005, 2006). Processes of uneven development, variously brought under the regulatory control of welfare-state institutions during the middle decades of the twentieth century, have consequently intensified in the wake of institutional reforms entrenching commodification, privatization and market relations (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2010). As Gareth Dale notes, "the widening and deepening of markets have unleashed pernicious tendencies: the yawning gap between rich and poor, financial crises galore, growing pressure on the natural environment, the commodification of increasing areas of life, the ideological naturalization of commodity relations, and the subordination of society to the casino rhythms of finance and the world market" (Dale, 2010, 241; cf. Martin, 2002).

Sustainability has concurrently ascended on local and global agendas, not uncommonly (though not necessarily) enmeshed with neoliberal institutional reforms designed to save nature by commodifying it (Robertson, 2006; Castree, 2010; Dempsey and Robertson, 2012). Human-environment relations have long been researched in the synthetic disciplines of environmental geography, cultural and human ecology, environmental anthropology, and more recently in political ecology and ecological economics. The new field of sustainability science (de Vries 2013) emerges in part from these antecedents (e.g. Castree et al. 2009), but also from the rise of theory on complex adaptive systems (Rammel et al. 2007) and coevolution of coupled social–ecological systems (Ostrom, 2009; Kallis and Norgaard, 2010; Weisz and Clark, 2011), and more broadly from social movements, policy agendas and political debates on environmental problems, pushing sustainability issues to front stage. Sustainability is about keeping the future navigable for coming generations (Hägerstrand, 2009). Human-induced environmental problems such as degradation of land, air, water and biodiversity threaten to reduce the scope of navigable pathways toward a sustainable future (Schellnhuber, 1999).

Sustainability science aims not only to understand the dynamics of social-ecological systems and to bridge natural, social and cultural sciences (Lang et al., 2012), but also to forge bridges between science and society, and between knowledge and action (Kasperson and Berberian, 2011; O'Brien, 2012). Problem-driven, practice-oriented and contextually sensitive, sustainability science involves linking critical research approaches with problem-solving approaches, ideally appreciative of various perspectives including local/traditional knowledge for framing problems, and for design, implementation and evaluation of solutions (Jerneck et al., 2011). The widely echoed calls in sustainability science for moving beyond multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research to transdisciplinary research, and for developing and practicing critical, deliberative, participatory and problem-solving methodologies, indicate major challenges and signposts for sustainability science, revealing its key characteristic as 'post-normal science' (Ravetz, 2006; O'Brien, 2012; Miller et al., 2013).

A vital area of environmental governance research deals with commons and forms of resource management that do not fit easily into regimes based on private property rights or on state authority. Research by among others Elinor Ostrom (1990) reveals great diversity in the ways communities self-organise to manage common-pool resources, often devising long-term sustainable institutions for governing their use. Dietz et al., (2003) outline requirements for devising institutional arrangements that can establish conditions favorable to self-organised community-based governance, and suggest strategies for meeting the requirements of adaptive governance of commons. Environmental governance seldom consists of pure market, state or community regimes, but involve emerging hybrid modes of governance that cross state–market–community divisions, e.g. co-management (state–community), public–private partnership (state–market) and private–social (community–market) forms of environmental governance (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006).

Linking knowledge to action is increasingly recognized as one of the greatest challenges for transitioning to sustainability,

and yet we continue to cultivate an understanding of ourselves that diminishes our capacities for action: reductionist understandings of human history reflecting while anchoring social processes that limit participation in the politics of sustainability and our adaptability in reaching for sustainable living (Clark and Clark, 2012). The mainstreaming of sustainability and sustainable development has resulted in a situation in which sustainability discourse and politics are dominated by powerful actors (also within research and higher education) with interests in maintaining status quo. Indeed, some critical research suggests that predominant sustainability discourse is more conducive to sustaining neoliberal ideology, neocolonial practices, accumulation by dispossession and the hegemony of finance capital than to sustaining metabolic support systems and livelihoods of the poor (Harvey, 1996; Hornborg, 2003; Luke, 2005; Redclift, 2005; Krueger and Gibbs, 2007).

