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Islands and COVID-19: A Global Survey

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Island Innovation

ISLAND CLOSED

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Islands and COVID-19: A Global Survey
Key Messages

- **Overall, islands have performed very well and their population has been kept safe and away from the worse health consequences of COVID-19. While the island geography has helped, the success of islands during COVID-19 was also due to timely and stringent measures adopted throughout the lockdown period.**

- **The pandemic has revealed the fragility of some island socio-economic assets such as, amongst others, tourism, food security, heath and digital infrastructure.**

- **An open and transparent debate needs to drive island post COVID-19 recovery packages. The conversation needs to include key socio-economic stakeholders that have driven island society and economic before the pandemic and those that push for moving away from a business as usual model towards a more resilient and sustainable future.**

- **Island post-COVID 19 recovery debates need to fully take into account the complexities of island jurisdiction (island states vs subnational island jurisdictions), island localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals and island efforts to drive a green energy transformation.**

- **Islands engaging in an open and transparent post COVID-19 recovery debate aimed at promoting a more resilient and sustainable future need to fully embrace the opportunities given to them by digital innovation, without losing track of traditional knowledge and approaches, to bring together island communities.**

The Survey

On 22 March 2020 the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG) started a survey aiming to better understand how Covid-19 was being dealt with on islands.[2] SCELG partnered with Island Innovation and together they reached out to their island network. The goal was not to undertake a research project, but to collate "raw" data from anybody who was inclined to respond and to put such data at the disposal of policymakers and wider island related stakeholders in their ongoing activities to deal with and adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey was closed on 01 June. The response was very positive and 130 people answered the survey, in some cases more than once providing timely updates. Respondents varied from government officials, researchers, members of island communities not affiliated to any specific organisation. Overall the survey gathered responses from islands in 52 countries, which have been included in a webpage where people can find the data divided by islands and by specific survey questions.

The survey focused mainly on phase 1 of the COVID-19 crisis: preventing the spread of the virus and dealing with lockdown. SCELG and Island Innovation will work together on a number of initiatives that will focus on phase 2 of the COVID-19 crisis (living with the pandemic) and phase 3 (life post COVID-19). Acknowledging that islands are incredibly diverse in their geography, society, political organization, and economic capacities, and have responded differently to the different challenges the COVID-19 crisis presented them, this report tries to capture some identifiable trends in the answers to the questions posed in the survey, without expecting to provide a comprehensive picture of islands and COVID-19 in the world. The report also opens up a conversation on how to move beyond the first phase of the COVID-19 crisis exploring means and pathways for the promotion of more resilient and sustainable islands.

What actions are being taken to protect the island community from COVID 19? In particular, how are travel restrictions being put in place and enforced?

- In most cases islands have implemented an early lockdown
- Travel to and from mainland was restricted, if not banned altogether with the exception of cargo shipments
- Inter-island travel was also limited
- Key recommended measures were mostly implemented (14 day quarantine measures, social distancing, working from home where possible)
- All socio-economic activities were stopped, including schools and religious celebrations

Islands did not behave differently than mainland counterparts. Most of the measures taken globally were enacted on islands including implementing a lockdown and taking further necessary measures to prevent the spread, such as recommending or imposing social distancing and moving to working from home. Most, if not all, activities stopped, including school operations and religious celebrations. One main difference due to the geographical nature of islands has been the opportunity and the need to block people from coming into the island by ship or plane. In most cases such a measure was enacted also to inter-island travel within archipelagos. Overall, islands have fared relatively well compared to the mainland in effectively preventing the spread of the virus.[3] The geographical isolation of an island may have helped, but it does not fully explain the success in preventing the spread without control of the virus on islands. The latter are often used to adversity and communities are resilient and innovative. In addition to resilience and innovation, good policy making and community observance of the measures put in place have paved the way for success. However, two challenging situations have occurred in the protection of islands during the spread of COVID-19: possible human rights abuses and "Corona refugees".

NO FERRY SERVICE

DUE TO CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19)

Possible human rights abuses

On some islands measures to prevent the spread of the virus have been adopted once a state of emergency was declared. In some cases this was a means to an end and allowed island policymakers to circumvent some normative limitations that can be overridden by declaring a state of emergency. The limitation of some rights (right to assemble, for example) was needed in order to battle the public health emergency. However, the adoption and enforcement of curfews and other lockdown measures can lead to possible human rights abuses. Despite such risks, the survey has not reflected grave human right violations on islands during the COVID-19 crisis.

