International actors as policymakers? Discussing the influence of international actors on the environmental policies of small island states.

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Abstract: The environmental discourse on small island states is structured around a set of geographical categories. Among these, the category of smallness reflects the assumption that such spaces are vulnerable on account of their reduced size, reinforcing an image of islands as 'prone' to environmental threats and in need of 'external support'. Such support is often provided by international actors, specifically international agencies, NGOs and sponsors, who consequently influence domestic policymaking processes. This paper offers a theoretical discussion of this influence in relation to environmental policies, drawing on concepts from the fields of international studies, development studies and island studies. I argue that the influence of international actors may be viewed as a form of leadership that is legitimised by the narrative of island vulnerability, the development paradigm, the authority attributed to reports and rankings, the symbolic functioning of global environmental threats and the over-use of geographical categories such as 'small' or 'developing'. In the second part of the paper, I propose four research questions for future studies on the political outputs of this influence in the Republic of Maldives: an icon of the environmental challenges threatening small island states.

Introduction

This paper offers a theoretical discussion of how the environmental policies of small island states may be influenced by international actors. Reading this influence from a geographical perspective, I survey the elements defining the contemporary scene, focusing on the connection between the geographical characteristics of Small Island States and the perceived legitimacy of international intervention. To this end, the paper draws together concepts from the fields of 'international relations' and 'development' (Ascher, 1983; Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986; Cox, 1996; Moravcsik, 1999; Mitchell, 2002; Ribeiro, 2005; Alvarez, 2007), as well as from studies on the environmental challenges faced by island spaces (Méheux, Dominey-Howes and Lloyd, 2007; Mercer et al., 2007; Tanner and Allouche, 2011; Grydehøj and Kelman, 2017). I conclude by proposing four research questions for future studies on the political and environmental outputs generated by this influence in the Maldives: an archipelago that is widely viewed as an icon of the battle against climate change and of the vulnerability of small island states and territories. Throughout the text, 'international actors' (henceforth abbreviated as IAs) are understood as a broad spectrum of private and public institutions, whose sphere of action is at the supranational level and that include international agencies and NGOs, as well as supranational networks, alliances or foundations. I focus here

on a specific type of small state: namely the Small Island State. However, at least part of my reflection on the influence of IAs may be extended to other small states and territories. Following Cox (1996) and Moravcsik (1999), I claim that the influence of IAs on Small Island States may be viewed as a form of leadership based on a specific set of narratives, actions, techniques and tools: the discourse on island vulnerability, the "vocabulary of global governance" (Siapno, 2004), the perceived authority of international reports and plans, the symbolic functioning of major environmental threats at the global level and finally the persistent use of geographical adjectives such as 'marginal', 'peripheral', or 'developing'.

Island Studies, as an interdisciplinary field, explores a set of spatial categories (smallness, remoteness, location, fragmentation and uniqueness) that define the geography of islands in both scientific discourse and popular culture (Trablesi, 2005; Hay, 2006; Baldacchino, 2008, 2012, 2013; Taglioni, 2011; Grydehøj, 2017). In this context, 'geographies of smallness' have been found to act as a powerful cyclic metaphor for island spaces. Consistently describing islands as small bounded places, together with the use of 'micro' and 'local' as prefixes, emphasizes the uniqueness of their social and environmental ecosystems and implies their dependency on mainland or terrestrial spaces, resources and development paradigms.

This is not merely a superimposed label. Rather, as pointed out by Baldacchino, "some small states, particularly the ones grouped under the UN SIDS [Small Island Developing States] umbrella, have tended to brandish their smallness as a bargaining chip, arguing that their size renders them especially vulnerable" (2012, p. 15). At the same time, this metaphor (of small and dependent places) has acquired a key function as the 'tag' used to identify islands as political actors on the contemporary scene. The main example of this phenomenon is the acronym SIDS, internationally adopted to refer to a large number of archipelagic and insular spaces under a single label. In recent decades, the SIDS 'tag' has played a leading role, both in terms of organising representation for this group of islands on the international chessboard and in terms of defining the 'geographical taxonomy' of insularity. However, in relation to the theme of the current article, the use of the SIDS acronym as a descriptive category is problematic in two ways. First, it ignores the distinction between states and 'non-states' (territories, jurisdictions, regions, protectorates), although worldwide the political status of many islands comes under the latter heading. Second, it is underpinned by the "paradigm of development", reinforcing – as earlier stated – an image of islands as economically and politically dependent on the mainland or on the support of supranational organisations and networks.