For good reasons, sustainability and sustainable development have attracted political and scientific awareness. At the same time, their popularity affords them being put to use as value-enhancing empty signifiers, not least in processes of financialization, advertising, corporate and city branding (enhancing 'competitiveness' and property values), spicing applications and claiming moral high ground. Harvey is not alone in observing that "it is very hard to be in favour of 'unsustainable' practices so the term sticks as positive reinforcement of policies and politics by giving them an aura of being environmentally sensitive", reducing sustainability to "the preservation of a particular social order" (1996, 148). Consequently, also for good reasons, sustainability and sustainable development have become highly contested concepts (Worster 1993; Davison 2001), occasionally travestied as oxymoronic sustainababble (Engelman 2013), or more soberly observed in "the fusion of a growth and development agenda with an environmental conservation and management agenda" (Prudham, 2013, 1570).

Improvement and investment

Financialisation thrives on common mystifications of improvement and investment. Assumed to be universally positive, critical examination of their etymologies reveals how problematic implications of some kinds of improvements and investments become hidden behind reasonably positive characteristics of other very different improvements and investments. Under the heading "Habitation versus Improvement", Karl Polanyi argued that "it was improvement on the grandest scale which wrought unprecedented havoc with the habitation of the common people", and consequently recognized the need for "legislative acts designed to protect their habitation against the juggernaut, improvement." Elsewhere Polanyi acknowledges a more positive meaning of "improvements fixed in a particular place" (2011, 41, 191, 193). The key distinction is not in physical design and technological characteristics of an improvement, but in social relations underlying its production and, upon completion, regulating its use and income flows.

In his brief etymological essay on 'improve', Raymond Williams explains that in "its earliest uses it referred to operations for monetary profit, where it was often equivalent to *invest*, and especially to operations on or connected with land, often the enclosing of common or waste land. . . . The wider meaning of 'making something better' developed from C17. He goes on to note "the sometimes contradictory senses of improvement, where economic operations for profit might not lead to, or might hinder, social and moral refinement" and emphasizes that "the complex underlying connection between 'making something better' and 'making a profit out of something' is significant when the social and economic history during which the word developed in these ways is remembered" (Williams, 1985, 160–161).

Among noteworthy analyses of financialisation and rent-seeking behaviour proliferating in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, Andrew Sayer revives the distinction between earned and unearned income, contributing depth and clarity to the insights of Polanyi and Williams by distinguishing between two profoundly different forms of investment. Sayer sees a "fundamental slippage in the use of the word 'investment'" and identifies

"two radically different uses:

(1) *Use-value/object-oriented definitions* focus on what it is that is invested *in* (e.g. infrastructure, equipment, training)
(2) *Exchange-value/'investor'-oriented definitions* focus on the financial gains from any kind of lending, saving, purchase of financial assets or speculation – regardless of whether they contribute to any objective investment (1), or benefit others.

The standard move is to elide this distinction and pass off the second as based on the first." (Sayer 2012, 171).

Under the sway of investments [2], allocational efficiency – the legitimizing function of finance – is understood in terms of "where expected rates of financial return are highest", regardless of "neutral or negative effects on productive capacity – through, asset stripping, value-skimming, and rent-seeking" (ibid.).

This distinction casts light on differences between landesque capital (commonly investment [1]), productive capital (mixed; increasingly investment [2] associated with financialisation; Froud et al., 2006) and finance capital (investment [2]). Sayer's distinction resonates with Bayliss-Smith's historical analysis of land use change, in which he argues that "the key variable in explaining contrasts in Pacific Island land use today is socio-political organisation" (1997, 144; cf. Clark and Tsai, 2012). Socio-political organisation characterized by financialisation opens up spaces of 'opportunity' for investments [2] through commodification, privatisation and marketisation of the environment, facilitating processes of accumulation by dispossession. And likewise, socio-political organisation that promotes investments [2] is more conducive to financialisation of the environment.

On the other hand, socio-political organisation characterized by egalitarianism (Bowles and Gintis, 1998), meaningful participatory democracy (Purcell 2008, 2013), social practices of commoning (Bromley, 1992; Harvey, 2012) and institutionalised right to place is more conducive to the propagation and integrity of investments [1]. And likewise, socio-political organisation that regulates land use and financial activities to promote investments [1] over investments [2] are more conducive to egalitarianism, meaningful participatory democracy, social practices of commoning and institutionalised right to place. The implications for island development are crucial.

