

**Title**

Critiques of island sustainability in tourism

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**Author bio**

Ilan Kelman's research interest is linking disasters and health, including the integration of climate change into disaster research and health research. This work covers three main areas: (i) disaster diplomacy and health diplomacy; (ii) island sustainability involving safe and healthy communities in isolated locations; and (iii) risk education for health and disasters.

## **Critiques of island sustainability in tourism**

### **Abstract**

Island sustainability influences and is influenced by tourism resources, such as sun, sea, and sand for warm water destinations and ice and large mammals for cold water destinations. To understand better these influences, some critiques of island sustainability are examined with regards to their relevance for tourism, using principally theoretical discussion supported by empirical examples as exemplified through the small island developing states (SIDS) acronym, pristine nature, and climate change. Energy (including transportation) and waste management, being essential service sectors for tourism, are examined in terms of island sustainability. Tourism-relevant consequences and understandings of island sustainability, especially from island studies literature, cover conspicuous sustainability, the storyline of climate change destroying islands including “last-chance tourism”, and island assemblages. Branding and marketing feature, often trapping tourism into using island sustainability to achieve tourism goals irrespective of any sustainability goals succeeding. Although tourism using island sustainability is not inherently detrimental to tourism or to sustainability, it can distract and detract from working with islanders to seek sustainability including, but not limited to, tourism endeavours.

### **Keywords**

energy, island studies, recycling, renewables, small island developing states, transportation, waste

### **Introduction**

Islands have long been subjected to promoting what islanders and non-islanders think an island should be and how islanders should act regarding sustainability (Baldacchino, 2005, 2010, 2012b; Crane & Fletcher, 2017; Gillis, 2007). This literature highlights and deconstructs, for instance, isolation, smallness, marginalization, remoteness, littorality, existential threats, helplessness, lack of opportunity, and vulnerability contrasted with paradise, utopia, resilience, romance, and the idyll. Grydehøj (2019) points out how many of these repeated “aspects of islandness” are based on assumptions and expectations of what islands and islanders should be, often as a presumed homogenous and static collective, rather than the reality of diversity and dynamism. Specific examples of island studies disputing the assumptions and expectations are explaining that islands and islanders (i) are connected by

water as much as they are separated by the disconnectedness of land (Hau'ofa, 1993; Hay, 2013) and (ii) are members of integrated and diverse networks rather than necessarily being remote and isolated (Chandler & Pugh, 2019).

Presumed features of islands and islandness, and challenges to them, are discussed for island tourism (Crick, 1989; Graci & Dodds, 2010). One baseline for island tourism can be, and is frequently assumed to be, 3S (sun, sea, and sand) or sometimes 4S (adding sex) (Butcher 2003; Carrigan, 2011; Crick, 1989; Hobson & Dietrich, 1995; Spencer & Bean, 2017). Another oft-assumed basis for island tourism is sustainable tourism, defined in different ways, with an underlying theme that the island, being an eco-paradise, has pristine nature alongside communities, livelihoods, and lifestyles with low environmental impacts (for examples and critiques, see Graci & Dodds, 2010 for Caribbean islands; Self, Self, & Bell-Haynes, 2010 for Ecuador's Galapagos Islands; and Kokkranikal, McLellan, & Baum, 2003 for Lakshadweep, India).

Efforts to achieve and showcase island sustainability in tourism intersect and connect many notions for each of "island", "sustainability", and "tourism". Drawing on the analysis of Dodds, Graci, and Holmes (2010) for island tourism in southeast Asia, how much do the management and marketing of sustainability for tourism reflect each other in an island destination? As Gössling, Hansson, Hörstmeier, and Saggel (2002) imply for Seychelles, how might tourists reconcile their desire for eco-friendly tourism with the environmental cost of travelling and being there?

