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Islands on the Edge: Exploring Islandness and Development in Four Australian Case Studies

by

Rebecca Erinn Jackson, BSc (Hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Tasmania

July 2008

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University of Tasmania or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does this thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

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ABSTRACT

This research is positioned in the field of island studies and examines impacts of residential and tourism developments on four Australian case studies - Bruny Island off the island-state of Tasmania; Phillip Island, part of Victoria; Kangaroo Island off South Australia; and Rottnest Island, Western Australia. These islands are on the edge of metropolitan regions, so are readily accessible and subject to development pressures that may threaten ecological, social and economic well-being.

I use a qualitative research methodology, involving interviews with key island stakeholders, to explore relationships among three themes: islandness, development, and governance. 'Islandness' broadly refers to qualities of islands - geographical, social and political - that are distinct from those of continents. Consideration of development focuses on (i) tourism as a key economic activity on the case islands, and (ii) residential development and the associated 'sea change' phenomenon involving amenity migration. I investigate governance structures for the case islands, and the capacity of communities to advance local sustainability.

Islandness is an ambiguous concept, partly due to the openness/closure of island boundaries (openness refers to connectedness with the wider world and closure relates to insularity). Such ambiguity is evident in tensions between islanders' desire for autonomy, and parity with mainlanders. Islandness can be diminished by increasing accessibility (a form of greater boundary openness), such as bridges or faster ferries, or by developments that do not pay due heed to principles of sustainability or specificities of island context. However, insularity can also be problematic: many offshore islands need to be open to tourism to sustain economic viability. A key issue then is how to balance apparent needs to further economic development (and possible homogenisation with mainlands) with other needs to maintain distinct island qualities. Suggested strategies include striving for economies of place (capitalising on a geographical uniqueness that adds value to goods); preserving unique island features such as sense of place, character, and environmental values; and ensuring that relevant governments (if

mainland-based) provide for some form of island representation. State and local government policy and planning strategies may also need to consider distinct island characteristics. Consistency between spatial and administrative boundaries is important from environmental and social perspectives (islands can foster sense of community and social capital), but such governance arrangements are often constrained economically.

This research contributes to the field of island studies by addressing the lack of comparative case studies and research on offshore islands. In relation to existing island literature, I augment theoretical understandings of the concept of islandness, and link this concept to that of sustainable development. This research also highlights the natural and social values of four offshore islands and the importance of maintaining their distinct island qualities (and suggests some strategies for doing so). I conclude that islandness is an important resource for island and other peoples as they grapple with the challenges of sustainable development. Research findings may be applicable to offshore islands in other parts of the world, considering some of the common sustainability challenges and opportunities associated with islandness.

Acknowledgements

Similar to islands, I have not been completely isolated. I have reached beyond my personal boundary to several external networks which have enabled me to undertake this piece of work.

Firstly, I am deeply indebted to my family, especially my mother Maxine for her unwavering support throughout the course of my candidature, but particularly during the past year. I also appreciate the encouragement from my sisters Skye and Caitlin and my grandmother Joy.

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, Mae and Herb Jackson.

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PROLOGUE

Writing a dissertation is very much like being in a long-term relationship: there are likely to be some very good times and some perfectly dreadful ones and it's a big help if you like what you've chosen (Bolker, 1998: 9).