Corona refugees

One challenge in trying to prevent the spread of COVID-19 was to block the islands from people wanting to find "refuge" on them. Some of these people were related to the islands by family ties, but others may have just possessed a second home and saw the islands as a safe haven where to spend the quarantine. Stories of corona refugees have been shared from the Iles du Ponant in France, Croatian Islands, Japan and Sweden, amongst others. The emergence of the corona refugee dimension points to a sometimes difficult relationship between island communities and the mainland.

Madeira, Portugal

"The Portuguese Government also declared an Emergency State to allow the government to overcome some legal constraints as to the circulation of people and some activities."

Seychelles

"…the public health commissioner swiftly declared a public health emergency in mid-March. This allowed for an increase in resources directed towards battling the outbreak on the ground."

Okinawa, Japan

"The rapid rise of the infection has been caused mainly by "corona refugees" and returnees from mainland Japan and abroad, particularly from Tokyo and Osaka, where 50% of Japan's infected cases are reported. Okinawa's small, remote islands are requesting mainlanders not to visit their islands during this emergency."

Croatia

"Trying to escape from the enemy they brought the enemy with them and into the environment which is far more suitable for the virus spread than the mainland. We are thus witnessing the controversy: spotted and chosen as refugia the islands have become a trap."

3   See Covid-19 and islands (states, territories and sub-national island jurisdictions- SNIJs) prepared by Iain Orr and available at http://isisa.org/.

What actions will be taken should people on the island have COVID-19?

- A necessary period of quarantine was put in place for people with COVID-19 symptoms
- On some islands test and trace measures were adopted
- Where possible, a parallel health service was developed on the island
- Where this was not possible, COVID-19 patients were moved to the mainland / main island

On the one hand, islands operated in the same way as the mainland if individuals tested positive for COVID-19. They were asked to quarantine and, where possible, test and trace was put in place and the health system was geared to responding to COVID-19. On the other hand, for small islands or for islands with poor healthcare infrastructure, dealing with COVID-19 became more challenging. In fact, not only were COVID-19 patients moved to the mainland or to another island, but these relocations had to be done in a very careful way. On some small islands having to move to the mainland for health matters, including pregnancy, is not a new situation, but COVID-19 has put further pressure on the islands. Although most islands have been spared by the worse numbers of the virus, one of the reasons is the acknowledgment that islands often do not have a strong health infrastructure as on the mainland. The fear of what could happen if COVID-19 were set free on an island appears to be much higher than the spread of COVID-19 on the mainland.

Fragile island health infrastructure

Despite the apparent success in dealing with COVID-19 within island settings, the reality is that in most islands (especially small ones with scarce population) health infrastructure is limited and in some cases poor. While going forward there could be options to improve health services on islands through increased funding and digital innovation, the reality is that in some cases the costs may be perceived to outweigh the benefits and such improvements may not take place. It is, hence, necessary to strongly take into account of the fragility of island health systems should a second wave of the pandemic materialise itself.

Greece
"Public health infrastructure on smaller islands is lacking. Typically, in health emergencies, helicopters and fast boats will transfer patients to bigger islands with hospitals, or to the mainland."

Trinidad and Tobago
"A parallel health care system has been put in place that includes dedicated hospital and step down facilities to accommodate Covid positive patients to ensure they are quarantined apart from the population."

What actions are being taken to ensure that essential goods and services are provided to the island community?

- Food supply chains were not affected negatively and have shown resilience
- Similarly, essential services (electricity, heating) were not particularly affected
- Support schemes were put in place for vulnerable people

One of the biggest concerns when lockdown followed the spread of COVID-19 around the world was that food supply chains would be affected negatively. Images of shelves empty and hoarding essential items were impressed in many people's minds from the first days of lockdown. The reality is that food supply chains have been very resilient and have not been negatively affected as people thought they would. On islands the fear of being cut off from the mainland was even stronger. However, while transport for people to and from islands was limited or stopped altogether, transport of goods was continued. Along the same lines, essential services, such as providing electricity and heating, were also not affected, despite there being possible risks to its delivery due to the lockdown. Several further aspects can be highlighted in this respect: food security and buy local schemes, seasonal migrant workers and the nature of essential workers within an island setting.

Food security and buy local

Despite the fact that food supply chains did not break down, COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of food security on islands. Food security should not only be seen as producing more domestic produce for people living on the islands. It should also be seen as an opportunity to diversify the economy of those islands that rely heavily on one sector (i.e. tourism). At the same time, the agriculture sector can be linked to tourism fostering agritourism, or slow tourism. Lastly, by fostering buy-local policies not only will this strengthen the island economy, but also avoid unnecessary imports that contribute to the carbon footprint of an island's economy. COVID-19 has also revealed on some islands the paradox of high yields of agricultural production geared towards the tourism sector.