Acronym models of island development: ideal types

The island development literature includes a set of simplified 'ideal type' acronym models based upon the idea that "there clearly exist several distinct 'species'" of island economies (Bertram and Poirine, 2007, 325). Each of these models "is best seen as an abstract, ideal type: seductively elegant in its conceptual simplicity, but not present in its pure form anywhere in the real world" (Baldacchino, 2010, 87). In none of the now numerous articles and book chapters elaborating on these models is there however any effort to engage with critiques of Weberian ideal type methodology. Here are just a few:

> "Weber's ideal types become empty formal categories around which sprawling segments of history are assembled ... His method, in short, is formalistic, in the sense that it describes formal properties that summarize superficially common features that in reality are profoundly different. It is guided by what a recent critic has called a 'categorizing imperative' dedicated to the construction of, and cataloguing of phenomena within, ideal types selected and arranged through a formalistic technique of analogy." (Dale, 2010, 120–121, with reference to Allen, 2004)

> "[T]heir appeal rests largely on their (spurious) claims to correspond to reality. ... they are, unlike mere causal classifications, intelligible to us in relation to our interests. And they are intelligible in relation to our interests because they have been constructed with those interests in mind." (Turner and Factor 1994, 156)

> The critical realist objection "is not directed against the fact of selectivity and the influence of values, for these are unavoidable; rather the problem is that the methodology pays no attention to the structure of the world and hence is unable to recognize that some selections are better than others according to their relationship to this structure. It is because of this arbitrary attitude to ontology that ... it is unlikely that much can be learned from comparing them with actual cases, except of course that there will be differences. ... the arbitrary freezing of contingent patterns, regardless of the structures that produce them, inevitably obscures whatever significance the differences may have, i.e. whether they are unimportant differences in contingent relations or mis-specifications of structural differences. Not surprisingly, the refusal to grant such differences any significance has invited the criticism that ideal type methodology gives users a built-in protection from refutation." (Sayer, 1992, 237–8, with reference to Giddens, 1982)

> "Problems in using the ideal type include its tendency to focus attention on extreme, or polar, phenomena while overlooking the connections between them." (Encyclopedia Britannica)

In the following I hope to show that these critiques are relevant to the acronym models of island development.

MIRAB, PROFIT and SITE on the development ladder

First out was MIRAB (Bertram and Watters, 1985), "arguably the most popular acronym" (Baldacchino, 2006, 48), which identified a set of island economies dependent upon migration, remittances, aid and bureaucracy. The normative thrust of the model is evident in the way it is referred to in terms of a "syndrome" that "an island community [can] graduate away from" (Baldacchino, 2006, 55). Islands can be "downgraded to MIRAB status" (Oberst and McElroy, 2007, 168), or make "a full transition out of MIRAB status", on what is presented as "the development ladder" (Bertram and Poirine, 2007, 336, 360). The basis for MIRAB islands being on the lower rungs of the ladder is found in "cultural attitudes towards social capital and work ethics", explain Bertram and Poirine, and elaborate: "The informal character of most remittance flows, besides putting them into the same economic arena as terrorist funding and criminal money-laundering ... means that to a considerable extent they have been unmeasured ... [and] the incentive to invest in the local economy, or to work and produce ... is limited" (339, 354, 357). Underlying MIRAB status is "a shrewd income-maximization strategy" (Baldacchino and Bertram, 2009, 150).

The upper rungs of the development ladder are held by islands that have made "radically different strategic choices" (Bertram and Poirine, 2007, 339) and "strategically intelligent evolutionary responses" to opportunities, with "capacity for flexible adjustment" (Baldacchino and Bertram, 2009, 142, 143) and "shrewd use of policy capacity" (Baldacchino, 2006, 51). These islands fall under the acronyms of PROFIT and SITE. PROFIT stands for people, resource management, overseas engagement, finance and transportation. SITE stands for small island tourism economies. The strategies for success in climbing the development ladder from MIRAB to PROFIT and/or SITE are geared to seeking rents of various kinds (Baldacchino, 2006; Baldacchino and Bertram, 2009; Bertram and Poirine, 2007), if not by successfully extracting rents from abroad through offshore finance, by opening up island space for rent extraction through (predominantly foreign) investment [2] in tourism.

