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The Dependency-Autonomy Paradox: A Core-Periphery Analysis of Tourism Development in Mediterranean Archipelagos

ABSTRACT

Island tourism debates challenge the inevitability of underdevelopment in peripheral islands. A paradox of *geopolitical dependency but optimal autonomy* suggests that tourism can create a 'virtuous periphery syndrome'. This study used a core-periphery framework to analyse stakeholders' perspectives on this, in two Mediterranean archipelagos. The most peripheral islands experienced the highest levels of environmental protection and lowest levels of development, which can be favourable for the development of tourism, but this is constrained by problematic core-periphery relations. Tourism provides opportunities for island empowerment but local understanding of this must be developed for optimal autonomy to be achieved.

KEYWORDS: dependency theory, core-periphery, island tourism, tourism governance, archipelagos

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite their diversity, small islands share common development problems. A small land area, small population size, distance from core markets and higher costs of access all make it difficult for islands to gain competitive advantage in more traditional export industries, such as agriculture and fishing (Royle & Scott, 1996; Nash & Martin, 2003; Booth *et al.*, 2020). Where industry diversification is lacking, island businesses are more vulnerable to external shocks (Croes & Ridderstaat, 2017) and less attractive to foreign investors (Bojanic & Lo, 2016), further constraining their development. High levels of unemployment and out-migration of young people leave islands with ageing populations, 'brain drain' (Connell, 2013), and businesses lacking know how and entrepreneurial spirit (Booth *et al.*, 2020). As a result, islands tend to experience lower levels of development and instead enjoy more pristine environments, a slower pace of life, and distinct cultures, all of which are attractive to tourists (Baum, 1997; Timothy, 2001). Tourism is frequently viewed as the only feasible option and its development in small islands inevitable (Croes *et al.*, 2018).

Small populations in islands encourage more closely networked societies and the potential for tourism development to be coordinated more easily and at the local level (Campling, 2006). Governance in archipelago settings, however, is usually more complex as it operates at multiple hierarchical levels leading to lengthier negotiations and challenges which are not necessarily encountered by single islands (Baldacchino, 2015). Decisions affecting tourism in the more peripheral islands in archipelagos are often taken by powers on the core island or mainland, and this can lead to conflicts between local residents and decision-makers. These conflicts have commonly been explained using dependency theory and described as core-

periphery relations (e.g. Weaver, 1998; Jordan, 2007; Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013; Gowreesunkar *et al.*, 2018). More recent debates on small island tourism and core-periphery relations question whether tourism can help to address inequalities between islands, and between islands and mainlands, rather than playing a role in causing them. Weaver (2017) contributes to these debates by proposing five paradoxes which reflect the characteristics of islands, and which they argue can result in a ‘virtuous periphery syndrome’ where locals at the periphery can experience empowerment through tourism. They call for research into individual cases of these paradoxes to explore whether this can be achieved.

This paper responds to this need for further empirical research into the potential for local empowerment through tourism in peripheral island contexts, through a multi-sited ethnography of two Mediterranean archipelagos, the Aegadian Islands and the Pelagian Islands. In doing so, we examine one of Weaver’s (2017) paradoxes – *the geopolitical dependency but optimal autonomy paradox* – and explore the potential for the realisation of a virtuous periphery syndrome. The core-periphery framework has been used most commonly to analyse the movement of tourists, and profits, between the world’s more and less developed countries and the inequalities that prevail. There are fewer studies where this approach is used to examine tourism development in small islands and archipelagos (Weaver, 1998; Jordan, 2007; Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013), and this study furthers our understanding of tourism and core-periphery dynamics in this context. Research into small island tourism remains important, especially given that tourist demand for island destinations continues to increase (UNWTO, 2019).

2. DEPENDENCY AND CORE-PERIPHERY RELATIONS IN ARCHIPLEAGOS

In this section, dependency theory and core-periphery frameworks, which are the origins of Weaver’s (2017) *geopolitical dependency but optimal autonomy paradox* (hereafter referred to as the dependency-autonomy paradox) are considered. An historic review of dependency theory and its critiques is presented with an appraisal of how it has been, and continues to be, applied in studies of tourism development. This is followed by a discussion of the characteristics of islands and archipelagos and the challenges they face in developing tourism, with a particular focus on the complex governance hierarchies and spatial disparities in power and development levels that can result.