Prince Edward Island, Canada

"We are a very vulnerable Island to food insecurity due to the combination of isolation, export economy, and northern climate. Many seed stores are now selling out, as people scramble to begin home-gardening."

Canary Islands, Spain

"The Canary Islands Government will make priority with the island products. Also they advertise about we need to buy products from here" & "No shortages to date, although the lack of tourists means that demand is considerably reduced."

Seasonal migrant workers

Not only on islands, food security concerns and food supply chains has highlighted the geo-political nature of the food industry. In some parts of the world, agriculture is often worked by migrant and seasonal workers who, because of lockdown, could not travel easily. In some countries people who had lost their jobs were asked to work in the fields. In others ad-hoc charters flights with migrants had to be organised in order to pick fruit and vegetables. At the same time migrant workforce is often employed in the meat processing industry. Workers find themselves in crowded working environment and with difficult working conditions, which has led to localised spread of COVID-19 even after the virus seemed to be kept at bay.

Ireland

"From this time onwards, as fruit and vegetable come into season, the government has allowed workers from Bulgaria and Romania to enter the country (one or two flights maximum) to assist with harvesting. These workers have had to undergo testing, and they will be isolated for 14 days."

Island essential workers

In a big city on the mainland if an essential worker (bus driver, nurse, supermarket worker) falls sick, he/she can usually be replaced by other colleagues. Small islands in particular often do not have this possibility. Although people on small islands tend to multi-task and often work in different sectors, it will not always be easy to suddenly replace an essential worker (i.e. a ferry worker) within an island context.

Sherkin Islands, Ireland

"If any of the ferry crew have to isolate, it could seriously restrict our crossings."

What actions are being taken to ensure that people working on the islands, not only in the tourism sector, are sustained financially in the short term and in the long term?

- Economic measures have been put in place (direct subsidies, loans, tax exemptions, basic income)
- Traditional support systems have enabled island communities to support themselves, not only from a financial perspective

Once again, the same measures that have been adopted and implemented on the mainland applied, in most cases, to islands and their communities. A wide range of temporary financial measures, such as direct subsidies, tax exemptions, etc… were provided. Self-employed faced specific challenges, which some countries were able to deal with by providing them with a specific amount of their foreseeable income based on previous tax returns. People working under the radar in the informal economy found themselves in a very difficult condition. Some countries toyed with the idea of a basic income to buffer the economic consequences of the lockdown. The question of whether islands required special measures and the importance of traditional support systems are two facets of the COVID-19 crisis that deserve special attention.

Islands have been coupled with the mainland

Should islands receive special and additional economic support vis à vis the mainland? Clearly, this is a question that applies to those States who have both a mainland and a cluster of islands, but it could also apply to archipelagic countries or regions with a key/main island. The survey did not reveal island specific measures, despite, in some cases, the additional constraints and challenges that islands may face. The question, in particular, becomes how to strike a balance between continuing to protect public health of the island population (especially when elder) and reopening the economy. Should/could additional economic incentives be given, if the decision sways towards prolonging the lockdown? But what if a country does not have such financial resources? These are all open questions.

Greece

"There are nationwide measures announced to financially support businesses and employees. No additional specific measures have been announced for islanders."

Croatia

"The measures are aimed mainly at small and medium entrepreneurs and their employees but none is island specific."

Traditional support systems

On some islands people did not rely only on government support, but they relied on traditional support systems. From replacing a monetary economy by exchanging skills and services to revaluing community in its wider sense, some island communities navigated the pandemic in a resilient manner.

Okinawa, Japan

"Okinawa has established traditional "moai," or mutual help system, which is practiced even in normal time. They help each other, particularly during emergencies such as pandemic, typhoon, and tsunami. This system works particularly well in small island communities."

Conditional support

Not only on islands, economic packages to buffer the negative consequences of the lockdown have been, in some cases, linked to specific conditions. While strings attached can be a trend in the long-term recovery process post COVID-19, attaching positive conditions to economic support measures, such as obliging the company receiving the subsidy or loan not to lay off its employees, was a way to strengthen community resilience and confidence in the state on the island.

Seychelles
"The assistance comes with the requirement that private sector businesses do not lay off any employees due to the virus."

Immediate support to people working in the tourism sector

Some islands rely heavily on tourism and the lockdown meant that some of these islands were eerily (or pleasantly) silent in periods that would otherwise feature bustling streets plenty of foreign visitors. While exploring the future of tourism post COVID-19 was beyond the scope of the survey, some examples of immediate innovative projects geared towards the workforce in the tourism sector emerged on some islands.