Following the work of scholars who have critiqued the SIDS label for these two reasons (Taglioni, 2011; Baldacchino, 2012), I adopt the alternative category of *small island spaces* (henceforth SIS), viewing it as more inclusive and more suited to fostering a geographic perspective on my topics of discussion. Nonetheless, in the final part of the paper, I specifically focus on the case of an archipelagic state, namely the Republic of Maldives.

Environmental challenge, crisis or change?

In recent decades, at least since the *UN Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of SIDS* held in Barbados in 1994 and, more actively, since the 2009 *15th Conference of the Parties* within the UNFCCC (COP 15) in Copenhagen, SIS have been positioned "under the spotlight" of global environmental discourse. Furthermore, 2014 was declared *International Year of Small Island Developing States* and the 2017 *23rd Conference of the Parties* (COP 23) in Bonn, Germany, was chaired by a member of the Alliance of Small

Island States (AOSIS): the Republic of Fiji. Throughout the period in question, AOSIS has acted as one of the bodies representing this complex group of varied political status. This body's key aim is to raise awareness, at both the community and political levels, of the chronic 'fragility' of small islands, as places affected by both ongoing environmental stressors (such as the consequences of climate change) and large-scale events (such as tsunamis, cyclones, or coastal flooding). As scholars from a diversity of perspectives have pointed out (Baldacchino, 2013; Baldacchino and Niles, 2011; Kelman, 2014; Moore, 2010; Méheux, Dominey-Howes and Lloyd, 2007), this awareness-raising campaign relies on a narrative emphasizing the *vulnerability* of islands, which is presented as a geographical feature and defining characteristic of insular places and social systems and linked to the so-called *global environmental crisis*, in terms of the multiple levels of threat posed to 'vulnerable' areas by climate change.

Vulnerability is a complex concept that encompasses a wide spectrum of social, economic, cultural and environmental components (Lewis, 1999; Baldacchino, 2012; Bankoff, 2001; Kelman, Gaillard and Mercer, 2015; Mercer, et al., 2007). Experts on vulnerability call for a science-based and multidisciplinary approach to the use of this construct within the environmental discourse, emphasizing that, at the political level, it is often assumed to be a factual chronic condition of geographical sites: especially small, marginal, peripheral and insular ones.

The correlation between vulnerability and environmental threat rests on the combination of a set of geographic conditions – which are taken for granted, 'reified' and defined by the earlier-mentioned categories of smallness, remoteness, isolation and uniqueness – with the powerful image of the global environmental crisis, leading to islands being framed as sites in need of supra-local and external assistance (Baldacchino, 2013).

This correlation must be critically re-read, however. One aspect that deserves special attention is the prominence of climate change and large-scale events and catastrophes in the environmental discourse on SIS.

The response to climate change and large-scale disasters is just one of the dimensions defining the relationship between environmental and social systems in island regions. Kelman, Gaillard and Mercer have reminded us that "the most prominent or fundamental development challenges are neither climate change nor globalisation" (2015, p. 23). Socio-environmental relations interact with a processual (dynamic and constantly changing) network of cultures, ecologies, knowledge, policies and practices. The dominance of climate change and environmental crisis in the discourse on SIS, often leads to this complexity being overlooked. Vice versa, a procedural perspective might help us to focus on coping strategies and on the constantly evolving set of resilient practices, structures, or adjustments that define socio-environmental interaction. Furthermore, a procedural perspective reads socio-environmental relations as mutually transformative processes. Change is the basic category required to understand these processes. Let us consider, for instance, 'transitional spaces' such as lagoons, harbours, seagrass meadows or mangroves which characterise the coastal geography of many islands worldwide. These places evoke the mutual and cyclic relationship between terrestrial and marine spaces, between human activity and environmental phenomena, offering a prime example of the interaction between society and the environment. One useful way of thinking about this is Gillis' description of small islands as 'ecotones':

