

CALL FOR PAPERS
Shrinking, Sinking, Resurfacing:
Small Islands and Natural Hazards in
Historical and Current Perspectives

Rachel
Carson
Center

**Workshop at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society (RCC),
LMU Munich, Germany**

22—24 November 2012

Conveners: Rebecca Hofmann (RCC), Uwe Lübken (RCC)

Small islands have largely been ignored by mainstream historical research. Why, after all, should scholars be interested in the past of seemingly unimportant patches of land, especially if they are located at the “edge of the world”? If they are treated at all, they are portrayed as either a place of desire (i.e., a mythical and, very often, tropical paradise), or as the exact opposite: the epitome of a nearly impossible life, a place where “civilizations” must, almost necessarily, collapse due to the isolation, the limited resource base, and, last but not least, the frequent exposure to natural hazards. Ironically, the latter point has triggered a new interest in small islands. In a world with a warming climate, rising sea levels, and the likelihood of increasing extreme natural events, these peculiar places have turned into pioneer communities at the forefront of global environmental change (the same can be said for arctic settlements). Yet, while isolation and the prevalence of natural hazards certainly describe important elements of life on small islands, the focus on vulnerability neglects the fact that small island communities have thrived for centuries, often dealing with these challenges successfully.

This workshop aims to look at the complex problem that natural hazards have posed—and still pose—on small islands in a more nuanced way. Thus, we are seeking proposals covering a range of interconnected historical topics, as well as current topics with a strong historical component, and which deal with any landform within the world’s oceans, seas, and waterways, including oceanic islands, river islands, char (is)lands, sunken islands, resurfaced islands, etc. (We are not trying to define either “smallness” or “islands” here. Rather, we are open to innovative approaches to the concept of “small islands,” if a convincing case is made). The workshop will explore various questions, including but not limited to the following:

- What, if anything, is special about the ways and means with which islanders have faced natural hazards in the past?
- How have small island communities dealt with the threats of erosion, subsidence, and sea level rise, as well as sea level fall? When and by whom were tipping points detected after which life on sinking islands became unsustainable?
- Did and does “islandness” contribute to coping with disaster? Are small islands laboratories of resilience, adaptation, and mitigation?
- How have colonialism, military occupation, and other forms of domination influenced island vulnerability and resilience in the Global South and elsewhere? Have development and modernization contributed to an erosion of coping practices?
- How are natural hazards represented in island cultures, discourses, and narratives, and how have these representations, in turn, influenced local coping capacities?
- Did or does the specter of sinking islands also endanger a particularly Western sense of longing or desire for a tropical paradise (lost)?
- How have strategies of mobility and migration been employed to deal with natural hazards?

Please send a proposal of no more than 500 words and a brief CV to:

conferences@carsoncenter.lmu.de

The deadline for submissions is 15 May 2012. Participants will be notified as soon as possible.

The conference will be held in English and will focus on the discussion of pre-circulated papers of about 5,000 to 7,000 words (due by 1 November 2012) that have not already been published nor are under consideration. The RCC will cover participants' travel and accommodation costs.

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact us:

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