Jamaica
"NCB Foundation launched this programme mainly for those who became unemployed as a result of COVID-19, and in partnership with Northern Caribbean University, iCreate, and Internet Jamaica. The programme is called Level Up."

What actions are being taken to ensure the mental well-being of people on the islands?

- Outdoor activities were encouraged, albeit in a limited and safe manner
- Arts and culture have been promoted, where possible, online
- Island communities got together online
- There was a special focus on mental well-being of children out of school

Despite the perceived safety present on islands with few or no cases, most people living on islands complied with the lockdown measures. Hence, promoting physical and mental well-being became a very important issue also on islands. Domestic abuse also increased on some islands. Similar measures than those on the mainland were put forward with the promotion of physical exercise, albeit done in a safe and physically distanced way. On some islands arts and culture were not put on pause, but just moved online with musicians and artists reaching island households through people's screens. At the same time the banter on the streets or in community halls was replaced by online calls and forums. All these online gatherings were also important for children and youth on the islands. However, mental wellbeing, depending so much on each island's digital infrastructure, revealed not only pockets of poverty where access to the web is not possible financially, but also islands (or parts thereof) with very poor digital infrastructure.

Support for vulnerable people

Island communities are closely knit together in most cases and are caring of each other. When there is a crisis the community looks after each other. COVID-19 was no exception. Sometimes as part of their traditional support measures, community support was geared towards the most vulnerable on the islands.

Scotland
"Community care and support groups have sprung up throughout the islands, providing support for shielded vulnerable groups, shopping and delivery of essential supplies."

If applicable, how are lockdown measures being relaxed?

- Lockdown was relaxed in a gradual manner
- "Bubbles" were established between islands with low levels of infection

Some islands are keen to relax the lockdown and welcome visitors back. Other islands (or people on the island keen to open) are cautious and nervous about opening up to people from the mainland. Overall, lockdown is happening gradually and slowly, possibly even slower than on the mainland due to the often higher risks of a second wave on the islands. One interesting aspect is the emergence of a coalition of islands with low infection rates creating safe "travel bubbles".

Importance of port of entry

Due to island geography, easing the lockdown requires careful attention to island port of entries via sea and air. Ports and airports become crucial places where to implement the measures that an island has adopted in terms of easing the lockdown, ranging from test and trace to clarifying any quarantine measures. On some islands different measures apply to tourists and to seasonal residents returning to the island for the summer.

Mallorca, Spain
"…the regional government insists on the need to carry out controls at origin and destination at ports and airports when travel to and from the islands begins to be allowed."

Island bubble

Islands have been (in most cases) successful in avoiding the worse (health) effects of the pandemic. In some cases islands close to each other have decided to open up to each other creating what can be labelled as "island bubbles." Domestic tourism and the concept of "staycation" have emerged as never before. Island bubbles are also strengthening regional and cultural ties among neighbouring islands.

Raraotnga, Cook Islands
"Our country is now considered to be one large bubble, with almost all businesses allowed to operate."

Survey question	Key answers	Wider issues
What actions are being taken to protect the island community from COVID-19? In particular, how are travel restrictions being put in place and enforced?	In most cases islands have implemented an early lockdown

Travel to and from mainland was restricted, if not banned altogether with the exception of cargo shipments

Inter-island travel was also limited

Key recommended measures were mostly implemented (14 day quarantine measures, social distancing, working from home where possible)

All socio-economic activities were stopped, including schools and religious celebrations | Possible human rights abuses

Corona refugees |
| What actions will be taken should people on the island have COVID-19? | A necessary period of quarantine was put in place for people with COVID-19 symptoms

On some islands test and trace measures were adopted

Where possible, a parallel health service was developed on the island

Where this was not possible, COVID patients were moved to the mainland / main island | Fragile island health infrastructure |
| What actions are being taken to ensure that essential goods and services are provided to the island community? | Food supply chains were not affected negatively and have shown resilience

Similarly, essential services (electricity, heating) were not particularly affected

Support schemes were put in place for vulnerable people | Food security and buy local

Seasonal migrant workers

Island essential workers |
| What actions are being taken to ensure that people working on the islands, not only in the tourism sector, are sustained financially in the short term and in the long term? | Economic measures have been put in place (direct subsidies, loans, tax exemptions, basic income)

Traditional support systems have enabled island communities to support themselves, not only from a financial perspective | Islands have been coupled with the mainland