2.1 Dependency Theory

The notion of centres and peripheries in the world system has a long history, though its significant use can be attributed to the post-World War II period and UN economist Raúl Prebisch’s early analyses of development (and underdevelopment) in Latin America (Palma, 1978). Similar analyses were later carried out by Frank (1967:8) who referred to ‘metropolitan centres and peripheral satellites’, and by Friedmann (1972) who wrote of cores and peripheries. Prebisch proposed a thesis about unequal exchange in world trade. They argued that the trading relationship between centres and peripheries would always be unequal as goods manufactured at the centre would always have a higher value than raw materials produced at the periphery (Duschene, 2006).

The dependency paradigm gained prominence in the late 1950s and 1960s as a critique of modernisation theory, with scholars trying to understand why development occurred so slowly in the developing world even when following the same capitalist models of development as developed countries. Although originating in structuralism, Marxism is

usually viewed as the dominant tradition from which dependency arose (Love, 1990). Building on traditional Marxist ideas of class inequality being caused by capitalism, dependency theorists took a political economy approach to explore the reasons for inequalities between nations (Lacher & Nepal, 2010). Key critics of modernisation theory and proponents of dependency theory (e.g. Frank, 1967; Wallerstein, 1974) shared the idea that peripheries were remaining underdeveloped not because of their internal structures but because of internal *and* external economic, political and institutional structures. Historically, development was in the context of colonialism and imperialism, and modernization theory was accused of being an ideology which justified western domination (Duchesne, 2006).

Developed countries were using their technological, political and financial superiority to implement a mode of development in developing countries that allowed them to appropriate economic surpluses for themselves (Dos Santos, 1970; Sharpley & Telfer, 2015). At this point, views diverged between structuralist and dependency schools of thought. Structuralists believed capitalist development was possible at the periphery through industrialization and social reforms. Cardoso (1973, as cited in Kapoor, 2002) argued that with dependency there can be growth, and they favoured 'associated-dependent development'. Conversely, dependency theorists argued that capitalism systematically under-develops poor countries. It is here that we see Frank's Marxist-dependency perspective diverge from the structuralist approach. It is the relations between metropolitan and underdeveloped countries which form the unicity of the capitalist system, and expansion of this system perpetuates inequalities between and within countries like 'the opposite faces of the same coin' (Frank, 1969, p.9). Frank, and other '*dependentistas*', believed the only way forward was revolutionary change (Frank, 1967; 1969).

2.2 Dependency Theory and Tourism

The political economy of tourism is perhaps best associated with Britton's research, in which they elaborated on how Third World destinations are exploited by metropolitan capitalist enterprises which control their tourism development. They argued that the commercial power of foreign enterprises imposes a development mode on peripheral destinations which reinforces dependency on, and vulnerability to, developed countries (Britton, 1982). Tourism has been likened to a new type of plantation economy, with the needs of the metropolitan centre being met by developing countries, in a modern form of imperialism (Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy, 2015; Higgins-Debiolles, 2022).

Dependency theory remains one of the dominant paradigms in tourism research (Adu-Ampong, *et al.*, 2020) most often to analyse tourism's role in socioeconomic development (Monterubbio *et al.*, 2017). Walpole & Goodwin (2000), Mbaiwa (2005), Lacher & Nepal (2010), and King and Dinkoksung (2014) researched the role of tourism in mainland core-periphery contexts and they all revealed dependent relationships with tourism's social and economic benefits being captured by the cores. However, dependency theory has been criticised for offering a fairly one-sided interpretation of tourism (Sharpley, 2022). Dependency analyses have tended to focus on mass tourism and the international movement of tourists from the world's wealthier developed cores to the less developed peripheries (Chang & Chen, 2013; McKercher, 2021) and they have taken an overly generalized view of macro-structural processes at work (Monterubbio *et al.*, 2018). There has been a failure to appreciate the importance of alternative types of tourism, such as ecotourism, in redressing inequalities in development levels (Bianchi, 2015), and they also tend to overlook the

potential for variations in local conditions and strategies for adaptation and resilience (Amoamo, 2021).