An ecotone is a place where two ecosystems connect and create a unique environment different from both … islands, especially smaller ones, are dominated by the ecotone where land meets sea (Gillis, 2014, p. 155).

Thus, adopting a procedural perspective is key to understanding the human ecologies of small islands and the responses activated by local systems to deal with environmental challenges. "Social organisations are open systems" (Aguirre, 2007, p. 41) and their relationship with the environment is characterised by continuous "change". Furthermore:

> … sometimes it is important to simply show the island as it is, with the reality of the changes being represented as just that; changes without judgment. These changes might be interpreted externally as 'catastrophe' while being accepted internally as one more major set of changes within a millennia-long history of change (Kelman, 2014, p. 133).

The dominant construct of vulnerability to climate change gives rise to another key outcome, which we might describe as the 'external support' paradigm. As argued by Scheyvens and Momsen, narratives of global environmental threat suggest that "island peoples are unskilled and lack resources and that their islands are 'tiny' and 'fragile'; [it follows that these narratives] can undermine [the islanders'] pride and stifle their initiative, reducing their ability to act with autonomy to determine and achieve their own developmental goal" (2008, p. 491). Furthermore, Baldacchino (2013) has observed that this image is frequently in contrast with the impressive quality of life, cultural richness and environmental heritage of small island places.

Islands' level of exposure to threat is defined, in reports, plans and the scientific literature, in terms of a set of "characteristics contributing to their vulnerability" (Méheux, Dominey-Howes and Lloyd, 2007, p. 434). Thus, SIS are viewed as characterized by: susceptibility to disasters; small physical dimensions; a limited set of natural resources; poorly developed infrastructures; strong dependence on marine environments; and ecological fragility. They are presented, *de facto*, as places that are 'prone' to being struck by adverse environmental events and particularly vulnerable to threat (*ibid.*). An interesting field of inquiry is an analysis of the process by which this image is created through the language of the public discourse around global threads (Ross, 1991; Hulme 2008). More recently, Arnall, Kothari and Kelman (2014, p. 98) view this analysis as belonging to "the politics of climate change, defining the "climate change phenomenon as a discursive concept operating across international, national and sub-national scales". However, even more relevant to our purposes here, are the geographical consequences of the 'external support' paradigm: namely, the association between island regions and peripheral areas and the positioning of the environmental crisis at the forefront of political agendas in SIS.

The fragility of insular regions faced with large-magnitude events, the vulnerability of islands threatened by ongoing environmental hazards and their chronic status as peripheral regions: this is a geographical narrative dominated by chronic crisis; it justifies the need for ongoing external support. This, in turn, reinforces the influence of non-state agencies, or IAs, on supra-national and national environmental policies, agendas and masterplans. In other words, it marks out the stage IAs act on. In the following sections, I examine this influence in greater detail.

International actors as policymakers?

In 1986, Kratochwil and Ruggie conducted a review of the literature on international organisations, which they classified as a "field of studies". Among the key themes defining this field, they listed the debate concerning the role to be played by these organisations: specifically, "the potential roles of international organisations in a broadly conceived process of international governance" (1986, p. 756). These authors' understanding of the term "international organisation" is close to the definition of IA adopted in this paper. According to Moravcsik (1999), the involvement of IAs in regional or intra-national negotiations on environmental policies, agendas and protection laws is a clear example of this role.

