

Managing Vulnerabilities of Small Island Heritage



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Executive Summary

This project investigated how small islands and their communities could achieve sustainability through managing vulnerabilities to their heritage. Three case studies were selected: Brownsea Island in southern England, the Faroe Islands in the North Sea, and Rathlin Island in Northern Ireland.

The field work yielded a three-level framework of (1) the fundamental ethos which should be adopted, (2) guiding principles for delineating an overall strategy needed to effect the ethos, and (3) operational manuals for carrying out the work. Limitations of the field work and this framework were also explored.

The fundamental ethos adopted is that managing vulnerabilities to heritage can and should be used to achieve sustainable communities. Small islands are particularly important for such work and they deserve much more prominence and resources than they traditionally receive.

Four guiding principles were proposed.

Guiding Principle 1: Taking or creating risk can be appropriate.

To achieve sustainability through managing vulnerabilities to small island heritage, investment might be needed initially. On Rathlin, the National Trust's choice to invest or not to invest could be the main determining factor in whether or not Rathlin becomes sustainable. Nonetheless, if investment is made, a small chance still exists that Rathlin livelihoods would not be sustained, even with the National Trust's expertise and clout. The investment might not yield the desired results, but the potential gain is so immense and the lessons learned would be so valuable irrespective of the outcome, that taking the risk would be worthwhile.

Guiding Principle 2: Heritage can build and sustain communities.

The National Trust can and should build and sustain communities. The National Trust implements this principle in many locations. Due to their importance and marginalisation, small islands should be a National Trust priority for such activities.

Guiding Principle 3: Be clear and honest about needs and capabilities.

Heritage sites and the National Trust cannot be everything to everyone. Such limitations should be clearly and openly acknowledged. For example, income from tourists is needed on the Faroes, but heritage sites might appeal to a limited clientele due to weather, remoteness, and required physical fitness. Nonetheless, marketing should be honest to attract the type of visitor who would enjoy and contribute to the Faroes. Knowing limitations and admitting them openly would help to develop viable plans and to suggest the other inputs which would be essential for success.

Guiding Principle 4: An all-vulnerability approach should be considered.

Specific vulnerabilities should be viewed in the wider, comprehensive context. All time and space scales, environmental and non-environmental vulnerabilities, and event-based and ongoing vulnerabilities should be considered along with possible combinations. An all-vulnerability approach is needed to avoid saving one heritage site at the cost of harming or losing the community.

All guiding principles should be operationalised to work in practice. Operational manuals are needed to describe what to do and how to do it. A general operational manual for managing vulnerabilities of small island heritage would be useful, but operational manuals could also be task-orientated or location-specific.

Based on the three-level framework, three recommendations were developed.

Recommendation 1: Support small island networks and networking.

Two island networks should be created: Islands of the National Trust (ISLANT) and Small Island Vulnerability Reduction (SILVR).

ISLANT would be a forum for stakeholders of the National Trust's small island properties. Education and exchange would be the primary activities.

SILVR would undertake proactive projects to reduce heritage vulnerability on small islands. Examples are restoring and managing heritage sites, training workshops, and

advocacy. Expanding beyond the National Trust would be needed for success, but the National Trust would be an excellent focal point and could become a leader in this area.

Recommendation 2: Create funds and fundraising drives for small islands.

The Neptune Coastline Campaign is being reviewed and relaunched. An opportune moment exists either to consider a separate fund for small islands or to earmark a set proportion of Neptune funds, perhaps 15%, for small island acquisitions and management.

Recommendation 3: Implement small island projects.

The Year of the Sea 2005 presents an opportunity to support projects specific to the small island theme. A starting point would be to found ISLANT and SILVR, followed by implementing the projects mentioned for these networks. The National Trust would gain substantially through becoming an island focal point, forging international linkages, generating positive publicity, and exchanging knowledge and skills.

Along with enacting these recommendations, more work is needed to reduce uncertainties and to confirm the pathway for success. Further theoretical work would help to better understand the concepts presented and the actions proposed plus their place in wider contexts. More practical work, such as through further exploration of the three case studies examined here, would help to focus solutions. Other appropriate case studies include Lundy Island in western England, the Finnish autonomous islands of Åland, and the British Overseas Territories including the Falklands.

This work has indicated that managing vulnerabilities of small island heritage can assist in building and sustaining small island communities. Active approaches for, and strong investment in, implementing this strategy for specific sites should be continued and expanded.

In island vulnerability lies island intrigue, but also allure, inspiration, beauty, hope, development, and sustainability. The opportunity exists now to lead the process of preserving, using, and promoting heritage on small islands for reducing vulnerability and for sustaining communities. That opportunity should be grasped.