Milne & Altjevic highlight the complex relations between the global and the local and a failure to acknowledge that local government, industries, and individuals can exert some degree of control at 'the coal face' (2001:372). At this local scale, a lack of attention has been paid to the significant internal core-periphery relations within countries (Britton, 1982). A rare example which fills this gap is a recent study by Monterrubio *et al.* (2018) which used a dependency theory approach to compare the socioeconomic impacts of enclave tourism in three state-planned destinations in Mexico. They found that while enclave tourism was largely criticized for reinforcing unequal relations between the state and locals, the locals felt that tourism did offer them some personal benefits. Despite a loss of prominence as a theory of development, the essence of the dependency argument is still used from different ideological perspectives and in new theoretical frameworks (Kapoor, 2002; Herath, 2008). Dependency continues to be a lens through which we can understand the role of tourism in development and core-periphery continues to be a popular framework. The following sections review the use of this lens and framework for analysing tourism development in archipelagos.

2.3 Tourism in Archipelagos

Archipelagos are defined as a group of islands, or a sea containing a number of scattered islands. They can themselves be nation states or affiliated with one or more mainland nations. Archipelagos exhibit *liminality or layering*, where one island could be the mainland to another island, which could itself be the mainland to yet another island (Baldacchino, 2015). Where archipelagos are 'owned' by a usually larger, and often distant continental mainland, planning and development can be more challenging than for single islands (Volo, 2017). Governance is particularly complex because it operates at multiple levels and core-periphery dynamics are evident. Decision-making for the more peripheral islands in archipelagos often happens remotely and affairs can be neglected by central governments (Timothy, 2001; Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013). Whether formalised or not, archipelagos are characterised by *domination and subordination* (Baldacchino, 2015); one island in an archipelago will tend to behave, even if subtly, as if they have more power than the others, and different cultural and community interests make for challenging inter-island stakeholder collaboration (Sheehan and Ritchie, 2005).

Islands within an archipelago can be at different stages of tourism maturity, needing different product and marketing strategies which should create distinct and complementary destinations to encourage island-hopping (Ruggieri, 2011; Baldacchino, 2015). However, connectivity is considered particularly problematic in archipelagos as it is usually more costly, time consuming and unreliable, and as such effective transport links tend to feature prominently in tourism planning (Chaperon & Theuma, 2015). This is particularly important for the smaller and more peripheral islands which are further from the archipelago's 'centre of gravity', giving them less visibility to tourists (Baldacchino, 2015).

The peculiarities and complexities of developing and managing tourism in archipelagos have been outlined. Next, we turn to the core-periphery framework to aid our understanding of the power relations in archipelagos and how this affects views about tourism development.

2.4 Tourism in Archipelagos and Core-Periphery Relations

In relation to tourism, there has been a lack of attention paid to significant internal core-periphery relations at the regional scale (Kauppila, 2011; Rogerson, 2019), and particularly where uneven patterns of development emerge between dominant islands/continental states and peripheral islands. Weaver (1998) asserts that a large number of small archipelagic, less developed countries in the international tourism industry face significant inter-island disparities in population and power. Their study of the Caribbean archipelagic states of Trinidad and Tobago, and Antigua and Barbuda revealed a model of nested core-periphery relationships where the 'dominant island' (i.e. Trinidad) is a core with respect to the 'subordinate island' (Tobago) but a periphery with respect to the 'external core'. The subordinate island is a periphery with respect to both and faces double exploitation. They argue that tourism can further consolidate the dominant island's control, acting as a centrifugal force which both reflects and reinforces the existing core-periphery relationships and results in small island dissatisfaction.

Jordan (2007) also examined Trinidad and Tobago using a core-periphery framework, with a focus on tourism collaboration, cooperation, coordination and conflict between what they refer to as small twin-island developing states (STIDS). They conclude that the internal core-periphery relationship is a crucial feature of the environment for STIDS: 'Institutional arrangements have grown out of the dynamics of the core-periphery model and as a product of that relationship, they cannot be understood without reference to it' (pg. 27). Gowreesunkar *et al.*, (2018) followed Jordan's (2007) approach and applied it to Îlot Bernaches, a Mauritian islet, concluding again that core-periphery conflicts exist and a management authority is needed to help deal with these.