Traditional support systems

Conditional support

Immediate support to people working in the tourism sector |
| What actions are being taken to ensure the mental well-being of people on the islands? | Outdoor activities were encouraged, albeit in a limited and safe manner

Arts and culture have been promoted, where possible, online

Island communities got together online

There was a special focus on mental well-being of children out of school | Support for vulnerable people |
| If applicable, how are lockdown measures being relaxed? | Lockdown is being relaxed in a gradual manner

Possibility of creating "bubbles" between islands with low levels of infection | Importance of port of entry

Island bubble |

Moving beyond the first phase of COVID-19

We all hope that there will not be second waves of this deadly virus. But if there is one, policy makers will need to learn from the experience of the first wave in order to make informed decisions. From the start, SCELG and Island Innovation's survey and this report wished to be a further tool in the machinery of island policy makers and stakeholders, should we face a second wave of COVID-19.

However, the pandemic has also provided a unique moment to reflect on the kind of world in which we live. When thinking of the future (life after the pandemic), learning from other islands and understanding what worked well and what did not in the first phase of the pandemic will be invaluable. We believe that the survey provides also a useful tool in this direction by highlighting the trends that have emerged in the first months of the pandemic spreading through islands worldwide.

Business as usual is not an option

One key starting point is that COVID-19 presents a unique opportunity for a new start for islands, but not only. Islands and their communities should not consider business as usual and the old normal as the goal to return to quickly. Doing so would probably lead to cutting corners and undermining environmental protection and, in the worst cases, even human rights.

St Lucia
"…there is a real danger of simply reverting to a desperate 'business as usual' mode to plug the obvious economic/financial gaps."

Jamaica
"We have a moment now as we speak about RECOVERY to try to sculpt our own NEW Green Deal for the Region"

The survey was not developed thinking of how to move beyond the pandemic, but responses thereto highlight a few aspects that are worthy to be analysed and that present both opportunities and challenges going forward. By exploring such areas, such as the balance between economic development and environmental protection, the question

of island states vs sub-national island jurisdictions and innovation, a policy driven research agenda has the potential to pave the way for an island roadmap for a more resilient and sustainable future. But we are aware that these are just some of the areas that need to be scrutinised, with many other being equally relevant.

Clash between economic development and environmental protection

We have said that islands should not go back to business as usual. However, it is wishful thinking that islands and their economies will change substantially from one day to another. In order to drive change, several steps need to be contemplated.

First, it is important to fully understand those sectors of the economy that have proved to be particularly fragile through COVID-19. Tourism and food security come to mind as two areas that an island may want to focus on. But digital connectivity should also be highlighted. Criticising such sectors alone will not lead to any change. It will be important to reach out to the key public and private players and arrange an enabling environment in order to promote a fruitful conversation aimed at making such sectors more resilient and more sustainable.

When it comes to tourism on some islands, we need to be fully aware of the scale of economic input that the sector brings to the economy including direct and indirect jobs.

Second, it is important to better understand and highlight what makes a pre-COVID-19 island economy not in harmony with resilience and sustainable development. What are, for example, the environmental pressures embedded in the old normal? Only by better understanding the environmental, health and other challenges present on islands can they be looked at afresh in a Post COVID-19 world. Just like with the tourism sector, key players that have a stake in these island dimensions need to be identified and invited at the policy table.

Diversification of island economies

In some cases tourism plays a major role in an island economy. COVID-19 presents an opportunity to balance the legitimate aspirations of tourism fuelled economies and other legitimate interests, such as environmental protection. The seas and oceans around islands cannot only be seen as a playground for foreign tourists, but should be considered as socio-environmental and cultural assets that belong to island communities. The challenge moving forward is how to diversify not by abandoning tourism, but by embracing a different approach to tourism that is both profitable and environmentally and culturally sensible.

Cayman Islands
"Before COVID-19 there was a major debate about the construction of a new port and berthing facility at the expense of some amazing coral reefs as well as beach and water clarity. This public health crisis has the potential to shift people's opinions."

Bahamas
"Diversification of tourism-dependent economies is key to reduce the impact during this crisis. Agriculture is one of the sectors that needs attention in small island nations including the Caribbean. Agriculture can ensure food security in the region by reducing import dependence. This sector can be transformed by being more innovative to attract youth. Bringing tourism into play with agriculture in the form of agritourism is certainly the way forward for the Caribbean."

Third, all stakeholders need to be ready to listen to each other and, where needed, to find equitable solutions that provide palatable outcomes for all those involved. Can an island really change from a carbon intensive and resource intensive tourism model to a niche sustainable high target model? In an ideal world, islands that rely heavily on tourism should open up policy and economic conversations capable of offsetting the most negative effects of unsustainable practices while considering different forms of more sustainable tourism practices. At the same time they should promote avenues to diversify their economy towards other sources of income beyond tourism.