Before I begin, I believe it is important to explain why I chose to study islands. Growing up in the Australian island state of Tasmania (although not born on Tasmanian soil and hence perhaps not a true islander, depending on various definitions of what it takes to be a Tasmanian), I largely saw the disadvantages of living on an island: as a child, experiencing seasickness when travelling on the *Abel Tasman* across Bass Strait to visit relatives in mainland Australia; as a teenager, the boredom which I associated with having fewer shops and television stations than on the mainland; and as a young adult, the sense of inferiority and defensiveness when I moved to the nation's capital, Canberra (believing a common Tasmanian opinion that if you want to 'make something of your life', you have to move to the mainland) and faced a constant barrage of jokes about inbreeding, particularly 'Hey, where's your scar?' (a result of supposedly having my second head removed). This sense of islander inferiority is reinforced when Tasmania is left off maps and souvenirs of Australia, as if it were a matter as trivial as not dotting an i (or in the case of souvenir manufacturers, perhaps it is just too difficult to connect Australia's southern island to its 'North Island', the mainland of Australia). It was not until I had left the island state and particularly not until I was living in a large Australian city, Melbourne, that I began to appreciate the benefits of an island lifestyle, including minimal travel times and a stronger identification with place (as opposed to feeling like an ant in the flat, seemingly endless suburbs of Melbourne). As Gillis (2004: 168) notes, 'islomania' is generated by absence rather than by presence: "only when we leave a place do we come to fully appreciate it".

Hence, it seemed logical to return to Tasmania to begin my PhD in island studies. However, I sensed that Tasmania itself was too large an island to tackle over a relatively short period of time and it did not appeal to me as an entire study site. I turned my attention back to a topic I had formulated in early 2000 while assisting with research on

an island offshore from Perth, Western Australia. Captivated by the beauty of Rottnest Island, yet equally conscious of the risks of mismanaging this distinctive place, I considered undertaking research on the management of islands offshore from Australian capital cities for my upcoming Honours research. However, I quickly realised that this subject matter was far too substantial for the ten-month Honours timeframe, and instead studied a selection of Hobart beaches from a coastal geomorphology perspective. However, the islands project remained in my mind and became my PhD topic four years later. Hence, in terms of reasons for writing dissertations, Bolker (1998: 4-5, 9) would say that I am one of “the lucky ones who have a burning question that they want to spend time answering ... some people seem always to have known what they want to write their dissertations about ... You follow your curiosity, and, if you’re lucky, your passion”.

PART I

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The island lay before their eyes like an unfolded map
(Verne, 1874-5: 119).

Residential and tourism developments affect places and people across the world – their sheer number, their scale and intensity, and their capacity to displace existing traditions, values and practices are especially problematic. In this work, I examine the particular impacts of such developments on islands, places where geography has created or otherwise influenced certain political, economic, environmental and social conditions. In broad terms, islands may include oceanic landforms and landforms on continental shelves. Some islands are extremely isolated from continental influences; others are subject to strong continental influences. The focus of this work is on islands near metropolitan centres which are readily accessible and thus subject to various development pressures¹ that may threaten ecological, social and economic well-being. In an era where the basic principles of sustainable development are now given, and the intrinsic value of place is acknowledged, for those who live on, govern or care for islands, such pressures are often understood (however partially) in terms of sustainability and in relation to their effects on what is known as sense of place.

This work is qualitative (the method of approach is documented in chapter two) and is in some ways an ‘anatomy of islomania²’, to borrow Durrell’s (1953) phrase. The research addresses three fundamental questions, formulated as hypotheses. The first is that islands

¹ “Those areas abutting urban regions often serve as their pleasure periphery, providing easily accessible, relatively unspoiled day and overnight outdoor recreation opportunities and short break escapes. These places have also become popular locations for holiday homes” (McKercher & Fu, 2005: 511).

² Durrell (1953) refers to ‘islomania’ as an affliction of spirit and he admitted to being an ‘islomane’, a person who finds islands irresistible.