These models are paraded as "real-life, inductive, 'bottom up' examination" (Baldacchino and Bertram, 2009 146), based on "the naturalist-empiricist way of doing social science" (Bertram, 2006), but display a remarkable circularity. First "formal properties that summarize superficially common features" (Dale, 2010, 120) are catalogued into ideal types. Then it is hypothesized that these features will be found in the islands that have been categorized according to these same features:

> "It was hypothesized that the PROFIT-SITE economies would economically outperform their MIRAB counterparts and demonstrate a stronger orientation toward export services (tourism, offshore finance). As a consequence of their higher level of development, it was further assumed that the former would exhibit higher levels of social progress and greater demographic maturity. ... Results indicated that the two island models indeed enjoy real-world validity since 18 of the 27 indicators were statistically significant. In contrast to their MIRAB neighbors, PROFIT-SITE islands were found to have significantly higher per capita incomes and service employment and sharply lower unemployment and agricultural activity. They were also endowed with considerably more tourism infrastructure (paved roads, airports) and, as expected, markedly higher levels of tourist arrivals and per capita resident visitor spending. ... In conclusion, from a development perspective, these results provide evidence of the ability of PROFIT-SITE islands to take advantage of the ladder of profitable economic options" (Oberst and McElroy, 2007, 169-172).

Island societies are seen to be "shopping around for the right role models", and in the process of shopping, "the strategic perceptions of key individuals can be crucial" (Baldacchino and Bertram, 2009, 153). "Attitude matters" (Baldacchino 2006, 55), as "islanders and their institutions choose the actual trajectory" (Bertram 2006, 11), from "a corresponding menu of strategic options open to islander communities" (Bertram and Poirine, 2007, 325). Both good shoppers (PROFIT/SITE) and bad shoppers (MIRAB), or at least their elite key individuals, are characterized as "shrewd" decision-makers, "adopting free riding" and "a skill repertoire that the small and powerless deploy and, being small, often get away with" (Baldacchino 2006, 50). Having determined "the real-world validity of the models" and assessed "their relative levels of development" (Oberst and McElroy, 2007, 166), the policy advice for climbing the ladder is unsurprisingly that "The combination of offshore finance and high-quality tourism stands out as the strategy of the most successful island economies" (Bertram and Poirine, 2007, 362).

Sustainable examples?

The parade example of successful attitude and flexible adjustment is found in the Cayman Islands, which "have moved from being a MIRAB classic to a PROFIT/SITE success story" (Baldacchino and Bertram, 2009 152). "Dislocation there certainly was, but the Cayman Islands successfully made the transition from one of the poorest to one of the three richest Caribbean island communities" (Bertram and Poirine, 2007, 335). The scale of displacement and dispossession can only be guessed, given the secrecy that enshrouds the islands (secrecy jurisdiction being synonymous with tax haven), so one can only wonder how many of the 8,000 MIRAB Caymanians were capable of staying in place after the success story had population increasing to 44,000, some of whom provide manual services to those whose income is generated in 77,947 international business companies, offshore banks, offshore insurance companies, trust companies, gaming corporations and mutual funds (figures for 2001 from Bertram and Poirine, 2007, 334). More recent figures state a 2010 population of 56,000 in the "world's leading domicile for hedge funds", where "lax regulation, essentially written by its clients" leads to its involvement "in most big financial scandals" (The Economist, 2011, 56). Nicholas Shaxson positions the Cayman Islands as "the world's fifth largest financial center, hosting eighty thousand companies, over three-quarters of the world's hedge funds, and $1.9 trillion on deposit" (2011, 18).