According to Alvarez (2007), international organisations act as "lawmakers" in the areas of the environment and development. His reasons for arguing this include: (1) the recognition of IAs (organisations, NGOs, networks, agencies) as legitimate participants in negotiation processes at the national or regional scales; (2) the advisory function that is often attributed to IAs in the preliminary stages of setting national political agendas; (3) their ownership and management of information through reports, documents and databases; (4) their power to manage funding, grants and support mechanisms; and (5) finally, the authoritative role held by international 'civil servants' within local and national administrative or consultative bodies. Thus, Alvarez posited the existence of:

> a new category of actor on the world scene: international civil servants. These new non-state actors owe their power to their titles and function, whether we call them 'secretary general', 'U.N. expert', or 'special rapporteur', or 'international judge'. Their capacity to act and their legitimacy as actors stem from the fact that they are agents of neutrality or of centralisation (2007, p. 597).

Hence, IAs play a key role because they are recognized as legitimate partners in negotiation processes and because they have access to and manage information. For Alvarez (2007) then, IAs crucially act through their 'civil servants' to influence the environmental agendas of local governments, thanks to the perception that they are "agents of neutrality or of centralisation". Moravcsik (1999), on his part, framed the role of IAs within "multilateral negotiation" as one of leadership. In describing the role of supranational institutions, he claimed that "they exercise 'leadership' rather than formal power. In short, they are 'informal' political entrepreneurs" (1999, p. 268). He backed up this argument by quoting Cox's statement that "the quality of executive leadership may prove to be the most critical single determinant of the growth in scope and authority of international organisations" (1996, p. 317).

According to all these readings, the influence of IAs relies on political acknowledgement of their leadership; furthermore, contemporary IAs enjoy a position of authority by virtue of their role as managers (and disseminators) of information and environmental data. This alone guarantees them a prominent role in consultation, negotiation and financial support processes and the defining of political agendas. They are leaders, agents of negotiation, sponsors and consultative authorities. Such is the role they play within local and national governance. They set priorities, provide support in post-disaster recovery scenarios, advise on the implementation of infrastructure or mitigation measures, validate the criteria for biodiversity or species protection, sponsor national heritage schemes, support programmes selected following international criteria and lead negotiation processes. In so doing, they strongly influence future environmental policies and strategies. For these reasons, IAs may be defined as 'policymakers'.

Ribeiro (2005, p. 3) contributed to the debate on the influence of IAs on development polices and strategies, claiming that "the development field is constituted by such actors as those representing various segments of local populations; private entrepreneurs; officials and

politicians at all levels of government; personnel of national, international and transnational corporations; and staff of international development organisations". He goes on to flesh out this picture by adding "various types of governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), churches, unions, multilateral agencies" (*ibid.*). In his view, the leadership of the IAs is strengthened by the creation of networks (which he understands as trans-scalar networks) between institutions, organisations, public and private entities. Building a network is a process of institutionalisation; it is the stage on which IAs will then be legitimated to play an active part in decision-making process. Ribeiro argued that: "when networks reach a point where they have well-defined lasting interests and goals, they tend to become institutions [that] are crystallisations of networks that have clear-cut projects in sight" (2005, p. 5). Labelling the contemporary era as the "age of International Organisations", Alvarez focused on one specific type of linkage within these networks: the mutual relationships between global NGOs on the one hand and transnational agencies or organisations (like the UN and its agencies) on the other:

> … although some describe International Organisations (below cited as IOs) and NGOs as competitors, they are in many respects in symbiotic relationships. These actors need each other. IOs have enhanced the normative impact of NGOs by granting them observer or consultative status, access to documents … IOs have empowered NGOs; and NGOs, to that extent, have increased the legitimacy of IOs (Alvarez, 2007, p. 597).

Although the mechanisms underlying international networks are not our main focus here, some aspects should be noted in passing. The influence of IAs across a diversity of fields, apart from development and environmental policies, is based on a recognition of their 'consultative status', their management of funds, grants and information, and their capacity to set priorities and define areas of intervention. This status is maintained via two lines of action: the construction of a repertoire of data and information – concerning social, environmental, economic or geographic features – that defines which settings are in need of help, namely the arenas where 'the external support' is needed; and the development of a lexicon that translates this support into a normative apparatus.

