

Technologies of agency and performance: Tasmania *Together* and the constitution of harmonious island identity

Elaine Stratford

*Sustainable Communities Research Group, School of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania,
Private Bag 78, Hobart TAS 7001, Australia*

Received 24 July 2002; received in revised form 1 March 2005

Abstract

Baldacchino [Baldacchino, G., 2002. Jurisdictional self-reliance for small island territories: considering the partition of Cyprus, *The Round Table*, 365, 349–360] has argued that the ‘troika’ of smallness, insularity and peripherality may incline island peoples (rather more than mainlanders?) to question the effects of economic globalization and be especially disposed to innovative approaches to development. He views jurisdictional capacity as integral to that task. Much of the literature on such issues relates to island nations, but this work focuses on Australia’s smallest and only island state of Tasmania, and thus on a sub-national jurisdiction. In what follows I explore the effects of an attempt to enrol Tasmanians in the creation and stabilization of a ‘2020 vision’ meant to be global in its reach, to focus on the particular strengths of the island state, and be innovative in advancing sustainable development. Known as *Tasmania Together*, the 20-year strategic vision outlines diverse economic, social and environmental goals assembled over two years via widespread consultations with the island’s communities of place and interest. For a time *Tasmania Together* generated significant debate about what it means to be an island people, and whether and to what extent Tasmanians’ future will be secured through economic globalization or localized endeavours premised on sustainability principles. Important to Tasmanians as well as to island studies, these rhetorics of social and spatial engagement also have salience beyond the borders of the island state, highlighting larger questions about the technologies of governmentality, agency and the performance of identity. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Governmentality; Actor networks; Sustainability; Economic globalization; Tasmania; Islands

1. Unfolding

Anyone who lives on an island knows there is a particular tension with that lifestyle. On the one hand, you are vulnerable and isolated on your rock in the sea, but on the other hand you are blissfully separate and insulated from the continental forces which can range from glaciers and mammoths to shopping malls and trans-Canada highways . . . You also are keenly aware of an island consciousness, a strategy for survival, that is different from the next island over and it defines

your way of life . . . From an evolutionary point of view, you have the sense that you are either going to be amongst the next to disappear off the face of the earth, or the only ones to survive (Anon., 2003).

1.1. *Of islands*

Islands are said to be places characterized by insularity and vulnerability (Crowards, 2004). Among their apparent problems are smallness of scale, dependence on limited natural resources and a narrow range of products and services, disadvantaged terms of trade, high transport costs, or reliance on outside authorities

E-mail address: elaine.stratford@utas.edu.au

(Briguglio, 1999; Dolman, 1985; King and Connell, 1999; Royle, 2001; Streeten, 1998). By the same token, islands have been constituted as places in which resourcefulness and innovation are hallmarks (Anckar, 2002; Armstrong and Read, 2003). These qualities are captured by Iceland's Prime Minister Oddsson who, when asked in 2001 of his nation's manifold successes, said that his people just kept forgetting how small their island was (Baldacchino and Milne, 2000). Whether vulnerable, resilient or paradoxically expressive of both conditions, islands are remarkable *qua* islands if one's focus includes questions of how we govern and are governed (Dean, 1999).

It is not simply the (quite variable) size of islands that matters here; an island is a specific physical entity; a literal category of morphology. In generic terms, it may be described as land surrounded by water and smaller than a continent. There are various sub-categories of islands: island continents, large islands, small islands, islets and isles. Powerful metaphors also circulate around the idea of an island. In Latin and French the term is associated with insularity but in Middle English, *ilandligland* means 'watery land', and may be indebted to the word *eyland* from the Old Norse (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2004). Watery lands are encircled and surrounded. Water separates island from mainland, sometimes bringing things from over the sea, sometimes acting as a buffer from offshore influences, always implying a state-of-being under constant negotiation.

It is possible to bridge islands, but this act may not render them something other than islands. Bridges can be fixed, as in tunnels, bridges, causeways and roads. They can be semi-fixed, as in information technologies or telecommunications. They can be mobile; in this sense, vessels of the air and sea are also bridges. These 'spans' may draw innovation to and from islands while increasing islands' exposure to accelerated ecological, economic and social changes. The ability to bridge them underscores their boundedness. In turn, this boundedness emphasizes that islands are different from mainlands. Islanders know that available resources are always limited, and may be defensive and eager to protect them or may seek to further their opportunities by engaging with those who are not of the island. In this regard, many island populations are internally fragmented by deep divisions about whether and to what extent they should conserve or develop those resources and engage in the processes of economic globalization. Debates about the salience of sustainable development or the more radically constituted idea of a praxis of sustainability are central to such divisions (Davidson, 1999; Dobson, 1996; Gibbs, 2000; Michael, 1995; O'Riordan, 1996; Redclift, 1987; Stratford and Jaskolski, 2004). Together, island/ness, economic globalization and sustainability form the meta-themes of this paper.

The creation of islands internal to the coastline may also be inscribed by topography, settlement patterns, locality and divergent manifestations of sense of place. Building bridges—that is, socio-spatial relations—in such contexts may be as challenging as building links to those places beyond the water/land interface that defines the island's physical form. In real and metaphoric terms, then, the shifting ontologies of islandness, and the variance of islands as topological and topographical categories¹ become central problems in how one might decipher the meaning and effects of boundaries and flows and, most fundamentally, of change (Stratford, 2003).

1.2. *Of the island state of Tasmania*

Australia is an archipelagic nation of many hundreds of islands, jurisdictionally disposed as several dependencies, two territories and six states. Creatures of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1901, each State and Territory has its own Constitution and laws, but may not raise forces or taxes nor coin money. In this most fundamental sense, each is dependent on the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, each is also active in the pursuit of trade and development in order to reap the real and apparent benefits of economic globalization through the use of natural and human capital. Some 256 km from the mainland, and itself an archipelago of over 334 'members' of varying size, Tasmania is the smallest, most peripheral and only island state in the federation of Australia. It has been typified as the basket-case of the nation for a long time and its people have faced numerous significant tests of economic and geopolitical development over the two hundred years since the island was colonized by the British. Among these challenges were a significant depression in the 1890s, and ongoing dependency on forestry, fishing, mining and agricultural production, each of which has been at the mercies of international market fluctuations and national and local political machinations.²

¹ For these insights, I am especially grateful to Andrew Harwood, Jeff Malpas and the late Bob White, whose discussions and unpublished paper on various commissions of inquiry and other interventions into the governance of Tasmania have been an important inspiration for parts of this paper (Harwood et al., 2001).

² Not least among these machinations were events in the lead-up to the 2004 Australian federal elections. Then leader of the Labor Opposition, Mark Latham, latterly promised Tasmanians a compensation package of AUSS800 million for the cessation of old-growth forestry, although the State Labor Premier, Paul Lennon refused to support the national leadership on this matter. Two marginal Labor seats in Bass and Braddon in Tasmania fell to the Liberal Government, which (despite an increase in the proportion of people voting for the Australian Greens) retained power after the election with an increased majority in the House of Assembly and a majority in the Senate for the first time in nearly three decades. Forestry will remain a vexed issue in Tasmania.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5075271>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5075271>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)