To contribute to answering such questions, critiques of island sustainability are examined with regards to their relevance for tourism. Principally theoretical discussion is supported by empirical examples from the literature and, where uncited, from the author's experience to support the conceptual points identified and critiqued. Methodologically, this approach is pursued and accepted in research on islands, sustainability, and tourism, with some examples combining these areas being:

- From sustainable tourism work, Weaver (2016) combines definitions, key literature, and anecdotal examples for discursively "reimagining indigenous tourism".
- From island sustainability studies, Grydehøj and Kelman (2017) conceptualise "The Eco-Island Trap" with respect to climate change through a critiquing, rather than systematic, review of the literature supported by illustrative examples from peer-reviewed academic work, grey literature, and their own experiences.

- From island tourism research, McLeod, Lewis, and Spencer (2017) adopt a “state of play” and “regional spotlight” analysis to set the agenda for research and application in the Caribbean.
- From sustainable island tourism, Scheyvens and Momsen (2008a) apply the approach described above to indicate issues and directions related to pro-poor tourism.

The next section presents and appraises some aspects of island sustainability in tourism followed by a section on two essential tourism sectors: (i) energy including transportation and (ii) waste management. Then, prior to the conclusion, a critiquing discussion engages further with some tourism-relevant consequences and understandings of island sustainability, especially from island studies literature.

### **Exemplifying island sustainability in tourism**

The United Nations grouping of small island developing states (SIDS) epitomises many issues regarding island sustainability in tourism. SIDS were first formalised as a group in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro) in order to link small countries and territories which have ostensibly similar development and sustainability challenges. The number of SIDS has ranged from approximately three dozen to nearly five dozen depending on the year, the context, and the organisation listing them. The sustainability agenda for SIDS was first put forward in UN (1994) and was revisited each decade in UN (2005) and UN (2014).

The name “SIDS” aims to convey particular island characteristics which are said to create sustainability challenges. The first “S” in SIDS is for “small”, yet member Papua New Guinea is larger in population and area than New Zealand. Although SIDS represent islands, the mainland countries of Belize, Guyana, and Guinea-Bissau are part of the group. Singapore and Bahrain are not classified as being “developing” yet are SIDS. Finally, despite the final “S” meaning “states”, non-sovereign territories such as Montserrat in the Caribbean and Cook Islands in the Pacific are part of the group.

None of these examples necessarily denigrates the SIDS’ attempts to influence international sustainability policy, notably international treaties for addressing climate change (Betzold, 2010) and implementation for sustainable tourism (Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008b), although these studies discuss and critique the effectiveness of SIDS pushing their interests. Nor do these examples necessarily detract from the exchanges of knowledge and ideas amongst SIDS and the rewards of joint programmes, such as pooling resources to form intergovernmental agencies including the Pacific Regional Environment Programme

(<https://www.sprep.org>) and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (<https://www.caribbeanclimate.bz>). It does mean that institutions and individuals representing SIDS frequently use this grouping's labels as rhetoric rather than as being fully representative of all members' characteristics. This use spills over into tourism; for instance, in using "small" and "developing" as reasons for SIDS governments to pursue tourism, even when the evidence indicates that tourism is far from a social or environmental, including economic, panacea for SIDS (Bojanic & Lo, 2016; Graci & Dodds, 2010; Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008b).

Other such examples are prevalent for island tourism covering both SIDS and non-SIDS, such as New Zealand (Becken, 2005). Warm water destinations market images of white sand beaches, sun, and a tranquil sea (for example, Echtner, 2010 and Naidoo, Ramseook-Munhurrin, & Durbarry, 2012 for Mauritius). Cold water island tourism uses ice, glaciers, landscapes, polar bears, sea mammals, and birds (Baldacchino, 2006). Within the sustainability ethos promoted for Svalbard in Norway's High Arctic, "the world's northernmost" anything is branded, from locomotive to jazz festival. This diversification away from nature-based and adventure tourism would seem to be more about sustaining tourism than necessarily about sustainable tourism. Greenland is similarly trying to diversify from adventure tourism to cultural tourism (Weaver & Lawton, 2017). In such cases, it is an open question regarding the balance amongst a sustainable society and environment, sustaining tourism for the income, and using tourism income and activities to sustain an island's culture, lifestyle, and environment.