Moore (2010) discussed the first of these lines of action, pointing out the power of the reports, datasets, statements and reviews. We can extend this analysis to the entire body of data and information periodically published and disseminated by international agencies, NGOs, networks and alliances. Within this corpus, rankings play a key role: they classify geographical entities (cities, states, islands, regions) in terms of economic, social and cultural markers, thereby creating a hierarchy, adopting inclusion and exclusion criteria and, above all, reinforcing the 'external support' paradigm.

The power of this mechanism lies both in the political and scientific consensus attributed to these rankings and in their use to inform the distribution of international grant funding and sponsorship. It is underpinned by the normative force of a technical lexicon. Critically reading the recovery process after the 2004 tsunami in the Maldives, Fulu (2007) provided a clear example of the power such vocabularies enjoy in SIS. She examined "the initial response by national and international agencies to gender issues during the aftermath of the Maldives tsunami, arguing that it was, in general, inadequate" (Fulu, 2007, p. 843). According to Fulu, during the initial post-disaster governance phase, IAs adopted universal categories and standardised vocabularies. These categories constitute the lexicon of international environmental and development agendas. She compared the universality of these

categories with the country's internal social context, observing a large gap. In relation to the *a priori* use of the 'vocabulary of development', she commented that:

> in the context of the Maldives tsunami, the multitude of foreign experts from international agencies spoke extensively about 'gender', 'community consultation', 'participation', women's empowerment', 'ownership' and other such development catch phrases … the Maldives does not have a history of 'community participation' in large-scale development programmes ... Decision making tends to be centralised in Malé … they [atoll chiefs] are accountable to those in power and not necessarily answerable to the community (2007, p. 857).

The distance between local contexts and universal categories has also been raised by Weichselgartner and Kelman (2015). In their critical work on the construct of resilience and its role in environmental plans and policies, they have suggested that: "the current transition of resilience from a descriptive concept to a normative agenda provides both challenges to overcome and opportunities to take up, by ensuring that both are balanced and support each other in practical implementation of resilience approaches" (2015, p. 262). They advocate a perspective that acknowledges the differences among diverse socio-environmental and geographical contexts. In contrast, the universal lexicon read by Fulu at the intranational scale acts, worldwide, as a "vocabulary of global governance" (Siapno, 2004), based on the perceived authority of reports and plans, the symbolic functioning of popular labels, the standardisation of methods and interventions, and the construction of geographical categories such as 'marginal', 'peripheral' or 'developing'.

Policymakers? Four 'drivers of influence'

Some of issues discussed above had already been identified by Ascher in the early 1980s. In his work on the organisational behaviour of international financial agencies (applied to the case of the World Bank), he studied the mechanism that legitimised their intervention in national policies, linking it to their control of funding and the dominance of the development paradigm (Ascher, 1983). The argument that I am about to present posits similar links to those observed by Asher. There is a need for in-depth inquiry into the significant influence of IAs on the environmental policies of SIS. The aim of such research would be to investigate the levels at which the connections among the legitimisation of leadership, ownership of information and development discourses come into play. As a first step towards implementing this research plan, I have identified four 'drivers of influence' characterising the action of IAs on national environmental agendas.

(1) Trends, threats and challenges

As previously pointed out, the perceived legitimacy of involving external actors in SIS's environmental policies is closely related to the image of the islands as vulnerable places. Vulnerability is presented both as local systems' level of exposure to risk and their ineffectiveness in adjusting to environmental challenges. Island regions are presented as 'in need of external support' because they face multiple environmental challenges and threats – the environmental effects of globalisation, fish stock crises, dependence on fossil fuels, the acidification of oceans – that exceed local or national governments' capacity to respond. Through the reports and documents periodically produced by IAs, these challenges and threats become the key points determining the priorities of policymaking. This approach is illustrated in the recent *The urgency of now: AOSIS Declaration of Action* published by AOSIS after COP23:

Noting the particular vulnerability of SIDS to the impacts of climate change.