produce a particular sense of being in place that forms one component of ‘islandness’³. The suffix *-ness* denotes a quality or condition (Oxford English Dictionary), and so islandness may be described as island qualities, including geographical, social and political elements. I elaborate on the concept of islandness in chapter three. The second hypothesis is that islandness is an important resource for island and other peoples as they attempt to grapple with the challenges of (sustainable) development because it ‘grounds’ them in the particularities of their circumstances. This discussion is expanded on in chapter four. The final hypothesis is that islandness may be diminished by residential and tourist developments, especially where these do not pay due heed either to the principles of sustainability or the specificities of island context. This hypothesis is examined in work spanning chapters five to nine. The significance of such potential loss of island qualities may lie in the observation that:

islands – *real* islands, real geographical entities – attract affection, loyalty, identification. And what do you get when you take a bounded geographical entity and add an investment of human attachment, loyalty and meaning? You get the phenomenon known as ‘place’. Islands are places – special places, paradigmatic places, topographies of meaning in which the qualities that construct place are dramatically distilled (Hay, 2006: 31).

Islands are, for example, well-known as settings for research on isolated flora, fauna and cultures (notably Darwin’s Galapagos and Mead’s Samoa). They have, in addition, strongly featured in fiction for many centuries, particularly since Robinson Crusoe’s (DeFoe, 1719) shipwreck on a remote island. In both cases – scientific and fictional alike – storytelling has been a significant element of how islands, islandness and their importance are conveyed. Islands have been treated as laboratories to test theoretical propositions in continental disciplines. Gillis (2004: 107) notes that “it was not that science was interested in the islands for themselves. The appeal of islands lay more in the fact that ... they would serve as easily comprehended stand-ins for the whole natural and human world”. For example, biogeographical studies on islands played a key role in evolutionary theory:

³ Islands and island people vary greatly but there are “similarities and common experiences which go far beyond their position as pieces of land surrounded by water” (Royle, 1989: 107). These similarities and experiences might be described as islandness.

An island is certainly an intrinsically appealing study object. It is simpler than a continent or an ocean, a visibly discrete object that can be labelled with a name and its resident populations identified thereby ... By their very multiplicity, and variation in shape, size, degree of isolation, and ecology, islands provide the necessary replications in natural “experiments” by which evolutionary hypotheses can be tested (MacArthur & Wilson, 1967: 3).

Whittaker (1998: 3) describes the central paradigm of island biogeography: “islands, being discrete, internally quantifiable, numerous, and varied entities, provide us with a suite of natural laboratories, from which the discerning natural scientist can make a selection that simplifies the complexity of the natural world, enabling theories of general importance to be developed and tested”. However, Greenhough (2006: 226) contends that “the laboratory-like simplicity of island spaces is deceptive because it fails to take account of the ... sea which actively interferes with the boundaries of island spaces”. Greenhough (2006) notes that the narrative of genetic homogeneity of Iceland’s population has been contested, particularly by social and historical accounts which question the isolation of Icelandic culture (considering the seafaring networks of the Vikings).

Considering the successes of using islands as natural laboratories, some researchers may be tempted to view islands as social laboratories and apply the natural template to the social world. Many studies of islanders revolve around anthropology and the study of non-Western cultures: “as a metaphor for closed cultural systems the ‘island’ has been central to anthropological theorising” (Peckham, 2003: 500). Long-term anthropological studies in small communities became the research norm, and Skinner (2002: 205) observes that “research on islands has continually engaged with continental thought, and is likely to continue to do so in the new millennium as debates move beyond tribal economics, kinship and salvage ethnography to studies of globalisation, post-colonialism and ‘movement’ in a new era caught between trade blocks and free trade agreements”. Skinner (2002: 209) considers that the island remains “a legitimate subject for social scrutiny, whether as conceptual device, as metaphor, or as social, economic or political distinctive location” and is well-suited for the extrapolation of in-depth data for generalisation and comparison.