For warmer locales, in developing a tourism strategy for Timor-Leste, Currie (2018) tried to avoid the typical 3S approach, yielding some success. Dodds et al. (2017) describe strategic ambiguity regarding Cuba's expectations for tourism expansion, in terms of balancing cultural and natural heritage with resorts—further complicated since their analysis by the rapid changes in Cuba-USA relations. Nelson (2005) analysed images from Grenada presenting itself as an eco-tourism and nature tourism destination, finding a common theme of promoting something different, such as spices and rain forest, from the tourists' assumed home lives. For both Timor-Leste and Grenada, images of ostensibly pristine, palm-fringed beaches were still used to appeal to assumed traditional tourist expectations of islands, even as part of the apparent promotion of "sustainable tourism".

This island sustainability vision for tourism of perfect, untouched nature is being affected by another island sustainability issue: climate change. Contemporary climate change is witnessed as rapid changes in weather statistics over decades measured particularly by a

rise in global mean air temperature (IPCC, 2013-2014). It arises from two main anthropogenic sources: (i) greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, including carbon dioxide and methane, such as from burning fossil fuels, including oil and coal, and (ii) land use changes reducing greenhouse gas uptake such as from deforestation. Many human systems emit and fail to absorb greenhouse gases, such as for food, freshwater, waste management, and energy supply, the latter being notable for transportation and electricity generation.

Projections of climate change impacts have led to global catastrophe narratives (Nisbet, 2009). Some authors raise the spectre of possible human extinction from climate change (Matheny, 2007; Tonn, 2003) without robust conceptualisation, evidenced argumentation, or predictive modelling results of how climate change could actually destroy all of humanity. These catastrophe and extinction narratives are projected onto islands, framing climate change as an existential threat (Lilley, 2008), particularly for low-lying tropical islands and for polar islands such as Svalbard and Greenland.

The threat highlighted for polar locations tends to be disappearance of the cryosphere and animals, particularly polar bears, although many campaigns have been aiming to reduce the influence of these images by making peoples and cultures the central concern (Manzo, 2010; Watt-Cloutier, 2015). The threat highlighted for the tropics is typically sea-level rise which is assumed to be inevitably destructive to atolls (Locke, 2009; Wyett, 2014). Currently, social and physical theories and evidence of island and islander responses to climate change do not support this contention of tropical island countries and territories definitely vanishing under climate change (Albert et al., 2016; Perry et al., 2015; Webb & Kench, 2010; Yates, Le Cozannet, Garcin, Salai, & Walker, 2013). Nevertheless, no doubt exists that islands, including in the Arctic (ACIA, 2005; AHDR, 2004; AMAP, 2011), are experiencing major social and environmental shifts from climate change (IPCC, 2013-2014) with extinction-level threats being a plausible, but far from definite, outcome. The importance is acknowledging the nuances, provisos, and misleading representations in the physical and social responses of islands and islanders to climate change impacts (Connell, 2016; Farbotko, 2005, 2010; Gaillard, 2012; McLean & Kench, 2015) rather than accepting the assumptions of destruction without question.

Climate change within tourism has entered into the island sustainability discourse as being damaging to what tourists are assumed to be travelling for, namely beaches for warm water islands (e.g. Belle & Bramwell, 2005 for Barbados) and nature for cold water islands (e.g. Snyder & Stonehouse, 2007 for the polar regions). Yet for islands, coastal tourism might

not be impacted by climate change any more or any less than non-coastal tourism, as Hyman (2014) shows for Jamaica. As with SIDS, climate change exemplifies island sustainability suggestions with respect to tourism which do not necessarily stand up to close scrutiny.

### **Sectoral perspectives of island sustainability in tourism**

Island sustainability appears for essential service sectors which are part of tourism, here examined for energy including transportation and waste management.

#### *Energy*

Climate change within island sustainability and tourism has placed islands at the forefront of energy-related efforts (Praene, Payet, & Bénard-Sora, 2018; Weir, 2018), given electricity generation's contribution to climate change, especially with many islands relying on diesel generators. Yet many islands experience energy overuse due to tourism (Dodds, 2007b; Ioannides & Holcomb, 2003). For SIDS, Surroop, Raghoo, and Bundhoo (2018) provide an overview of energy systems, indicating how renewable energy sources for generating electricity are frequently highlighted for island sustainability. Hydropower and geothermal are particularly prominent for tourists, being promoted as sustainable sources as well as sites to visit.