Not mentioned in the acronym model literature is that the political stability of these success stories involves severe deficits in democracy, "that local politics is captured by financial interests from elsewhere (sometimes … criminal interests). … These zones of ultra-freedom for financial interests are so often repressive places, viciously intolerant of criticism. … Here in the tax havens, rugged individualism has morphed into a disregard, even a contempt, for democracy and for societies at large" (Shaxson 2011, 13). And more specifically regarding the Cayman Islands:

> "Her Majesty the British Queen appoints His Excellency the Governor, the most powerful person on the island. He (never a she, so far) presides over a cabinet of local Caymanians who are elected locally but who have almost no power over the stuff that matters – the money. The governor handles defense, internal security, and foreign relations; he appoints the police commissioner, the complaints commissioner, the auditor general, the attorney general, the judiciary, and other top officials. The final appeal court is the Privy Council in London. M16, Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, is highly active here (as are the CIA and several other intelligence services)." (Shaxson 2011, 18)

Another example of successful 'intelligent evolutionary response' is French Polynesia, which in an exercise examining "the social welfare function" is placed highest among four examples in the trade-off between per capita consumption, and, minimization of effort to secure income plus "non-material quality of community life captured here as 'social capital'". This is "a situation with a large military enclave which sustains high expenditures but has only limited impacts on local culture and labor utilization", involving investment "in a military agreement to dispose of exclusive rights to use the land and air space of the strategically located small island" (Bertram and Poirine, 2007, 337–339, 352). That these exclusive rights entail dispossession and displacement, not to mention the long-term health and environmental consequences of nuclear testing, is passed over in silence (cf. Fullilove, 2004; Vine, 2009; DeLoughrey, 2012).

The opposite example of failure in 'shrewd use of policy capacity' is Nauru, once "among the richest people on earth" (The Economist, 2001, 67), whose "reclassification to the MIRAB group" is attributed to "exhaustion of phosphate reserves" (Bertram and Poirine, 2007, 364) and "mismanagement" (Baldacchino, 2006, 55), not "the plunder of the island" (The Economist, 2011, 67), ecological imperialism and ecologically unequal exchange (Clark and Foster, 2009), or "a failed economic system" (McDaniel and Gowdy, 2000, 195).

Sustainability is mentioned many times in the acronym model literature, but consistently with reference to sustaining the patterns of development identified in the models, thereby contributing more to sustainababble than to sustainability science. Sustainability is reduced to "sustainable material standard of living", "sustainable equilibrium states" and the question of how to "sustain imports". We are informed that "'sustainability' of island economies has very little to do with self-sufficiency or environmental protection", but is rather all about "flexibility and adjustment capacity" (Bertram and Poirine, 2007, 330, 336-227). Island communities are called upon to be flexible and adjust to investments [2], regardless of environmental consequences, or if flexibility and adjustment involves dispossession, displacement and domicide (Porteous and Smith, 2001; cf. Slater, 2009; for island contexts, Clark et al., 2007, García Herrera et al., 2007). Investments [2] are for the better good, reaching all through "the 'trickle-down' benefits" (Baldacchino, 2010, 174). The silence on sustainability issues in the wider sense of social-ecological systems – including habitat destruction – is deafening. Consideration of such issues would put the success stories of PROFIT and SITE in very different light.

A favourite metaphor in the acronym model literature is speciation and mutation, which "goes to the heart of the economic and geopolitical dynamics of island development", understood "as a strategic game-theoretic process of self-selective hyper-specialization", which "refers to the sort of specialization in which an entire community takes advantage of a

niche of evolutionary opportunity by adopting a particular economic 'personality'" (Bertram and Poirine, 2007, 331–332). While biologists debate the 'species problem', well-meaning social scientists forge ahead with an understanding of societies and communities as 'species' that 'speciate' by taking advantage of 'strategic opportunities', such as 'hosting' high-quality tourism or financial 'services'. Tacitly linked to the ladder metaphor, this rides on a prevalent though warped understanding of evolution, development and progress (Gould 1997, Wright 2004, Clark and Clark, 2012). Societies and communities are not species, and cultural, social, economic and geopolitical history cannot be reduced to economic speciation, any more than our shared human history can be reduced to genetic mutations, however much appealing to speciation and mutation may 'strategically' render our research more "naturalist-empiricist" (Bertram, 2006, 4). Better then to debate our 'species being' (Harvey, 2000), gladly with biologists, who would largely shy away from notions of economic and geopolitical speciation.

