

SCELG DIALOGUE

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Islands, land of innovative solutions for all territories

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I would like to thank Nicola Crook and Julie Gibson for their assistance in the preparation of this policy brief.

Islands and innovation

The title of this policy brief is also the title of the second International Conference on Climate Change Adaptation organized by the government of the Reunion Island in partnership with the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development, which was held in Saint Denis, Reunion Islands, on 5 and 6 October 2017, which I had the pleasure to attend and contribute thereto.

In my presentation at the conference, and in this policy brief, I explore how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the spirit behind them are captured in innovative island policy. The experience of the Åland Islands in Finland and of Scotland islands will be used to showcase two examples of this policy innovation.

The Sustainable Development Goals and their spirit

Countries have up to 2030 to implement and meet the SDGs. This will not be an easy task considering that the SDGs include 17 goals, 179 targets and an even larger number of indicators. The capacity of States will be tested to their limits not only in their reporting abilities and overall implementation strategies, but also in understanding that implementing the SDGs is not a mere tick box exercise. However, to understand

this, countries and other wider stakeholders must go beyond the printed letter of the SDGs and engage with the spirit that permeates the goals. The SDGs, let's remember, are not, at least formally, legally binding upon countries. However, goals can be powerful tools as they have the capacity to set a direction of travel. This is the first element of the spirit of the SDGs: giving those who believe in, and decide to comply and implement them, a point in the horizon to aim for.

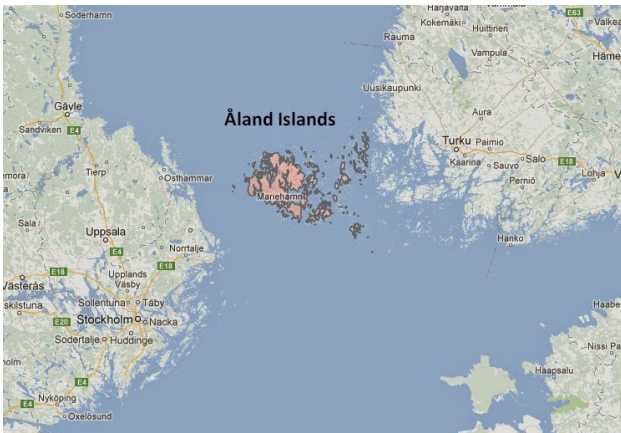
However, it is also important that, in preparing for this journey, countries, and other actors alike, do not hold any goal separate from another. The implementation of the SDGs does not require seventeen different trips in seventeen different directions; rather, it is quite the opposite. From day one, the UN General Assembly Resolution that kickstarted the SDG process (A/RES/70/1), made it very clear that the different goals are significantly linked. In many cases I would go as far as to say that they also overlap and in some instances can also conflict, as is also the case for the goals on climate change and sustainable energy. The understanding of linkages and cross fertilization between goals is the second element that embeds the SDGs.

A clear policy direction and the appreciation of linkages across all SDGs is the spirit that permeates not only the latter, but more importantly all efforts to implement them. Here I posit that, in order to be true to the spirit that embeds the SDGs, a holistic and integrated policy approach to natural resource management is needed.

The experiences of the Åland Islands and of Scotland provide two examples of the required holistic and integrated policy approach.

The Åland Islands and Building a 2030 Vision

The Åland Islands are an archipelago of 6700 islands in the Baltic Sea belonging to Finland. It is an autonomous Swedish speaking region of Finland, with its own Parliament and government. A further characteristic is that the Åland Islands are a demilitarised territory.



In 2014, both the parliament and government of the Åland Islands adopted a landmark decision aimed at achieving total sustainable development by 2051. A bottom up, community led process led to the adoption of the Development and Sustainability Agenda in 2016, which includes seven strategic goals to be met by 2030:

1. Happy people whose inherent resources increase;
2. Everyone feels trust and has real possibilities to participate in society;
3. All water is of good quality;
4. Ecosystems in balance and biological diversity;
5. Attractive for residents, visitors and businesses;
6. Significantly higher proportion of energy from renewable sources, plus increased energy efficiency; and
7. Sustainable and mindful patterns of consumption.

The Agenda is mindful of the existence of the SDGs and of the parallel timeline between the latter and the process initiated in the Åland islands. In fact, the Agenda clarifies that each of the above-mentioned goals contributes to meeting one or more SDGs.

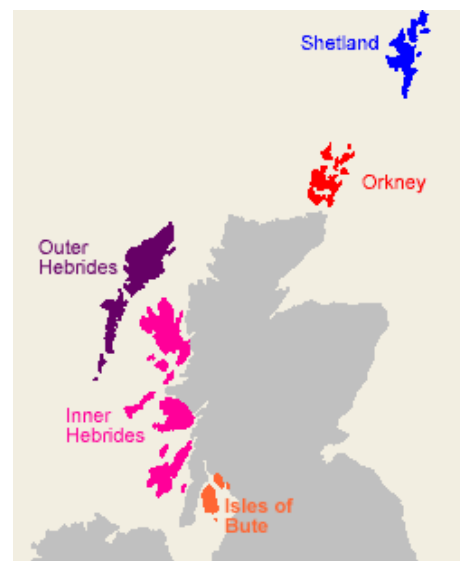
Just like for the SDGs themselves, several, if not all, of the goals present in the 2030 Development and Sustainability Agenda are interlinked and depend upon each other. For example, good water quality (goal 3) is paramount for ecosystems (goal 4) and needed to attract visitors (goal 5). The presence of the SDGs in an official document of a non-State actor, albeit particular to the

Åland Islands, is a testimony to the rising importance of the SDGs beyond States.