Gillis (2004: 4) believes that islands have rarely been understood on their own terms because “they have occupied such a central place in the Western imagination ... As master symbols and metaphors for powerful mainland cultures, their own realities and consciousness have been more obscured than illuminated”. It is only in recent decades that academic interest has begun to focus on the claim that islands be studied on their own terms. Some suggest this interdisciplinary field be labelled *nissology* (Depraetere, 1990-1991). McCall (1994: 2) for example explains that because of “misunderstandings about islands and the lack of an organised body of knowledge suitable for islands, I propose the concept of “Nissology”, the study of islands on their own terms; the open and free inquiry into island-ness; and the promotion of international cooperation and networking amongst islands”. McCall (1997) later clarifies that the “their” in “on their own terms” refers not to the land itself, but to the inhabitants of those places – to islanders.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, others then suggest that islands might be viewed differently. Baldacchino (2004a: 278), for instance, has been a leading advocate of *island studies*:

Island Studies is not the mere study of events and phenomena on sites which happen to be islands ... Islands do not merely reproduce on a manageable scale the dynamics and processes that exist elsewhere. Islandness is an *intervening variable* that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways (emphasis added).

Further, Baldacchino (2006a: 9) asserts that:

The core of ‘island studies’ is the constitution of ‘islandness’ and its possible or plausible influence and impact on ecology, human/species behaviour and any of the areas handled by the traditional subject uni-disciplines (such as archaeology, economics or literature), subject multi-disciplines (such as political economy or biogeography) or policy foci/issues (such as governance, social capital, waste disposal, language extinction or sustainable tourism).

Rather than focusing on diametrical (island/continental) points of view of islands, it is important to consider islands as “part of complex and cross-cutting systems of regional and global interaction ... ‘island studies’ need/should not be focused only on islands

themselves, but also on relations between islands and mainlands” (Baldacchino, 2006a: 10). This research is positioned in the field of island studies, not nissology, as it considers islandness as an intervening variable.

Like geography, island studies has the scope to facilitate interdisciplinary research. Its scholarly base derives from a range of disciplines and its reputation has grown considerably over the past two decades. A number of seminars and international conferences now focus on islands in their own right (for example the International Small Islands Studies Association conferences, Islands of the World; the International Geographical Union’s Commission on Islands; and the International Conference on Small Island Cultures); several institutions encourage island networks (such as Global Islands Network); and there is now a journal dedicated solely to island studies (*Island Studies Journal*). Perhaps one reason for the recent scholarly uptake of island studies resonates with that of earlier research on islands: an island presents as a relatively simple study area to grasp because it is a discrete entity, as opposed to continental places where boundaries appear more arbitrary. In a study of island tourism and sustainability, Kokkranikal et al. (2003: 428) point out that the smaller size of islands “allows for detailed analysis of the sustainability issues, which may be problematic in the case of larger human settlements where it could be difficult to separate the effects of tourism from other aspects of human activities”. Islands provide valuable opportunities to explore human-environment relationships, as they allow for the concurrence of human boundaries and those of the natural (terrestrial) world.

Geographers have long sought to partition the world and people into various areas (Cook & Phillips, 2005). Islands are naturally partitioned and no doubt this forms part of their appeal to geographers. Islands may comprise several smaller units of place common to continents (for example, built environment, wetland, sandy coastline), and perhaps for this reason it is often the *entire island* which appeals to scholars as a study site because it (re)presents a whole, contained place that can be ‘grasped’:

because it is surrounded by water, an island is like a framed picture, appearing to its viewer as small but at the same time all the more comprehensible. The framing allows us the illusion that we know an island

more thoroughly, lending weight to the modern notion that it is through the small that we can understand the large (Gillis, 2004: 151).

Island categories

We live in a sea of islands (Hau'ofa, 1994) or a world of islands (Baldacchino, 2007a). Almost ten per cent of the world's population (approximately 600 million people) live on islands, which cover about seven per cent of the Earth's land surface (Baldacchino, 2007b). Islands can broadly be divided into two main categories based on their origin: oceanic and continental. Oceanic islands are those produced by volcanic activity (such as the Hawaiian islands) and continental islands are those that lie on the continental shelf of a continent (including islands as large as Greenland). Generally, continental islands are larger and older than oceanic islands (Nunn, 2007) and as they are a result of the relationship between sea and land, they depend on sea level for their status. Many were parts of continents in the past and, with sea level expected to rise in the future as a result of global warming, there is potential for loss of existing islands and creation of new ones from existing mainlands.