Troubling questions

Returning to the critiques of ideal type methodology, these examples from the acronym model literature reveal: blindness to the cultural, social, political and economic histories of people and places pigeon-holed under the categorizing imperative; spurious claims to correspond to reality; the interests of their constructors; blindness to the structures that produced the carefully categorized patterns, obscuring whatever significance the patterns may have; and near total disconnection from the connections between the acronyms. A good example of policy-based evidence-making – to be applied by enlightened policy-makers hawking politics as evidence-based policy-making (Hammersley, 2005) – it is indeed unlikely that much can be learned from comparing them, to each other or to 'real-life' islands. Though it is easy to imagine these models capturing the ears of those seeking 'strategic opportunities' for profitable investments [2] on islands, and those who see themselves as 'key individuals' with certain 'strategic perceptions', 'crucial' to their island's 'development'; in short, those with the right 'attitude'.

From the perspective of uneven development (Harvey, 2006a, Smith, 2008), the histories of islands categorized in these models appear to be coherently connected rather than mutually exclusive 'paths', which island societies can 'choose' to follow, if only they make the optimal policy decisions in the face of 'strategic opportunities'. Island societies need to be seen as connected to geographically broader processes of capital accumulation (Clark, 2009). The financial activities 'hosted' by the Cayman Islands and other 'successful' PROFIT islands are part and parcel of the underlying structures forming the histories of their SITE and MIRAB 'neighbors'. Characteristics emphasized in analyses of PROFIT islands, namely, flexibility and adaptability to strategic opportunities in the global arena, are the very same characteristics of capitalist, historical geography emphasized by theorists of uneven development.

While the acronym models make much of the 'development ladder', 'syndromes', 'speciation', menus of 'strategic options', 'attitude', the 'shopping' of 'key individuals', and the "dynamic continuum with two extreme positions" (Baldacchino, 2006, 55), they have little to tell us about the histories of the categorized islands, and even less to say about how 'strategic' decisions are made, who makes them, who benefits, and who is dispossessed in the process. Success stories of island development veil forms of accumulation by dispossession in which representations play an important role, projecting and legitimizing one vision of a place while hiding from view who and what is displaced in realizing the vision. In this, the literature on acronym models of island development plays a role. PROFIT/SITE is represented as success, MIRAB as failure, but as Pierre Bourdieu pointed out: "The social force of representations is not necessarily proportional to their truth-value" (1991: 226). If the model builders bothered to ask the dispossessed about the success of PROFIT/SITE development paths, they would get a very different representation than what is offered in their "real-life, inductive, 'bottom up' examination" (Baldacchino and Bertram, 2009, 146). Bourdieu (1999) offers an entirely different take on real-life, bottom-up examination.

The acronym models of island development leave us with some troubling questions. Where are issues concerning democracy, the deepening of democracy? Where are issues concerning displacement and dispossession, the just island, the right to inhabit a place, the right to stay put, the right to participate in fashioning development processes and in forming our habitat in accordance with our hearts' desires? Or does interest in 'niches' stop at the 'shrewd use of policy capacity', 'strategically intelligent evolutionary responses', taking advantage of 'evolutionary opportunity' and 'capacity for flexible adjustment' to the dictates of finance capital?

The right to the island

The right to the city, originally formulated by Henri Lefebvre in 1968, has attracted much attention in recent years, largely in response to the ways neoliberalization has "greatly diminished the scope and effectiveness of participatory democracy", creating a democratic deficit that "has been growing by leaps and bounds" (Harvey, 2009, 86). Levebvre saw "the city as an oeuvre – a work in which all its citizens participate" (Mitchell, 2003, 17). The right to the city is the right "to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property)" (Lefebvre, 1996, 174).

> "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common right rather than an individual right since the transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is ... one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights." (Harvey, 2008, 23)

The right to the city is about spatial justice (Marcuse et al., 2009; Soja, 2010), and therefore about the transformation of cities for people, not for profit (Brenner et al., 2012). Being a common, rather than a private right, exercising the right to the city involves "a social practice of commoning. This practice produces or establishes a social relation with a common whose uses are either exclusive to a social group or partially

or fully open to all and sundry. At the heart of the practice of commoning lies the principle that the relation between the social group and that aspect of the environment being treated as a common shall be both collective and non-commodified – off-limits to the logic of market exchange and market valuations'' (Harvey, 2012,73).