Chaperon and Bramwell (2013) present a more optimistic picture of the Maltese Islands. They used a dependency approach to examine tourism's core-periphery relations between the main island of Malta and the smaller, more peripheral island of Gozo. They found that, while Gozo exhibits dependency on the main island for its patterns and pace of tourism development, the local residents of Gozo use their 'agency' and 'strategic selectivity' to exert influence over their tourism industry. The authors argue that dependency theory provides valuable interpretations of tourism's core-periphery relations but warn that overly simple applications - suggesting that tourism development inevitably entails exploitation of the periphery by the core - can be deterministic and misleading.

Weaver (2017) presents a supporting view in acknowledging the prevalence and usefulness of the core-periphery model for understanding inequalities, but questions whether it is fair to 'cast peripherality as the ultimate small island dilemma' (pg.13). They suggest that peripherality may constitute as much opportunity as threat (see also Hay, 2006 and Baldacchino, 2006 for similar dualistic contentions). In their conceptual paper, Weaver presents five paradoxes for small island and peripheral tourism: Small islands are geographical peripheries but also *experiential cores*; they foster economic marginality but develop as *tourism centres*; they are sites of tourism monocultures within the context of *eclectic economic innovation*; peripherality equates with geopolitical dependency but *also fosters selective autonomy*; and homogeneity contrasts with *cultural and environmental distinctiveness*. These paradoxes lead to what Weaver refers to as a 'virtuous periphery syndrome' where tourism acts as the vehicle through which leveraging and embracing peripherality is possible and small island empowerment and resilience can occur. In a case study of Timor-Leste, an independent country on the southernmost edge of the Indonesian archipelago, Weaver (2018) applies the five paradoxes as lenses through which to evaluate its

tourism potential. In doing so they conclude that each paradox can be leveraged to develop the destination sustainably, particularly through international marketing and product development.

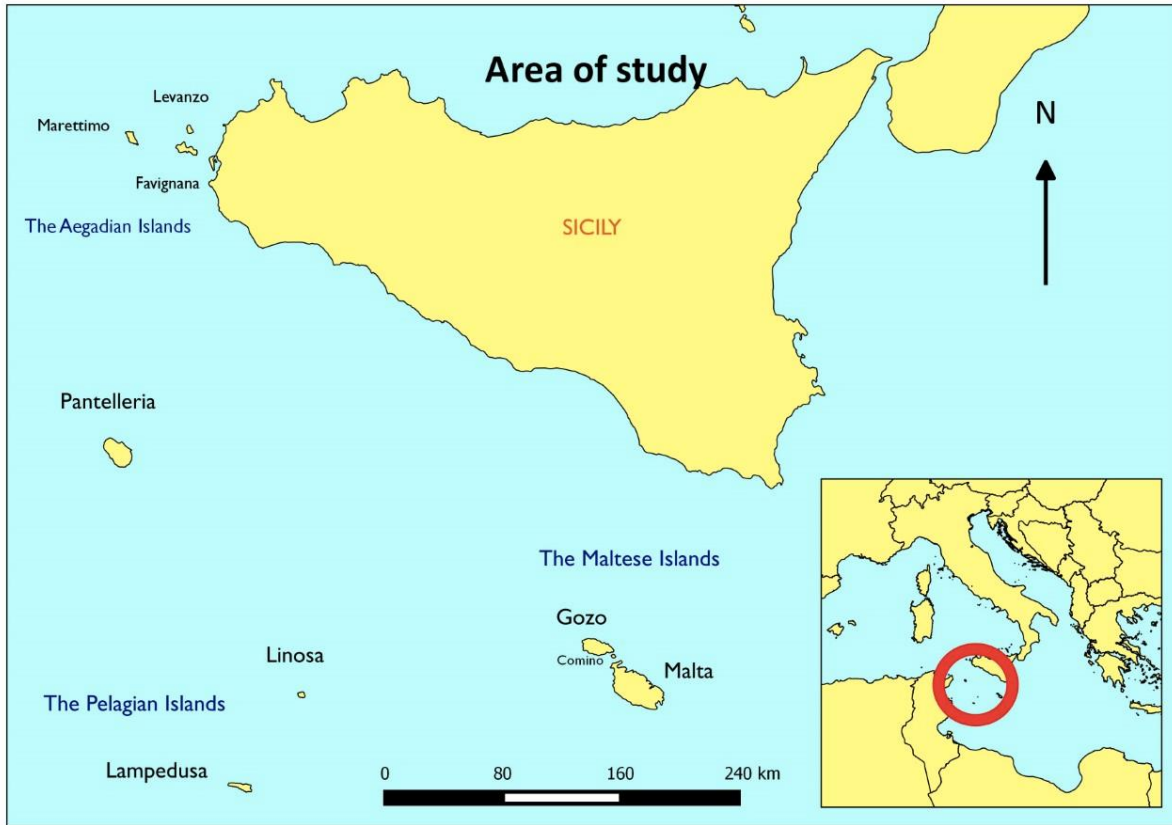
Butler (2017), in a post publication review of Weaver (2017), provides further commentary. They are not convinced that these are so much paradoxes for small islands, but rather statements of what tends to happen in these specific contexts. They do, however, consider *geopolitical dependency but optimal autonomy* as being closest to a realistic paradox, agreeing that archipelagos are often partially autonomous whilst also dependent on distant parent states. They support the assertion that residents of peripheral islands may be dissatisfied with decisions made for them by the core, but that with tourism there is the opportunity to exert some degree of control. It is this dependency-autonomy paradox that has been addressed in a single such study to date. Amoamo (2018) examines what they have termed ‘revisionary core-periphery’ relations in the context of Britain’s overseas territories and how these relations have been impacted by Brexit. Their study of Pitcairn, a peripheral island in the South Pacific, leads them to agree that ‘peripherality for small islands constitutes at least as much opportunity as threat when considered from a geopolitical tourism perspective’ (pg.301).