Islands can also be categorised based on other criteria: for example level of sovereignty or development (a category to which the United Nation's Division for Sustainable Development directs much attention is Small Island Developing States or SIDS). Island states are nation states containing one or a group of islands, while sub-national islands are those islands within nations, including continental nations, and they may be relatively proximate (such as Sicily) or distant (for example Tristan da Cunha). A sub-national entity generally refers to an administrative region within a country below that of the sovereign state, so it follows that sub-national islands have some form of administrative power below that of the sovereign state. Examples are Prince Edward Island (a province within Canada), the Isle of Man (a British Crown dependency) and Tasmania (a state within the Commonwealth of Australia).

Offshore islands are those islands situated close to a continental mainland (or to a larger island) and they are also known as coastal islands. Since offshore islands are usually

located on the periphery of a larger political unit based on a nearby mainland (Watson, I 1998), they are commonly considered appendages of mainlands. Theroux (1983: 77) likens them to wayward puzzle pieces: “Just under the irregular coast was the Isle of Wight, shaped like the loose puzzle-piece that most offshore islands resemble”. However, the number of offshore islanders is significant. It was estimated in 1989 that more than 34 million people inhabit offshore parts of mainland nations (Royle, 1989). In comparison to island nations, academics and institutions have directed limited attention to the study of offshore islands on their own terms. In Agenda 21 the United Nations (1992) recognises small islands as fragile ecosystems and acknowledges that, in addition to SIDS, islands which support small communities are special cases both for environment and development and have specific problems in planning sustainable development. However, the majority of work focuses on SIDS. Of the developed islands that are the subject of academic research, there tends to be an emphasis on nation states and warm island regions such as the Mediterranean. There has recently been rising interest in sub-national island jurisdictions or SNIJs (Baldacchino, 2004, 2006; Bartmann, 2006; Groome Wynne, 2007; Kelman et al., 2006; Stratford, 2006a). While this research is much needed, it largely ignores offshore islands that do not have autonomy.

Although those offshore islands close to metropolises are ‘under the noses’ of the many academics based in cities, there are significant gaps in research about them. For example, McKercher and Fu (2005) comment that much of the research on tourism and the periphery has focused on fringe destinations such as Pacific islands or rural communities; few studies have examined the periphery of existing destinations. While many offshore islands (particularly those near metropolitan centres) do not lack attention from the general public, they are perhaps the most neglected category of islands in a research sense. This lack of research may stem from the fact that many offshore islands are not considered isolated and hence not perceived as ‘exotic’. For example, Gillis (2004: 118) notes that in the field of anthropology, “as late as the 1990s the more distant and isolated the place, the greater the prestige it bestowed”. Ian Watson (1998: 133-4) considers the obscurity of offshore islands: “[they] are on the periphery of a larger landmass, can be considered culturally or geographically or geologically part of that landmass, are usually somehow subordinate or dependent to it, and collapse into that

landmass on a map which is highly generalized”. Perhaps offshore islands are not perceived as ‘different enough’ from their adjacent mainland to produce any great research insights. However, I consider that it is precisely *because* they can be so geologically, biologically and culturally similar to their adjacent mainlands that we can learn much about offshore islands, as these factors can be held constant to an extent; this constancy allows greater attention on islandness as an intervening variable.