Some will see this as utopian, but we have a long history of egalitarianism (Boehm, 1999), practicing commoning, and exercising the right to inhabit place. And, this is no more utopian than the neoliberal utopia of free markets operating in entirely privatized space. There is nothing new about the right to the city, except the name attached to it. That the name arose in the struggles of 1968, and is revived more recently in struggles against the massive dispossessions of commons, does not mean this is new, something our ancestors were not concerned with. As a right to habitat and to inhabit, it involves collective creation of our niche, our built environments and modified landscapes. And for this it involves the deepening of democracy and the de-commodification of space/nature, making room for the common construction of place.

Now, exchange 'city' in the lines above with 'island'. Rather than 'shopping around for the right role model' on the limited 'menu' of MIRAB, PROFIT and SITE, island societies need to ask: how to move from the various formulas for uneven development toward more equitable, just and sustainable modes of island development? No small challenge, for sure. The right to the island is not a simple recipe, and exercising the right to the island cannot be expected to be harmoniously free of conflict. Radical democracy involves recognition of and engagement with agonistic relations (Stratford, 2008), about which the acronym models display, again, deafening silence.

What does this mean for island studies? The aforementioned move in sustainability science towards linking knowledge to action builds upon a long tradition of participatory and collaborative action research (Lewin, 1946). This involves working together (Poteete et al., 2010) with people who possess considerable local/traditional knowledge relevant to defining and addressing problems concerning local resource management and development issues. Moving from the safe space of analytical knowledge production to transformational work (e.g. on sustainability issues) challenges us to listen to people who know more about their place than we do, and to enter into dialogue with modesty concerning our gifts of analytical knowledge. This can lead to the reframing of problems we had originally approached with preconceived conceptual frameworks (Jerneck and Olsson, 2011; Kelman et al., 2011). Commitment to the right to the island involves the fine art of listening, and respect towards the knowledge people have of their habitat. It involves ''diminishing the role of outside policy experts while encouraging local design of programs to meet local goals'' (Macinko, in press). This means facilitating island communities to be ''their own consultants, rather than the consulted'' – going beyond the mere provision of ''an opportunity to speak'', to enhance capacities to speak with voice (Pugh, 2013, 1278). It involves a research code of ethics such as that of the International Society of Ethnobiology (2006). It involves the use of alternative ''valuation languages'', ''the extension of democracy'' and ''the production of knowledge that challenges the dominant explanations of a particular situation'' (ENTITLE, 2013; cf. Martinez-Alier, 2002; Schneider et al., 2010; Asara et al., 2013). It involves transforming power relations, rather than naturalizing them (Purcell, 2009).

Conclusion

Financialization, fuelled by neoliberalization, reduces the scope of navigable sustainable pathways for future generations, and is conducive to the displacement of island communities as resources come increasingly under the calculus of financial investments [2]. The acronym models that have of late attracted considerable attention in the island development literature fail to consider these conflict-laden social relations, offering instead a simplistic view of island development that represents accumulation by dispossession in the guise of 'successful' climbing on 'the development ladder'. The right to the island offers a very different perspective on island development, equally normative, but with very different implications for researching, understanding, and contributing to island development. The right to the island approach is more promising if we wish to take sustainability and the well being of island communities seriously. I encourage researchers and policy makers drawing on the MIRAB, PROFIT and SITE models of island development to carefully consider this perspective.

Acknowledgments

Work on this paper was made possible thanks to financial support from Formas (The Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning) to LUCID (Lund University Centre of Excellence for the Integration of Social and natural Dimensions of Sustainability). This paper was presented at the Island Dynamics conference, Local Actions in a Global Context: Paradiplomacy by Subnational Jurisdictions, in Longyearbyen, Svalbard, 14–17 January 2013; and at the International Geographical Union Commission on Islands conference, Island Development: Local Economy, Culture, Innovation and Sustainability, in Penghu, Taiwan, 1–5 October 2013. Thanks to Chad Boda, Thomas Clark, Sun-Kee Hong, Jon Pugh, Andrew Sayer, Elaine Stratford and Huei-Min Tsai for helpful critical comments.

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