For Mauritius, for which tourism generates about one quarter of the economy (WTTC, 2017), approximately 5% of electricity comes from in-country hydropower with significant prospects for expansion (Elahee, 2013). Hydropower has been implicated as inhibiting sustainability in numerous ways, such as through forced displacement and ecosystem damage (World Commission on Dams, 2000). The potential environmental damage from dams has long been noted as a concern for Mauritius (Ramjeawon, 1994), but most of the sites are distant from main tourist locations. Hydropower for Mauritius could be seen as sustainable given that it is local, renewable, and generates jobs, while the costs of construction, maintenance, and changed ecosystems would rarely be visible to visitors.

Surroop et al. (2018) report that only one SIDS, Papua New Guinea, was found to have geothermal electricity generation, providing 11% of the country's electricity production. Mauritius is planning to implement geothermal while many other SIDS, from Vanuatu to St. Lucia, have potential for it. Non-SIDS island countries, particularly Iceland, Indonesia, and New Zealand, are much further along the geothermal path than SIDS including using the geothermal infrastructure for some tourism (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2010). The main disadvantage of geothermal energy is perhaps that infrastructure is often required in

comparatively remote locations, adding costs such as the transmission system and disturbing ecosystems. Another potential drawback is that local people might feel exploration of and resource extraction from their lands are against or interfere with their culture or livelihoods. On these bases, around the slopes of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines, the indigenous Aeta objected to geothermal exploration (Goertzen, 1991).

More overt energy-related symbolism of island sustainability which appeals to tourists relates to “carbon neutrality”, referring to no net greenhouse gas emissions by reducing their release and increasing their uptake. Mohamed Nasheed’s Presidency of Maldives from 2008-2012 led to the movie *The Island President* (2011) representing his views of impacts from and measures to tackle climate change. One initiative aimed to make his country carbon neutral by 2020. Given the sectoral distribution of energy demand in the country, a major overhaul of the culture and economy would be essential to reach this target.

At the time of Nasheed’s commitment, Bernard, Khelil, Pichon, and Tissot (2010) provided a national audit for Maldives demonstrating how the tourism industry is the largest producer of Maldivian greenhouse gases, emitting 36% of domestic emissions. In fact, greenhouse gas emissions from international flights to and from the country (the method by which most tourists reach Maldives) were calculated to equal all domestic emissions (Bernard et al., 2010)—although these calculations do not include shipping which covers yachts, cruise ships, and cargo.

Following Nasheed’s ousting in 2012, successive Maldivian governments have tended to downplay his environmental initiatives while not repudiating them entirely. Recent decisions in Maldives have encouraged even more tourism through permitting tourist facilities on inhabited islands, rather than on resort-only islands which frequently aimed to fulfil the promise and image (even if not reality) of idyllic eco-tourism (Ayala, 1996; King, 1997). The country now also allows foreign ownership of land provided that the owner reclaims land from the sea (CIA, 2018). Maldives is still marketed as an eco-tourism idyll, reinforcing warm water island sustainability in tourism, despite 96% of electricity being generated through fossil fuels (and the remainder by non-hydro renewables) (CIA, 2018). Solar water heating is used, as it is on many warm water islands, which would not be reflected in the electricity generation numbers.

Coconut biofuels have long been promoted as a potential contribution from SIDS to energy systems, for both electricity generation and vehicle operation, especially in the Pacific (Solly, 1980). It has not yet succeeded at a large scale and concerns are continually raised for all attempts at increasing biofuel use (Cloin, 2007; Gardebroek, Reimer, & Baller, 2017). If it

did succeed at a large scale, then coconut plantations would need to expand, exacerbating already existing problems of food-related land being taken over for commercial products. Meanwhile, perceptions of coconut biofuel being local, eco-friendly, and plentiful could lead to an increase in consumption, especially if it were cheap. Ioannides and Holcomb (2003) already noted that aiming for fewer tourists to islands to reduce consumption loads made the destinations more upmarket, translating into more resource consumption per tourist. Should a coconut biofuel leader such as Vanuatu change all in-country transportation to a local fossil-fuel-free product, then the publicity might induce more tourists to fly there to witness energy futures and to use the local biofuel extensively because it is deemed to be eco-friendly.