Research setting

While offshore islands face many common problems due to their insularity and separation from mainlands, I want to hone in on particular issues facing islands offshore from metropolitan regions. Such places tend to attract large numbers of day and overnight visitors, many temporary (seasonal) and permanent residents, and are insidiously under pressure from a range of sources. While much of the island tourism literature focuses on the problems of remote islands in attracting tourists, the issue with offshore islands near metropolises may well be how to limit visitor (and resident) numbers in order to minimise environmental and social impacts. Brown (2006: 101) notes that community responses to land use and development decisions are often contingent on the type of development involved:

Whereas increased residential development often appears consistent with the prevailing human population growth paradigm, tourism-related development often lacks the same inevitability because of implied community choice regarding the type of economic development to be encouraged. Consequently, tourism-related development decisions can be particularly contentious because these are viewed as more discretionary and non-essential from a community perspective.

While many development pressures are common to offshore islands across the world, it is Australian offshore islands that I focus on. Australia, the world’s smallest continent, is a federation of six states, two major territories and several external island territories⁴. The Australian coastline extends for almost 60,000km and approximately 40 per cent of

⁴ The Australian Government also administers a mainland territory, Jervis Bay Territory, as a naval base and sea port for Canberra, the inland national capital; and the Australian Antarctic Territory.

this comprises island coastlines (Geoscience Australia, 2003). Its offshore islands vary in size, population, climatic conditions and natural resources, and experience various pressures, resulting in different types of environmental impacts. Considering that Australia has 8,222 islands (Geoscience Australia, 2004), there are many research opportunities around the continent, but I want to focus on those islands that are likely to experience significant development pressures: those near capital cities. The four offshore islands that form the central focus of this research are each within 120km of a capital city: Bruny Island off the island-state of Tasmania⁵; Rottnest Island in Western Australia; Phillip Island, part of Victoria; and Kangaroo Island, South Australia. These islands are located within the continental shelf (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1 Location of the case islands

Depraetere and Dahl (2007: 71) argue that proximity of islands to continents is an important geographic detail:

⁵ Tasmania is an archipelago of at least 334 islands.

for that purpose, a useful criterion is the coastal maritime zone legally defined as the territorial sea (12 nautical miles~22.2 km), which also corresponds to the distance from which the coast is visible at sea level ... This criterion defines two classes: the 'pericontinental' islands located within this continental coastal zone and subject to strong continental influences, and 'open ocean' islands distant from immediate continental areas.

All of my case studies are in this sense pericontinental islands – hence Rottnest Island, the furthest of the case islands from its mainland shore (18km), is visible from the coastline of suburban Perth (the capital city of Western Australia).

Australia is one of the world's most urbanised countries, with more than 85 per cent of its population living in major towns or cities. I chose to concentrate on islands near metropolitan regions in part because settlement in Australia is so heavily concentrated in these primary urban areas, which are sources of tourism and residential pressures. Hence, it is to be expected that islands near metropolitan regions generally experience changes more rapidly and on a scale greater than islands more remote from cities. Australia has a relatively mobile population and in recent years has been characterised as a 'sea change' society (Burnley & Murphy, 2004; Hamilton & Mail, 2003; Salt, 2004). Sea change describes a major lifestyle shift, often literally involving a move to the coast and it "has come to represent the wider social and environmental transformations resulting from rapid population growth and associated urbanisation within coastal areas" (Gurran & Blakely, 2007: 113). Salt (2004) argues that the sea change phenomenon represents a third Australian culture, following on from that of the city and the bush. In the past decade coastal migration has accelerated particularly in communities in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia that are within a three-hour drive of a capital city (Gurran et al. 2007). Coastal communities that are a similar distance from Brisbane and Sydney have experienced longer-term coastal migration over the past 30 years (Gurran et al. 2007). Although not included by Gurran et al. (2007) as significantly impacted by coastal migration, I frame coastal communities near Hobart, including Bruny Island, as places that will increasingly experience coastal migration within the next decade. Research on sea change tends to focus on mainland coasts but I will explore whether this phenomenon extends to the case islands.