Concerned by the devastation already inflicted on SIDS by climate change impacts at current levels of warming, including intensifying extreme weather events, sea level rise, and ocean acidification.

Alarmed by the clear scientific evidence that, unless warming is kept below 1.5°C, SIDS will face further intolerable and existential threats (AOSIS, 2017).

(2) Symbolic places and symbolic events

Places affected by extreme events act as symbols in the construction of personal and collective geographies (Kasperson and Kasperson, 1996; Flynn, Slovic and Kunreuther, 2001). A specific risk is recalled, communicated and, in some cases, used as an example by referring to its date or venue (think 9/11, Bhopal or Chernobyl). The implications of this mechanism, above all of communication management, in the political and social spheres have been discussed, in several fields of risk studies (Anderson, 1970, Dynes and Quarantelli, 1976; Comfort, 2007; Johnson, Tunstall and Penning-Roswell, 2005). Extreme events often act as "catalysts of change", a definition that underlines the symbolic force of a high-impact event in driving subsequent political agendas. Furthermore, such events often reinforce the 'need for external support', with aid being requested by the affected regions, not just as an emergency measure, but on a chronic basis. In the Maldives (Republic of Maldives, 2005; Fulu, 2007) and across the Indian Ocean region, the 2004 'Boxing Day' tsunami has functioned both as a public event influencing personal and collective geographies and as a driver legitimising the action of IAs and supranational institutions. The early stages of this process were documented by Fulu. She claimed that, although "the Maldives did not face the same inundation of INGOs that Sri Lanka experienced, there was a 'wave' of international emergency experts who, with their specialised technical knowledge, were considered particularly well placed to solve the problems of the tsunami" (2007, p. 856). More recently, to cite again the 2017 AOSIS *Declaration*, the symbolic force and material impact of major events have been reminded to recall "… the urgency for action, brought into focus by the unprecedented impacts of the 2017 hurricane season in the Caribbean … We further reiterate the urgent need for accelerating action on the climate agenda" (AOSIS, 2017).

(3) Inclusion/exclusion: unequal geographies

Article 9 of the UNFCCC *Paris Agreement* states:

the institutions serving this Agreement, including the operating entities of the Financial Mechanism of the Convention, shall aim to ensure efficient access to financial resources through simplified approval procedures and enhanced readiness support for developing country parties, in particular for the least developed countries and small island developing states, in the context of their national climate strategies and plans (UNFCCC, 2015, p. 14).

Leaving aside the lexicon used here, which again invokes the 'development paradigm', this statement addresses a key point, which is access to funding. There are large differences in access to finance from region to region, and country to country, and even at the intranational

scale. Managing the procedures (calls, prizes, awards, sponsorships and programmes) that determine the accessibility criteria implies taking responsibility for inequality – in terms of the opportunity to implement environmental policies (such as risk mitigation policies, sustainability education, or even infrastructure planning) – between regions (cities or urban areas) that succeed in obtaining a grant, and those that do not have such financial support available to them. In other words, the ownership of grants and funds, and the setting of criteria and indicators for evaluating project proposals, is a matter of power.

(4) Dialectics

The reports, rankings and plans produced by the IAs act as 'a vocabulary of power' within the policymaking of small states, generating a dialectics that govern the implementation of policies at the national or local level (Fulu, 2007; Scheyvens and Momsen, 2008; Siapno, 2004; Weichselgartner and Kelman, 2015). When it comes to environmental policy, these dialectics are so powerful that they may be identified at several levels of the implementation processes: top-down versus bottom-up approaches to defining local policies; infrastructural measures versus participatory projects; mitigation versus adaptation strategies; and, at the theoretical level, frameworks of vulnerability versus frameworks of resilience. Such is the legacy of the vocabulary of development to national and local environmental policies. Recomposing these dualities should be continued, building on the long-standing work which exists, for more urgent inquiry.