Overall, there will not be a one-size-fits-all recipe for success when it comes to future islands post COVID-19. However, success or failure will depend greatly on facilitating a frank and open conversation that brings together all actors and drivers of the island economy. Digital connectivity will be key to open the doors (physical and virtual) of this much needed conversation. But good ideas and policies are only a start, albeit an important start. Finance and budgets need to accompany such ideas. The conversations on Post COVID-19 islands need to also have the budget holders and finance brokers around the table.

World class digital connectivity

Digital innovation will be crucial both in providing an asset for such a debate, but also to enable a true diversification of the economy. In some cases, greater connectivity will mean that jobs that in a pre-COVID-19 world could have been done only from the mainland can now be done from an island. And we have all seen in the lockdown that (good) digital connectivity can break all geographical barriers.

Shetland Islands, Scotland
"The Shetland Islands Council chief executive has gone on record to say that, 'there needs to be "world class" connectivity in place to "rebuild our economy to be more resilient to shocks like COVID-19" in the future and support delivery of public services."

Island States vs Subnational island jurisdictions

One key lesson from the first phase of COVID-19 is that islands that had power over their borders did not think twice in using such power to close their borders to visitors in order to protect their citizens. Other islands that depended on the mainland sometimes found it complicated and difficult and even confusing to consider, implement and enforce measures during the lockdown. Similarly, in moving beyond the pandemic, islands will find themselves in different governance settings,

some with more legal and normative possibilities and others with less. But these observations should not be interpreted in a binary way whereby islands with sovereign power or subnational island jurisdictions with strong competences are to be automatically favoured over the other islands. What we see is a complex political and legal dimension of island governance that needs to be considered when preparing the policy conversation table mentioned above.
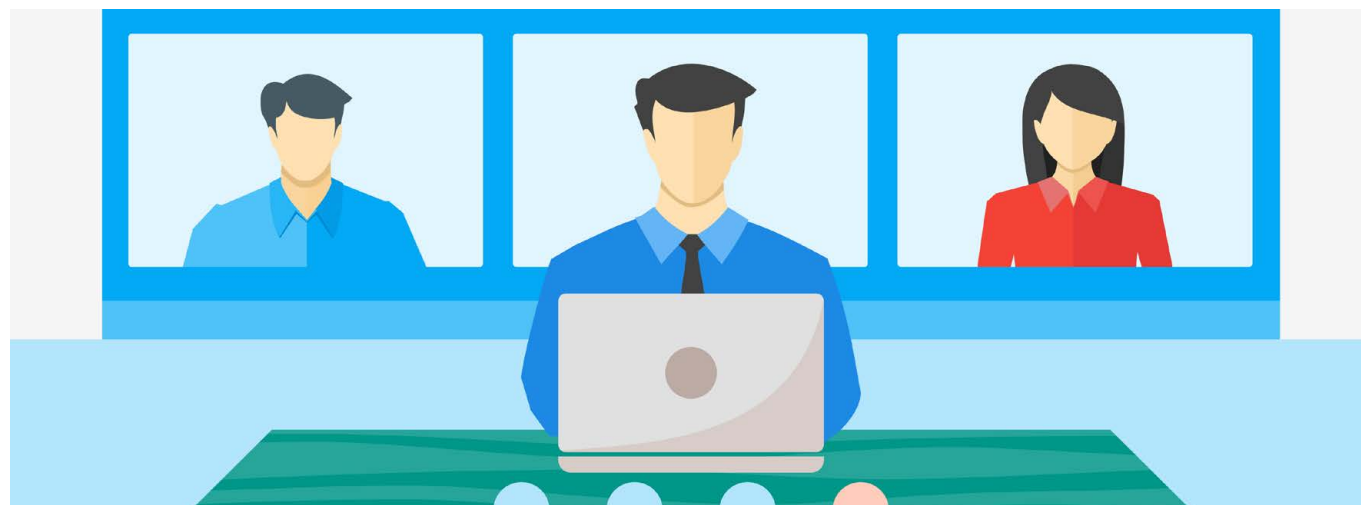
Islands of mainland countries

A country can have islands as part of its territory (i.e. Scotland, Croatia, France). In the lockdown, and in islands' efforts to prevent the spread of the pandemic, it was made clear that some of these islands lack strong competences. It is not always clear what island municipalities or island officials can or cannot do. In future health crisis and in discussing post COVID-19 island futures, it will be important that these islands have a legal and political voice on the mainland when it comes to shape a more resilient and more sustainable future.

