

John Connell (2013). *Islands at Risk?: Environments, Economies and Contemporary Change*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. 368 pp. £96 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-78100-350-3

Islands at Risk? Environments, Economies and Contemporary Change by John Connell provides a wealth of information to readers on environmental and economic patterns of development in small islands and small island states (SISIs). In the Introduction, Connell lays out his goals for this book. The first goal is to examine the extent to which islands are particularly vulnerable; the second goal is to see whether this vulnerability is environmental, economic or social-political; and the last goal is to understand why and how islands and island states vary considerably. At the outset, Connell admits that in meeting the goals of the book he is limited by the absence of adequate data on SISIs. As a result, he uses a qualitative approach.

The first two chapters provide the reader with some context on the environment and development of the SISIs. Chapter 2 examines the basic structures of economic development and politics in SISIs and how they have developed in recent years given their isolation and fragmented locations. Most SISIs experience limitations to conventional economic development such as small populations, limited resources, remoteness, and fragile environments. These limitations have resulted in substantial emigration, which reduces the pool of qualified professionals. Due to these limitations, SISIs also have to rely on external institutions for key services. SISIs are considered to be patchwork economies that experience uneven development across different sectors and struggle to compete on a global level. While SISIs benefit from overseas aid and migrant remittances, this has not been able to compensate for the cumulative loss of potential workers or influence development. While the SISIs have political economies and bureaucratic systems in place, they are weak and have limited financial power, which contributes to political instability.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine how the once -ominant sources of livelihood (agriculture, forestry, and fisheries) have become marginalized and given way to modern economies. SISIs have moved toward what are considered to be 'new economies', which include 'modern' commercial agriculture and fishing, tourism, manufacturing, and other 'modern' activities. The shift toward a new economy provides income generation, diversification, and occupational multiplicity; however, the adoption of new versus old economies varies considerable across and within SISIs. Connell discusses the mixed success of modern economies that have helped transition SISI away from agriculture and fishing. We see that the tourism and service industries are proving difficult to maintain in various SISIs due to limited human and physical resources, inadequate infrastructures, high-energy costs, *etc.* Modern economies also have an impact on employment and incomes, wealth, and poverty. Unemployment and poverty have become especially evident in growing urban centers where income inequality, inadequate housing, and limited access to health care services and education are evident.

Chapters 5 to 8 account for the changes in population, urbanization, and environment experienced by SISIs. These chapters demonstrate the resilience of SISI residents. Connell

highlights that SISI populations are mobile, whether they migrate from rural to urban areas within the SISI or move to another country. This migration is said to be rarely absolute, ambivalent, or final (p. 261). While migration can disrupt some SISIs through brain and skills drain or by breaking people away from their culture, households stay together through technology, remittances, and return migration. Connell says that migration “both erodes and nourishes the fabric of society” (p. 181). The later chapters also highlight the ability of the SISI populations to adapt to environmental changes. Connell specifically looks at climate change, sea-level rise, coral reefs, cyclones, floods, drought, water, disease, biodiversity, and catastrophes such as volcanoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis. Environmental change is uncertain and can be extremely devastating to islands. However, SISI populations have been able to adapt to environmental changes because, for the most part, SISIs have always been fragile and exposed to various environmental threats.

Although the author mentions his limitations in the Introduction, his qualitative methodology is not clearly laid out. At times, the reader is unsure whether countries are being referenced due to convenient data or if they are actually within the same classification scheme. From the Introduction, it seemed as though there would be a classification scheme or schemes that would sort the small islands into manageable sets, however, there was no evidence of this in later chapters. Another weakness is that there are many generalizations of SISIs, where comparisons are made among the SISI but not rationalized or grounded in theory/data.

Despite these drawbacks, readers should come away with a greater understanding of the environmental, economic, and social-political issues that SISIs experience. In addition, readers should be able to see that the problems of SISIs are not unique to SISIs and the way that SISIs confront their issues is important at the global level. One of the strengths of this book is the bibliography. With at least 90 pages of references included in the bibliography, anyone interested in studying small island economies and societies will find a rich depository of literature to study. Overall, this book is a welcome resource to the literature on small island economies and societies. It contributes to extremely important and ongoing discussions.

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