The examples here thus far have been mainly supply side rather than reducing energy demand. One of the most common demand reduction initiatives across SIDS is solar energy for heating water which is typically taken as a given rather than as being for island sustainability. Given how much energy is required to heat water, the sustainability gains from solar heating are substantive, even on a life cycle basis (e.g. Lin, Chang, & Chung, 2015 for an isolated part of Taiwan).

Meanwhile, sustainable transport is not always a priority. Many buses in island countries such as Fiji and Barbados are old, spewing out noxious particulates and gases. For inter-island travel in Maldives, slow ferries exist, but most visitors end up on sea planes or motor boats. Meanwhile, in warm water destinations, year-round air conditioning is increasingly expected for visitor (and resident) comfort, yielding high energy consumption.

Islands not connected to external grids frequently depend on diesel-powered electricity generation plants, meaning that fuel and spare parts require a supply chain tending to extend far from the island. Even island countries which extract fossil fuels, such as Timor-Leste, do not typically have the in-country processing and refining facilities to provide for their own needs (Raghoo, Surroop, Wolf, Filho, & Jeetah, 2018). Meanwhile, as noted by Doraisami (2018), the (mis)management of the resource has led to development and economic troubles. Maintaining an electricity grid, such as over the mountains of St. Lucia, undersea across an archipelago, or to a mainland increases supply costs for parts and expertise for construction, maintenance, and decommissioning, even where the operations are run entirely on-island. After Hurricane Maria swept through Puerto Rico in 2017, external assistance was required for months afterwards in order to restore power (de Onís, 2018).

In Iceland, bitter tension emerges between assumed needs of nature-based tourism and energy production based on the natural resources from this same nature, namely hydro and geothermal electricity generation (Karlisdóttir, 2013). Renewable energy is promoted as

being clean, green, and sustainable, as is nature-based tourism, so that the two clash with each other. It is not easy to determine which might be more sustainable in any specific context: being self-sufficient for electricity supply or bringing in tourists to see nature and then using the income to import electricity? Much might depend on the definition of “sustainable” and perhaps neither would be sustainable in some situations. It is also unclear whether energy infrastructure or nature would provide more overall tourist income.

Consequently, while many islands have sought to be innovators in energy systems on both the supply and demand sides (Lenzen et al., 2014; Raturi, Singh, & Prasad, 2016), mixed degrees of success are witnessed. Tourists might not always be aware of the difficulties or apparent trade-offs, meaning that energy systems including transportation, ostensibly to tackle climate change, can be used to represent island sustainability in tourism.

### *Waste management*

Tourism-related waste has long been a concern for island sustainability (Pantin, 1999) with analyses hampered by lack of data and varying analysis methods (Eckelman et al., 2014). Using different parameters, Georges (2006) implies that tourists in Caribbean hotels generate twice as much waste as locals, along with different forms of waste, whilst Mateu-Sbert, Ricci-Cabello, Villalonga-Olives, and Cabeza-Irigoyen (2013) calculate that an extra tourist on Menorca produces less extra waste than an extra resident. Across islands, for residents and tourists, typical waste management sustainability focuses on the 3Rs of reduce, reuse, and recycle which, in turn, have their own implementation challenges.

Outer islands of Åland, Finland have recycling stations rather than home pickup. Residents collect their recyclables at home, they generally drive to the recycling stations, the deposited material is collected by a lorry which drives onto a ferry, and thus the material is taken off-island for processing and recycling—an intensive use of fossil fuels. Vehicle tires pose an especial problem for recycling or reusing. Part of the problem, as shown for Taiwan converting tires to energy (Tsai, 2015), is that the technology still requires substantive improvements. Part of the problem, as for Dominica (Sarkar, Chamberlain, & Miller, 2011), is that the annual volume of tires available apparently does not justify operating and maintaining the tire recycling equipment needed, although as always, the method of calculating costs and benefits affects the results. Malta had just started a household recycling programme when Dodds (2007a) published her analysis of sustainable tourism for the island country.