Weaver (2017, pg.19) admits that the ‘virtuous periphery syndrome’ is ‘an ideal which lacks full articulation’ and suggests the way forward is to identify and analyse cases of individual syndrome components to inform how the ideal can be achieved. In response, the present study furthers Weaver’s (2017) and Butler’s (2017) discussions by using the core-periphery framework to analyse community and tourism stakeholder views about tourism development on two Mediterranean archipelagos, examining in particular the dependency-autonomy paradox.

3. STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The study area consists of two archipelagos, both under Italian jurisdiction (see Figure 1). First is the Aegadian archipelago which comprises of Favignana, Levanzo and Marettimo (and some uninhabited islets), located west of the city of Trapani on the western-most point of Sicily. Second is the Pelagian archipelago, comprising Lampedusa and Linosa and the uninhabited islet of Lampione, located 250 km from the Sicilian coast. The Aegadian Islands and Pelagian Islands both fall under the regional government of Sicily. Each archipelago is then governed by municipalities located on their largest island, Favignana for the Aegadian Islands and Lampedusa for the Pelagian Islands.

Figure 1: Map of Study Area



Source: QGIS, 2016. Designed by Andrea Pace

Sun, sea and sand tourism in the larger islands of Lampedusa and Favignana has developed over the past 30 years replacing fishing, bluefish/tuna canning, and in the case of Favignana limestone extraction, as a major economic activity (Orsini, 2015; Groppi *et al.*, 2018). The smaller islands of Linosa, Levanzo and Marettimo offer more niche tourism products related to the natural environment. Lampedusa has its own airport with daily flights to and from Sicily, and to other destinations in summer. Favignana, only 6 km from the coast of Sicily, does not have an airport but can be easily reached by boat. Transport connections between islands in each archipelago are also by ferry/hydrofoil (Agius *et al.*, 2021). There is limited data on tourist arrivals to these archipelagos but it has been estimated that Favignana receives most tourists at 800,000 per year with summer peaks of 60,000 tourists daily (Peronaci and Luciani, 2015). The Pelagian islands receive 100,000 tourists annually, with the vast majority also arriving in summer months (Comune di Lampedusa e Linosa, 2015).