The Maldives: setting a research agenda

Due to its geographical and geomorphological features, the Republic of Maldives is internationally viewed as one of the countries that are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. This image has partly been constructed by a corpus of reports, plans, outlooks and documents disseminated by IAs (Scheyvens and Momsen, 2008; Moore, 2010; UNDP, 2010; Kelman, 2014). At the same time, national environmental policy has been strongly influenced by the 'Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation paradigm' (Malatesta and Schmidt di Friedberg, 2017). In 2015, Minister Thoriq Ibrahim, in his introductory remarks to the *Climate Change Policy Framework,* clearly confirmed the state's commitment to the national and international climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies that have underpinned governmental policies in recent decades (Ministry of Environment and Energy, 2015). In October 2016, he reinforced this claim in his *Foreword* to the *Second National Communication of Maldives to the UNFCCC* (Ministry of Environment and Energy, 2016).

These trends have generated a significant outcome. The Maldives are presented as a symbol of the urgency for small island states to adapt to climate change. A vulnerable archipelago facing a series of threats stemming from climate change at the regional scale (rising sea levels, coastal erosion, acidification of the oceans):

> Maldives is one of the lowest lying island nations in the world. Climate change poses serious challenges to our development on multiple fronts. Our geography, developmental challenges and the narrow economy are aggravating the issue further (Ministry of Environment and Energy, 2016, p. v).

Given this background, it is clear that the Maldives offer a particularly favourable political context for some of the issues discussed in this paper: notably, the use of vulnerability as a key category for defining SIS, the power of the 'external support' paradigm and the legitimisation of IAs as leading backers to environmental and development strategies.

I now outline four key research questions, and the arguments supporting them, which are drawn from a preliminary analysis of the Maldivian context. They are also informed by the points discussed earlier in the paper, especially the four drivers listed in the previous paragraph and are backed up by a preliminary literature and documentary review. They are intended to compose a draft agenda for future research on the environmental policies of SIS.

This review (conducted in 2017) unfolded in three stages: (1) collection (2) organisation and (3) content analysis of textual documents produced (since 2005, the year after the tsunami) by nine IAs: the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF), International Red Crescent, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the World Bank. In the Maldives, these nine IAs promote (and provide the support to) both environmental and development strategies and plans. According to the literature (Pardasani, 2006; Carlsen and Hughes, 2007¸ Fulu, 2007), 2005 was a pivotal year for the Maldives with respect to development strategies, tourism policies, environmental restoration and implementation of local plans.

Table 1: Synthetic overview of document organisation.

Category	Document Type	No. of Documents	IA
Programmes and Plans	Backgrounds; Introductions; Projects; Frameworks; Missions; Newsletters; Action Plans	32	GCF; GEF; International Red Crescent; IUCN; UNFCCC; UNDP; World Bank
Overviews and Reports	Minutes; Assessments; Evaluations; Notes; Success-Stories; Facts; Statistics; Case Studies; Country Profiles	30	FAO; GEF; International Red Crescent; IUCN; UNDP; UNEP; World Bank
Grants and Funding	Call for Applications; Funding Programs; Call for Grants	12	FAO; GCF; UNDP; World Bank
Awareness and Education	Leaflets; Brochures; Newsletters; Posters; Requests for Proposals; Success-Stories	21	FAO; International Red Crescent; IUCN; UNDP

Source: Stefano Malatesta (2017)

The data corpus has been selected following one criterion: the explicit reference – within texts, titles or aims – to the keywords of the 'vocabulary of development' above mentioned: climate change, resilience, vulnerability, adaptation, mitigation, development and participatory projects. I organised the resulting list, consisting of approximatively one hundred

documents, into four categories: programs and plans; overviews and reports; grants and funding; awareness and education (Table 1).