Without suitable and efficient 3R programmes, waste accumulates leading to situations such as in Maldives where burning solid waste is visible to many tourists. Lal and Takau (2006) noted how some Tongan islands have a household collection system for which a charge is levied by either the government or a private company. Not everyone can afford or wishes to pay the fee, so older practices of “solid waste management” are reverted to by throwing rubbish into the mangroves where it would not be seen. This approach for Tonga has not necessarily been detrimental when the waste was principally local and organic, such as coconut husks and fish bones. Difficulties emerge for modern, imported waste such as plastics and batteries which do not decompose rapidly and can release toxic substances, in addition to the increasing volumes of solid waste being produced. From a tourism perspective, waste bobbing in the ocean or being left on the beach by high tide contradicts expectations of pristine nature and clean environments.

Where these aspects of island sustainability in tourism are sought to be maintained, waste management issues might be hidden from tourists. Managing e-waste from devices such as laptops and mobile phones is a growing problem internationally, so some islands step into the breach. Indonesia’s Batam and Wakatobi Islands illegally import e-waste from Europe and the US, for recycling or refurbishment and resale (Panambunan-Ferse & Breiter, 2013), but the sites are not those where tourists typically go. Conversely, Kassa Island is mainly used as a day trip for tourists from Conakry, Guinea and in 1989 received a shipment labelled as being brick material which turned out to be illegally dumped and poisonous incinerator ash from Philadelphia (Vir, 1989). Caribbean SIDS have long fought the US over transporting through their region nuclear waste for processing without asking permission or verifying the type of waste (Rodríguez-Rivera, 2009).

Where tourists cannot see these waste management issues, many island sustainability presumptions can be maintained, plus there are examples where waste management is used for island sustainability in tourism. The Future Centre Trust in Barbados is a local sustainability centre and a tourist attraction. Waste tires hold soil forming a garden of small tire-sized compartments where fruit and vegetables are grown. The Future Centre Trust also organised volunteers to collect rubbish from walkers around the country, demonstrating to tourists and locals that Barbados has a clean ethic (Raffoul, Mahon, & Goodridge, 2006).

Other social and technical innovations for island waste sustainability are being tested and implemented (Eckelman et al., 2014), although few have much connection to tourism or even could be tourist attractions. Instead, the absence of visible waste and waste management is likely to be most appealing for tourists, apart from standard items in many places, such as

recycling bins which tourists can point to as evidence of island sustainability, even if the techniques provide few results, especially over a life cycle.

### **Critiquing island sustainability in tourism**

The sectoral analysis of energy and waste management shows that island sustainability efforts sometimes have genuine sustainability aims, including in tourism, and sometimes are more for show, including in tourism. Meanwhile, some island sustainability issues are not dealt with, to large degree because they are out of sight.

One critique of promoting island sustainability for garnering attention is “conspicuous sustainability” (Grydehøj & Kelman, 2017). Conspicuous sustainability means engaging in initiatives which appear to support sustainability irrespective of their real contribution to sustainability. Although the literature has not yet applied conspicuous sustainability to tourism, research and practice have long examined whether or not tourism itself is inherently unsustainable alongside analyses of the promotion and marketing used to highlight claimed sustainability traits (Becken & Hay, 2007; Buckley, 2012; Graci & Dodds, 2010). Consequently, tourism case studies involving island sustainability can exemplify conspicuous sustainability.

Dodds et al. (2010) discuss sustainability initiatives for the islands of Koh Phi Phi, Thailand and Gili Trawangan, Indonesia showing how practical as well as nebulous notions of sustainability are being examined for tourism marketing and tourism management. Involving tourists in the sustainability practices is part of both islands’ initiatives, yet tourists seem to support the endeavours because they are visible rather than due to sustainability results from them. In effect, whether or not island sustainability is progressed with tourists and through tourism, the marketing and the tourists’ perceptions of contributing to sustainability continue.