Under the Australian Commonwealth Constitution of 1901, the Australian Government's legislative powers include taxation, defence, foreign affairs, and telecommunications services, while the States retain legislative power over a range of matters that occur within their borders, including police, hospitals, education and public transport. In addition to the States and Territories, Australia has a second tier of sub-national government: local government. Local government powers are not referred to in the Constitution; they are determined by state government legislation. Traditionally concerned with the 'three Rs', or rates, roads and rubbish, in recent times local governments have acquired a greater range of responsibilities, including environmental management and policy. While offshore islands are typically subordinate to or dependent on their mainlands, I do not refer to the case islands in this research as sub-national islands because this label implies some form of jurisdiction, which not all the cases possess. I refer to the case studies as 'offshore' islands because not all of them have autonomy at a local level. Most offshore islands in Australia come under the jurisdiction of a mainland local governing body (often called councils), but two of the case studies in this research are exceptions to this generalisation. Kangaroo Island has its own local government, Kangaroo Island Council, and Rottnest Island is managed by a Western Australian Government statutory authority. Both Bruny Island and Phillip Island have had their own councils in the past but were amalgamated with mainland councils in the 1990s. Given these jurisdictional matters, in this research I will also explore the relationships between mainlands and islands – since “to define something as an offshore island presupposes a mainland and an island which stand in a hierarchical relationship to each other” (Watson, I, 1998: 134) – and particularly between cities and islands.

In an international research context, Australia's offshore islands are perhaps overshadowed by their continent, because Australia is often categorised as an island. If any sub-national islands are cited, it is often only Tasmania⁶, although this relatively large island (68,300km²) can also be forgotten: Australia is “commonly imagined as a single landmass without its surrounding islands – as with the ready exclusion of Tasmania in representations of Australia” (McMahon, 2005: 2). In island tourism

⁶ Or perhaps Queensland's Fraser Island purely because it is the world's largest sand island.

studies, it is usually only tropical Queensland islands that are cited; less exotic locales tend to be ignored, despite their popularity as destinations.

Although comparative island studies are rare, Baldacchino (2004b: 270) suggests that “this research strategy contains enormous promise, now that it has appeared on the horizon of logistic and financial possibility”. Australian examples of comparative island research are few but a notable example is that by Hercock (1998) who examined the relationship between public policy and the environment on four islands offshore from Perth, Western Australia. However, Hercock’s is a local comparative study. By undertaking an interstate comparative study I can examine different state and local government positions on islands, especially in relation to tourism, residential development and environmental management – each tending to have multilateral and multi-jurisdictional importance.

Research questions and significance

The qualitative research reported in this work is the result of collection and analysis of narratives about the relationships between development and islandness with a view to testing the hypotheses noted at the beginning of this chapter. I use a sustainable development framework, encompassing economic, environmental, social and political components, to examine the effects of tourism and residential developments. While it is commonly argued that sustainable development is an over-used, ill-defined term difficult to apply in practice, I find the concept valuable: as Villamil (1977) points out, islands are highly integrated and sustainable development is premised on a strong commitment to the integration of decision-making about environmental, economic and social life (United Nations, 1992). Sustainable development is also based on an understanding of the intrinsic worth of non-human nature (Layard, 2001).

Several questions concern me about how communities and stakeholders of the four case islands experience, understand and manage residential and tourism developments. These are guiding questions and their treatment is implicit in the content of chapters five to

eight. How do such developments affect natural and social island values that are constitutive of islandness *per se*? How do the island communities and stakeholders gauge opportunities for, and challenges confronting, sustainable development? What roles do governments and local communities have in managing the four islands for sustainable development? These questions are explored through three major themes. The first is *island and islandness*. Exploring the case study islands and islands at an abstract level, I examine both their alluring and challenging characteristics (particularly in relation to their differences from mainlands generally and cities specifically). I focus on their appeal to long-term, new and temporary residents, and tourists; and the flipside: I address the difficulties associated with island life and challenges facing their tourism industries. Is the island distinct from its adjacent mainland as a function of islandness in a geographic sense? If so, what environmental, social and economic characteristics of the island differ from its mainland? Do residents use islandness to assert a distinct identity and to justify specific economic, social and political demands? I also examine the relationship between islands and metropolises: offshore islands are typically characterised as marginal or peripheral places, and cities as cores or centres. What is the relationship of each case island to its mainland capital city? Are there tensions between island life and desire for parity with mainlanders?