Madeira, Portugal
"Madeira Regional Government tried to close the airport to avoid infection from travellers, but National Government refused based on international agreements and rules related with air transport."

Fohr Islands, Germany
"The German islands do not seem to have control over what is happening to them but the corresponding states make the decision."

Åland Islands, Finland
There is some confusion as to what the autonomous government is allowed to do."

One island, two countries and oversea island territories

Few islands in the world are home to more than one country. COVID-19 has shown that such an artificial division of an island can hinder health policies to a pandemic if the two sides of the island move at a different speed or, worse, in opposite directions. Going ahead such islands need to enhance political cooperation in order to jointly try to move towards a more resilient and more sustainable future. This is particularly important when it comes to environmental measures related to the seas and oceans around the island and in relation to climate change. Furthermore, there are several islands around the world that depend constitutionally and economically on a country that finds itself far away, often in another continent. The legal and political complexity of such islands needs to be taken into account, once again, when a conversation geared to shape a future post COVID-19 world is triggered.

Ireland
"One of the country's epidemiological advisers has stated that Ireland possesses the great advantage of being an island, and therefore able to control its borders, but this advantage has been thrown away by having two separate jurisdictions and two separate Health Service Agencies which are not co-operating."

Curaçao
"The government has gotten a 6 week loan from the Netherlands (we're part of the kingdom of the Netherlands)."

Final remarks

The survey provided a snapshot of how islands around the world have performed during the first phase of the COVID-19 crisis. Overall, islands performed incredibly well compared to mainland counterparts. The pandemic was kept at bay and people on the islands were protected.

"I wish I were an island"

Some people on the mainland said these words at the height of the pandemic. Islands have been, mostly, safe places in the COVID-19 crisis (until now). But this should not be taken as a guarantee that the islands will always be safe. The geographical isolation of islands, coupled with good public health measures, has proved to be an advantage for many islands. Hopefully, islands and their success in dealing with COVID-19 can be shared with mainland counterparts and good practices will be shared to keep everybody safe in the future.

Pitcairn Islands

"We are a resilient bunch. We look after each other's welfare. And, if we must self-isolate, we will use every form of communication to check up on each other - including the use of VHF radios for community announcements, telephone, and social networking."

Martha's Vineyard, USA

"One can but wonder and actually I worry far more about those who live in cities! We have the beaches, the fields, the forests and lots of natural areas -- for which we are so blessed!"

Prince Edward Island, Canada

"I feel extremely fortunate to live on an island right now!!!!"

The review of the survey leads us to conclude that there is a need for islands to open up an inclusive conversation about a Post COVID-19 future. If we want to move towards a more resilient and more sustainable future, it will be important to bring around the table key political and socio-economic actors that have driven the pre COVID-19 world. A space needs to be present at the table for champions of sustainability and the island community itself who often has resilience embedded in its DNA. Digital innovation and digital infrastructure can enable a truly inclusive conversation that needs to take into account the complexity of the different political and legal landscapes of islands around the world, from island nations, island subnational jurisdictions and other islands. If we want to move towards greater resilience and sustainability, then the localisation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the role of islands in the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change should also be invited to the table. Only by embracing such complexity can we have a chance to shape a different future. One that truly moves beyond "business as usual" and takes islands and their communities towards a more resilient and more sustainable future.

SCELG and Island Innovation are excited to take part and, where possible, facilitate such conversation especially by sharing island experiences across island networks and communities.

List of islands for which responses were provided in the survey

Pacific Ocean

- Cook Islands
- Cortes Island, Canada
- Fiji
- Guam, USA
- Hawaii, USA
- Okinawa, Japan
- Pitcairn Islands
- Tasmania, Australia
- Tuvalu
- Samoa
- Vancouver Island, Canada

Indian Ocean

- Madagascar
- Maldives
- Mauritius
- Reunion
- Seychelles

Atlantic Ocean (Europe)

- Aland Islands, Finland
- Azores, Portugal
- Barra, Scotland
- Faroe Islands
- Fohr Island, Germany
- Fuerteventura, Spain
- Greenland
- Iceland
- Iles du Ponant, France
- Ireland (Generally)
- Isle of Man
- Isle of Wight, UK
- Jersey
- Jura, Scotland
- Laeso, Denmark
- Lewis, Scotland

- Madeira, Portugal
- Öland, Sweden
- Orkney Islands, Scotland
- Saaremaa, Estonia
- Scottish Islands Generally
- Sherkin Island, Ireland
- Shetland Islands, Scotland
- South Uist, Scotland
- Tenerife, Spain
- Tiree, Scotland