The sustainability initiatives become conspicuous, used to illustrate how much islands are engaging with sustainability, even when the activities achieve little (Baldacchino & Kelman, 2016; Grydehøj & Kelman, 2017). At times, conspicuous sustainability endeavours, rather than merely failing to advance sustainability, can regress it. An example from island tourism is creating branding or expectations which draw in tourists who then damage what they come to see. Graci and Dodds (2010) describe overtourism in Maldives and the Galapagos Islands harming the wildlife, ecosystems, and beaches which attract visitors, especially due to successful marketing aiming to highlight the supposed sustainability; that is, to make it conspicuous.

Island sustainability branding has become important for tourism around the world. Khamis (2007) describes how tourists are attracted by the reputation of King Island, Tasmania for gourmet cuisine, tranquillity, and gorgeous landscapes, despite this reputation being significantly manufactured through careful and clever branding. For Shetland, Scotland, tourism branding not only presents contradictory elements creating visitor expectations which cannot always be met, but also conflicts with some local identities and islander interests for their own communities (Grydehøj, 2008). Self et al. (2010) detail how ecotourism has become an important marketing ploy for the Galapagos Islands with many tour operators greenwashing their operations rather than providing legitimately eco-friendly products and services.

The storyline of climate change destruction has yielded further contradictions in island sustainability. Within tourism, a “last-chance” narrative has emerged, marketing island destinations as the last chance to see them before they are irrevocably ruined by social shifts or anthropogenic environmental changes (Lemelin, Dawson, & Stewart, 2012). One dimension is that these supposedly pristine, natural destinations would be sustainable without climate change. Now, however, the destinations will not last—that is, they are not sustainable—so they should be visited as soon as possible, no matter what the resource consumption required for doing so, which itself contributes to climate change. Last-chance tourism for islands is often marketed with island sustainability, while not apparently increasing environmental awareness or actions amongst the tourists (Eijgelaar, Thaper, & Peeters, 2010). As such, last-chance tourism contradicts sustainable tourism, feeding into the discussions of tourism contributing to climate change and of climate change affecting tourism positively and negatively (Becken, 2013; Scott & Becken, 2010).

Similarly, as discussed earlier, climate change is used for island sustainability through the energy sector, but does not necessarily encourage tourists to reduce their own energy use by avoiding travel to island destinations or when visiting islands. The focus on renewable energy supplies which are ostensibly sustainable also distracts from the well-known points (Lovins, 1976, 2011) that (i) for sustainability, energy demand reduction must be implemented in conjunction with sustainable energy supplies and (ii) these actions are required for many reasons other than climate change, such as health, livelihoods, cost-effectiveness, safety, and durability.

For tourism, island sustainability for energy supply, to a large degree, detracts from the priority action of reducing energy consumption. Climate change has supported conspicuous sustainability more than sustainability. Meanwhile, visible aspects of waste

management might not be the most effective island sustainability endeavours in tourism, as tourists do not usually encounter some of the most damaging waste-related consequences for islands. Again, conspicuousness is more prominent than actual sustainability.

Is moving beyond conspicuous sustainability, such as for energy and waste management, feasible without sacrificing important aspects of sustainability? One step might be recognising that island assemblages can have as much forcefulness in attracting tourists as single island entities. SIDS are an example of an island assemblage. For island tourism, three other significant forms of assemblages from the literature are discussed here.

First, grouped islands are archipelagos, with archipelagicity being examined for tourism (Baldacchino, 2013). Baldacchino and Ferreira (2013) look at the Azores as an example of promoting the archipelago for tourism, indicating how advantages include expanding the tourist base, distributing tourism income throughout the archipelago, and increasing the value of visits with a variety of experiences. Drawbacks include simplifying inter-island differences which can detrimentally impact island and archipelagic identity while providing archipelago tourism products which presume what the visitors and residents seek.