The bottom up process that developed the Development and Sustainability Agenda is the good practice that I wish to highlight in this paper. I believe that, by relying on robust public participation from the outset, the possibility that the implementation of the Agenda will be based on holistic and integrated policy approach will be greater.

Scotland and the Process of Island Proofing

Scotland has 93 inhabited islands which are divided into three main clusters: Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles. Other islands fall under the remit of the Highland, Argyll and Bute and North Ayrshire local authorities. Scotland is part of the United Kingdom (UK), but has its own Parliament and Government. Although it does not share the same level of autonomy as the Åland Islands, one can say that Scotland possesses a fair degree of independence. A further complexity resides in the fact that due to the decision by the UK to withdraw from the European Union, Scotland (although voting against BREXIT) will soon follow suit.



In 2013, the Scottish Government began a process focused on its islands, which recently led to

a Bill being brought before the Scottish Parliament. The Islands (Scotland) Bill is to be adopted, all going well, in 2018.

The goal of the Islands (Scotland) Bill is mainly twofold: to provide a legislative framework that contributes to the sustainable economic growth of island communities, and to ensure that all acts of public authorities duly consider the impact that such acts and decisions will have on island communities and on the islands themselves. This act of securing islands needs has been called island proofing, which is considered by the Scottish Government as the cornerstone of the future bill.

The first goal of the Islands (Scotland) Bill is met by adopting national islands plans. Every five years the Scottish Government must adopt a national islands plan, which is then assessed by the Parliament. A national islands plan “is a plan setting out the main objectives and strategy of the Scottish Ministers in relation to improving outcomes for island communities that result from, or are contributed to by, the carrying out of functions of a public nature.” (Islands (Scotland) Bill, section 3.2). It will be important to monitor the extent to which island communities will be effectively consulted in the development of the national islands plan. Only such a bottom up led active participation of the island communities will lead this part of the Bill to truly represent a good practice and represent a holistic and integrated policy approach to sustainability.

The second goal is more directly related to island proofing. According to the Islands (Scotland) Bill each piece of legislation must undergo an island communities impact assessment in order to ensure that it does not have unintended negative effects (Islands (Scotland) Bill, section 12). It is important to highlight that the obligation to undertake an island communities impact assessment is not limited to legislation related to islands or that could have a direct impact on islands. A further interesting point is that the principle of island proofing (and the duty to undertake an island communities impact assessment that goes with it) operates also for a wide range of public authorities whose acts can be labelled as policies, strategies or services.

The ongoing Scottish experience does not refer to the SDGs. However, the goal of delivering

sustainable economic growth to its island communities by island proofing legislation and policy appears to be an innovation. While it is too soon to truly label the Islands (Scotland) Bill as an example of a holistic and integrated approach to natural resource management, the fact that a Bill such as this one has even landed before a Parliament is a positive development.

Conclusion

In this policy brief I highlighted the positive value of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for providing a direction of travel for States (and non-State Actors). I also made clear that a true understanding of the SDGs requires an appreciation of the linkages between the different goals when it comes to their implementation. I then moved on to showcase two examples that illustrate how the SDGs themselves and/or the spirit behind them (holistic and integrated policy approach to natural resources management) are not only applicable to States, but also increasingly to non-State actors, such as regional actors in the context of island policy. On the one hand, the example of the Åland Islands in Finland highlights how a 2030 Development and Sustainability Agenda was built on the SDGs. On the other hand, in Scotland an Islands (Scotland) Bill is being debated before the Scottish Parliament that will put a duty on public authorities to consider needs and priorities of islands and their communities (i.e. principle of island proofing).

This policy brief concludes suggesting that approaches like the one in the Åland Islands and Scotland are worthy of being further studied and could shed light on good practices aimed at promoting resilience and sustainable development on islands. Only time will tell whether they indeed capture innovative solutions of interest not only for islands, but also for all territories, as hinted by the title of the Conference on Climate Change Adaptation organized by the government of the Reunion Island in partnership with the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development in Saint Denis in October 2017.

Key resources:

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) A/RES/70/1 United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>

Development and Sustainability Agenda for Åland, available at: <http://www.regeringen.ax/sites/www.regeringen.ax/files/attachments/page/development-and-sustainability-agenda-for-aland-2017-03-01.pdf>

Islands (Scotland) Bill 2018, SP-Bill 15, Session 5 (2017), available at: [http://www.parliament.scot/Islands%20\(Scotland\)%20Bill/SPBill15S052017.pdf](http://www.parliament.scot/Islands%20(Scotland)%20Bill/SPBill15S052017.pdf)

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SCELG Working papers

C Wambua, Promoting Public Acceptance of Wind Energy Projects in Kenya: Towards a Wind-Wind Solution, SCELG Working Paper 10/2017

LS Lynes, Climate Change Law and Colonialism: Legal Standing of Three Rivers and a Hypothetical Case of Bison Personhood in Canada, SCELG Working Paper 9/2017

SCELG Policy Briefs

M Geelhoed, Response to the Public Consultation 'Environmental Principles and Governance in Scotland', SCELG Policy Brief 11/2019

M Geelhoed, Response to the Public Consultation 'Good Food Nation Proposals for Legislation', SCELG Policy Brief 10/2019

SCELG Dialogues

F Sindico and K McKenzie, Human Rights Thresholds in the Context of Climate Change: A Litigation Perspective in the Wake of the IPCC Special Report on 1.5°C or the Week in which Everything Changed..., SCELG Dialogue 7/2018

F Sindico and S Switzer, The Transformation of Environmental Law and Governance: Risk, Innovation and Resilience, SCELG Dialogue 6/2018

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