Atlantic Ocean (Africa and Americas)

- Big Tancook Island, Canada
- Falkland Islands
- Islands of Maine, USA
- Martha's Vineyard, USA
- Prince Edward Island, Canada
- Sao Tome and Principe

Caribbean Sea

- Anguilla
- Antigua and Barbuda
- Aruba
- Bahamas
- Barbados
- Bay Islands, Honduras
- Bermuda
- Cayman Islands
- Curacao
- Dominica
- Grenada
- Haiti
- Jamaica
- Montserrat
- Puerto Rico

- San Andres, Colombia
- St Kitts and Nevis
- St Lucia
- St Vincent and the Grenadines
- St. Maarten
- Trinidad and Tobago
- Turks and Caicos Islands
- US Virgin Islands

Mediterranean

- Corsica, France
- Croatian Islands Generally
- Gozo, Malta
- Greek Islands Generally
- Ibiza and Formentera, Spain
- Lastovo, Croatia
- Mallorca, Spain
- Malta (Generally)
- Sicilian Islands, Italy
- Solta, Croatia

Lake islands

- Beaver Island, Michigan, USA
- Put-in-Bay, Ohio, USA

Island and COVID-19 Resources

Resources based on the SCELG and Island Innovation Survey

The survey developed by SCELG and Island Innovation can be accessed on the SCELG website at https://www.strath.ac.uk/research/strathclydecentreenvironmentallawgovernance/ourwork/research/labsincubators/eilean/islandsandcovid-19/

Policy Briefs
F Sindico and J Ellsmoor, Coronavirus: A Global Island Perspective, SCELG Policy Brief 14/2020

News Reports
BBC Orkney F Sindico was interviewed about the survey by BBC Orkney on 11 May 2020 [interview starts at 12:18]

CBC (Canadian Public Radio) F Sindico was interviewed about the survey by CBC on 30 April 2020

Podcasts
OTOK Podcast A podcast series on islands managed by Bojan Furst.

Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF) Rural Routes Podcast "Rural and Island responses to COVID-19 panel interview"

Scotland Rural College Island webinar series, "COVID 19: A Global Island Response"

Other Island and COVID-19 resources

Islands and the CoronaVirus pandemic (Update by Iain Orr, 20 June 2020) available on the International Small Island Studies Association home page

News Reports
Jamaica Observer "Webinar to tackle impact of COVID-19 on island communities"

Webinars
Organised by Island Innovation

Island Responses to COVID-19 – Discussion with representatives from Greenland, the Maldives, Canary Islands and Anguilla.

The Economic Future of the Caribbean: Life After COVID-19 – Discussion with representatives from Barbados, Aruba, the Cayman Islands, Saint Lucia and Sint Maarten.

Responding to COVID-19 in Jamaica – Discussion with representatives from various angles of the Jamaican economy: government, finance, private sector & media.

Organised by Hawai'i Green Growth

Island Platform on COVID-19 Response – Sharing, Support, Solutions, discussion with Guam. Grenada, UN Foundation, Global Island Partnership and Hawai'i Green Growth Local2030 Hub [watch the recording here]

How are islands addressing COVID-19 related disruptions to the tourism economy? What are their ideas on building back better? Discussion with representatives from Galápagos Islands, Hawai'i, and Curaçao, and responses from the Philippines and the Cook Islands [watch the recording here]

Strengthening island food security to address impacts of COVID-19 and achieve long term sustainability, discussion with Papua New Guinea, Cook Islands, Hawai'i, and other islands [watch the recording here]

UNIVERSITY of STRATHCLYDE
CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LAW AND GOVERNANCE

Island Innovation

The Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG) is based at the University of strathclyde Law School in Glasgow, Scotland, UK. SCELG houses EILEAN, an initiative on Law, Islands and Sustainability that aims to develop a better understanding of how island communities engage in legal and political processes around resilience and sustainability. SCELG has provided technical advice to the Scottish Government in the implementation of the Islands (Scotland) Act in 2019 and leads a sustainability education programme called Island Explorers. For further information please contact francesco.sindico@strath.ac.uk or reach us via twitter @scelg and @fsindco.

Island Innovation is a social enterprise and digital media company at the intersection of sustainable development and communications, offering specialised services across various sectors. The organization brings together the private sector, government, utilities, NGOs and universities to advance innovation for sustainability and prosperity in islands worldwide. The 'digital bridges' that Island Innovation creates bring together a diverse array of stakeholders reaching every continent.