The second assemblage discussed by island studies is aquapelagos (Hayward, 2012, p. 5) defined as “an assemblage of the marine and land spaces of a group of islands and their adjacent waters”. That is, an aquapelago is an island group and its waters. The response is that the term “archipelago” suffices for this assemblage (Baldacchino, 2012a). From an island tourism perspective, repackaging the same offerings in different vocabulary is not necessarily detrimental (Buckley, 2002). That is, aquapelagic tourism might generate interest to complement archipelagic tourism even while offering the same products, services, and experiences, but just using a neologism. The concept then becomes a representation in its own right, being imagined, explored, and promoted—including for and in tourism—with Hayward (2015) analysing an example of the archipelago/aquapelago of New York City.

Hayward’s (2015) work demonstrates the third assemblage: that of the island or archipelago (or aquapelago) in relation to the mainland. As with Grenada appealing to tourists by “othering” the images offered (Nelson, 2005)—that is, promoting them as being different or an “other” to what people typically experience—islands are often presented as being the “other” to the mainland. This viewpoint bolsters on mainland terms the assumed island traits of remoteness, marginality, and isolation (Baldacchino, 2008). Sustainability is assumed to be more difficult on these island “others” of (or “outliers” from) the mainland/continental assemblage. Yet these alleged sustainability challenges are purported to

bring advantages for tourists seeking a holiday escape, whether 3S, 4S, eco-resorts, adventure, and/or pristine nature.

In this regard, assemblages of islands produce, in effect, the same issues for sustainability in tourism as islands do. Whether archipelagos, aquapelagos, or mainland-exception constructions, island assemblages do not necessarily produce different sustainability representations or assumptions in tourism than islands.

Perhaps there is an inevitable return to the long-discussed definitions of “sustainability” for tourism and “sustainable tourism” (Becken, 2013; Buckley, 2012; Butler, 1999; Carlsen & Butler, 2011; Dodds, 2007b; Graci & Dodds, 2010; Liu, 2003). The oft-asked questions include (i) whether or not sustainable tourism, not just conspicuousness thereof, is a realistic goal for islands and (ii) how much tourism undermines sustainability—of tourists and of destinations. Attempts have been made to answer such questions by actively embracing public diplomacy and public relations as for Cuba (L’Etang, Falkheimer, & Lugo, 2007) and aiming for conflict resolution as has been proposed for Cyprus (Sonmez & Apostolopoulos, 2000).

Care is needed not to overlay such issues or to expect everyone to respond to them similarly. Examining island sustainability in tourism has demonstrated how often, such as for energy and waste management, actions can be focused more on presenting sustainability than on achieving aspects of it. Applying conspicuous sustainability to island tourism demonstrates that the eco-island trap is prevalent for a variety of island destinations, not limited to 3S or 4S locations, including island assemblages. The viability of other pathways, as Currie (2018) tried for Timor-Leste, remains an open question.

## **Conclusion**

Some critiques of island sustainability have been examined with regards to their relevance for tourism, showing how tourism can become trapped (eco-trapped, from Grydehøj & Kelman, 2017) by island sustainability—and vice versa—despite, or perhaps because of, many contradictions and inconsistencies. As with typical conspicuous sustainability for islands (Grydehøj & Kelman, 2017), tourism uses island sustainability for its own interests, no matter what the contribution to sustainability is or the real feasibility of achieving some form or process of sustainability. The labels used might also emphasise a specific direction irrespective of sustainability rather than strategically selecting the pathway(s) desired for sustainability and then labelling it/them. For instance, Scheyvens and Momsen (2008b) explain how stating that SIDS are vulnerable, ostensibly invoking assumed

island traits, inhibits sustainable tourism development through this assumption of vulnerability.

The discussion here shows how the situation is not inherently deleterious to island sustainability in tourism. It can distract and detract from (i) working with islanders to seek sustainability including, but not limited to, tourism endeavours and (ii) enquiring about and testing the realism of sustainability involving tourism. Moreover, islanders collectively and in a specific location are not a single-minded, homogenous, static group, instead holding and acting on a variety of viewpoints of islands, sustainability, and tourism. Being aware of images, views, expectations, and assumptions which are present and absent, how they arise, why they remain, and what they do and do not represent to different internal and external groups would yield opportunities for constructively using island sustainability in and through tourism.

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