As a consequence of their natural importance, the archipelagos have over the years earned a number of designations and have several protected areas (EUR-Lex, 2015) including extensive Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Activities such as trekking, diving and snorkelling are popular and the number of ecotourism operators is increasing (Agius *et al.*, 2019). Table 1 summarises the major characteristics of the islands in the study area, including population and size.

Table 1: Characteristics of Study Area

	Aegadian Islands	Pelagian Islands
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	Favignana	Marettimo	Levanzo	Lampedusa	Linosa
Population	4,500	820	220	5,703	438
Area (km²)	19.8	12	5.8	20.2	5.4
Coastline (km)	33	18	15	33.3	11
Highest point (m)	314 (Santa Caterina)	686 (Monte Falcone)	278 (Monaco)	133 (Albero Sole)	195 (Monte Vulcano)
Distance from mainland (Km)	16 (Trapani)	24 (Trapani)	13 (Trapani)	220 (Agrigento)	171.4 (Agrigento)

Sources: Arnold, 2008; Bonanno, 2013; Fattorini & Daporto, 2014

3.1 Multi-sited Ethnography

This research was exploratory in nature to reveal what was happening and what people were thinking about tourism in their islands, and in each specific geographical and political context. Taking this into account, ethnography, a contextually rich qualitative research method, was used. Specifically, multi-sited ethnography was employed, to allow for the study of a phenomenon that cannot be accounted for by focusing on a single site (Marcus, 1995). Multi-sited ethnography entails following ‘people, connections, associations and relationships across space’ (Falzon, 2009, p.2). It involves a spatially dispersed field through which the ethnographer moves by 'sojourning' in more than one place. It combines the richness and depth of ethnography with the flexibility and holistic strength of multi-spatial analysis (*Ibid.*). Multi-sited ethnography has been widely used to study tourism (Ribeiro and Foemmel, 2012) as part of the turn towards more innovative qualitative methods (O’Gorman *et al.*, 2014; Nogués-Pedregal, 2019).

The main phase of data collection was completed in 2016, with further fieldwork continuing to 2019, involving several visits to the islands under study. During this period, three data collection phases were organised on each archipelago. The first was conducted to familiarise the researcher with the islands, including the connectivity, tourism activity, governance structures, key stakeholders, and community dynamics. The second involved a greater immersion in the tourism sector, and the ecotourism sector in particular by organising and participating in ecotours in the smaller islands. The third phase involved 60 interviews with participants across the islands of each archipelago. These interviews were mainly with local community and tourism industry stakeholders, but also with local experts in the fields of tourism and sustainable development, such as academics and NGO representatives (see Table 2). The duration of these interviews varied from 30 to 90 minutes. Ethnographic interviews offered flexibility and the opportunity to engage with diverse stakeholders in each of their geographical and social contexts. Broad topics for discussion included how tourism is governed, developed, marketed and managed. Field notes as data were analysed manually using inductive, open coding to identify predominant themes, and where views were shared and divergent (Braun and Clarke, 2006). These themes are used to structure the following Findings and Discussion section.

Table 2: Interview Respondents by Type and Location

	Stakeholder Type

	Local Community	Tourism Industry	Other Experts	Total
Aegadian Islands	10	18	9	37
Pelagian Islands	2	12	9	23
Total	12	30	18	60