Research Question (1): May we attribute IAs with a leadership role in defining national environmental policies? This is the first point of discussion. Preliminary analysis of the available documents and an initial reading of the case through the theoretical lens articulated in this paper, suggest the key importance of the support given by external agencies, actors and sponsors in the fields of environmental policy and climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Research Question (2): How much has the recovery process since the 2004 tsunami contributed to the institutionalisation of support from IAs? As previously pointed out, the literature on hazards suggest that major disasters act as drivers, or catalysts, of political and management changes. Studies of the political processes activated during, and immediately after, the post-disaster phase have identified an influx of international emergency experts and agencies (Pardasani, 2006; Fulu, 2007), noting the legacy of this dramatic event in terms of environmental governance (Republic of Maldives, 2005). This research question asks whether this process has acted to consolidate the institutionalisation of support from IAs.

Research Question (3): To what extent has the leadership of IAs reinforced the predominance of the climate change adaptation and mitigation paradigm at the national level? The lead taken by the Maldives AOSIS' actions against the effects of climate change and the archipelago's international image as the 'most vulnerable country' to climate change in the world, have reinforced the external support narrative and vice versa. This mutual relationship offers a key focus for further investigation into the role of IAs as policymakers.

Research Question (4): Is the local dimension being overlooked in favour of national (or supra-regional) scale programmes? Geographers have pointed out that the implementation of environmental policies must go hand in hand with a place-based approach (Hewitt and Burton, 1971; Kates, 1971; Kates and Wilbanks, 2003). Studying socio-environmental interaction at the local scale implies advancing our understanding of the complex set of practices, technologies, knowledge and strategies adopted by local communities. Therefore, especially in the case of island regions, it is appropriate to ask whether the interventions of IAs fit with the kaleidoscopic geography shaping socio-environmental interaction at the local and supra-local scales.

Conclusion: dealing with broader questions

This paper presents the theoretical framework that could guide future research on the environmental geography of the Maldives archipelago. Clearly, the proposed research questions are not exhaustive, given the complexity of SIS environmental policies. Furthermore, choosing to focus on the role of the development paradigm in the environmental discourse on SIS and on the influence of IAs in national environmental policies omits key broader questions concerning, for example, jurisdiction and the political geography of small states and territories.

However, the primary aim of this work is to capture how the geographical categories attributed to SIS reinforce a mechanism of dependence between island regions and supranational bodies. The often-assumed reliance of islands on mainland regions can be interpreted as a 'condition' defining the discourse on insularity, and, above all, as a legacy of colonialism. In the contemporary scenario, we may plausibly claim that IAs are powerful key players operating alongside states and mainland regions. In some cases, they can allocate more

financial resources and provide better strategic supports than SIS. They maintain a leadership role based on control over information, financial support mechanisms and influence in specific areas of policymaking.

Many studies have attempted to recompose the dialectics emerging – within the policymaking of small states – from the fields of environmental and development studies. In particular, they have addressed the "dialectic duality" (Aguirre, 2007, p. 39) between local knowledge and top-down views (Cronin et al., 2004; Mercer et al., 2007) and between vulnerability and resilience (Aguirre, 2007; Kelman, Gaillard and Mercer, 2015). These concerns are relevant, while leading on to broader questions. The study of environmental policies in SIS should be guided by an understanding of the roles of the different actors (local, national, supranational) in environmental governance. In other words, we need to consider the differences and inequalities emerging among local settings, adopting a place-based approach aimed at including all social actors and preventing any one individual paradigm from dominating. Despite global discourse on the environmental crisis, inequality, power and locality continue to matter. As Kelman, Gaillard and Mercer (2015, p. 23) have pointed out:

> the history of and the literature from vulnerability and resilience research and on-the-ground practice … has highlighted 'multiple exposure'. Climate change, globalisation, poverty, earthquakes, injustice, tropical cyclones, lack of livelihood opportunities, inequity, landslides, … often converge to most affect those who have the fewest options and resources for dealing with those challenges. Consequently, those with the fewest options and resources tend to be the most vulnerable.

Disclaimer

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