The second theme embraces two components: *tourism*, a key economic activity of each case island; and *residential development*, in Australia, subject to a ‘sea change’ phenomenon involving amenity migration⁷. In investigating this second theme, I examine the effects of tourism and residential developments on the natural and social values of the case islands. Do tourism and residential developments conflict with environmental management objectives or are there instances where they can lead to improved environmental outcomes? Does the influx of tourists and new residents (and associated developments) affect social values pertaining to the case islands, and if so, how?

The third theme is *governance for local sustainability* on the case islands, and it is significant because government bodies have vital roles in respect to managing change,

⁷ Amenity migration is the movement of people in search of a better lifestyle to attractive settings characterised by high natural amenity (Gurran et al. 2007).

including the impacts of tourism and residential development on natural and social values. I describe and evaluate the range of governance structures and systems that exist for the case islands, and establish whether state and local government legislation, and policy and planning initiatives take into account their special island characteristics. What jurisdiction is responsible for the island, and if this differed in the past, what was the reason for the change? For islands that are a part of mainland jurisdictions, are there any island-specific governance provisions? Are there tensions between autonomy and dependence on mainland jurisdictions? Do offshore islands need to be governed any differently from mainlands and should there be consistency between spatial and administrative boundaries? Since the four islands' state governments are based in the capital cities, I also explore their power and influence over island planning decisions. Considering the growing recognition of the importance of community participation in governance, I also assess the capacity of local communities to channel development to advance their visions for the island and to resist inappropriate developments. What are the roles of the local (and wider) communities in governing the islands for sustainability? Can offshore islands be models for local sustainability and community visioning⁸? For each case island, what are some constraints and opportunities for sustainable development?

Chapter nine revisits these three main themes in a comparative analysis of the four islands, and here I suggest some strategies to improve possibilities for sustainable development and for maintaining islandness. In chapter ten I conclude by presenting the main research findings, consider the limitations and significance of the study, and suggest further research opportunities. I also make recommendations for improved island management which are aimed at maintaining or enhancing islandness.

According to Baldacchino (2004: 280), the need for a coherent island studies has never been more pressing because “locality has come within global reach” and islands are faced with threats such as the global village, global warming, overpopulation and depopulation. In such light, this research is significant for a number of reasons. It

⁸ Community visioning may be defined as “a process by which a community envisions the future it wants, and plans how to achieve it” (Ames, 1993: 7). Ames (2001) also suggests that the term visioning derives from the conjunction of two words – vision and planning.

provides a detailed theoretical and empirical contribution to the field of island studies, particularly addressing the lack of comparative case studies. Considering the gaps on research about offshore islands (despite the range of development pressures they are facing) this research is timely and valuable in terms of furthering the understanding of Australian offshore islands.

The research has a broader significance beyond island studies; it also contributes to Australian tourism and environmental studies, and demonstrates the value of island case studies in local sustainability research. Considering the lack of academic (particularly qualitative) research in the policy arena, this research may prove useful: qualitative research can make a significant contribution to that arena. There are tensions between the long-term time frames of qualitative research and the relatively short time frames of policy formulation cycles (Rist, 2000), and quantitative ‘solid facts’ are no doubt easier to justify in policy development. However, “the utility of case research to practitioners and policy makers is in its extension of experience” (Stake, 2000: 449). This research also has a role in demonstrating the value of both qualitative research within the island studies discipline, and of presenting viewpoints of islanders and other island stakeholders (through the interview method) rather than only those of mainlanders researching islands.