In qualitative studies such as this, it is important to emphasise the reflexivity of the process as this is seen as an important factor affecting the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative methods (Dodgson, 2019; Haynes, 2012). Taking a reflexive approach includes acknowledging the positionality of the researchers – the ways in which our own lived experiences impact on our practices and analysis (Cohen, 2013). The authors of this study are islanders, although not from the islands under study, and have carried out research in other island settings. The author responsible for the primary data collection was therefore able to engage openly with participants in these Italian archipelagos through a shared islander identity, and in line with the island studies approach of seeing islands “from the inside out” (Baldacchino, 2008, p. 49). The authors were cognizant of this insider/outsider position during data analysis and acknowledged the potential influence of this through the rigorous application of the core-periphery framework and by making comparisons with other studies when developing the findings of this research.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings are presented in this section around three emergent themes of governance, connectivity, and collaboration in the development of tourism in archipelagos. Many participants, particularly from the more peripheral islands, tended to focus their discussions on issues related to the development of ecotourism, which was revealed as a cross-cutting area of interest. This is unsurprising given that the presence of ecotourism operators has been increasing in Mediterranean island destinations (Agius *et al.*, 2019). Ecotourism and mass tourism are inevitably interconnected and are more frequently coexisting as part of strategies for addressing common problems caused by traditional tourism development (Rhormens *et al.*, 2017). Ecotourism usually takes place in areas considered to be ‘peripheral’ in spatial, temporal and economic terms (Sakellariadou, 2014), and the peripheral nature of islands means they are often spared overdevelopment and tend to boast pristine landscapes and seascapes, and a richness of species (Bramwell, 2004). In this section, examples are presented to illustrate the issues and sentiments which dominated these discussions. Using a core-periphery framework, the findings are analysed from a dependency perspective.

4.1 Governance

Issues around tourism governance and decision-making were raised as a major concern by participants across the area of study, with specific comments regarding political attention and electoral promises, delineation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) which are important for ecotourism, and tourism marketing activities. The most prevalent issue, acknowledged by all participants, but felt most strongly by those on the smaller islands in each archipelago, was that they do not receive sufficient attention by their respective local governments based on the larger islands, nor by their regional governments located in Sicily. Locals voiced a sense of abandonment, with the largest islands being prioritised, both in terms of decision-making and in benefits received.

Local community and tourism stakeholders from the smaller Aegadian islands of Levanzo and Marettimo complained that politicians always prioritise Favignana, believing that opportunities are only created for the largest island: *“It seems as if the Aegadian Islands consist only of Favignana”* (tourism stakeholder, Levanzo). A Marettimo tour operator also commented: *“In fact, certain initiatives and opportunities are kept hush hush for close friends of Favignana”*. They claimed that the Mayor, who is based in Favignana, rarely visits the smaller islands and is detached from the problems and realities experienced by them. Similar complaints were made about regional and national politicians who also rarely visit the islands: *“Politicians rarely visit the island and they barely know the problems faced by locals”* (Tourism stakeholder, Levanzo). Those from the smaller Pelagian Islands remarked that the local authorities tend to take advantage of the small island of Linosa, for instance in exploiting Linosa’s peripheral characteristics to obtain project funding which then mainly benefits Lampedusa: *“Linosa is always at the mercy of Lampedusa”* (Tourism stakeholder, Linosa).

Participants across the study area expressed a general lack of trust in politicians. Participants from the Pelagian islands, in particular, complained that ahead of elections promises are made to support the islands, but few are ever kept. To illustrate their point, they referred to footage on YouTube dating back 30 years where locals were interviewed about the challenges of living on the islands, and they described the very same issues that islanders face today. More recent, newer criticisms were made of the limited attention that regional politicians give to the local environment and to climate change. More specific to the Pelagian case, participants complained there was too much focus on immigration issues in the region. These have significant political consequences for mainland Italy but overshadow the issues considered important to those on the islands. They feel forgotten by centralised policy makers and considered important only when they can be used for strategic military or other political purposes.

A smaller number of participants, mainly from the larger islands, shared an opposing view. They believed that the smaller islands are given as much attention as is feasible given their population size and that they are suitably represented in political decision-making. To emphasise the point, one explained that although the Mayor of the Aegadian Islands hailed from Favignana, the Vice-Mayor was from Marettimo. They did, however, acknowledge the difficulties in implementing electoral promises because of the lack of power and resources given to local authorities. They explained that since the new administration, the Vice-Mayor’s responsibilities had significantly increased to include tourism, transport, environment, fisheries, and other sectors. Some sympathised that it was easy to blame the Mayor and the local authorities for failing the smaller islands but felt this was unfair since many decisions are dependent on external powers such as regional or national governments. Although these views were not presented as frequently as that of neglectful governance, it is useful to note the counter-position and the shift of blame from the dominant islands to the external cores.

Also relating to governance issues were discussions of MPAs in the study area. Most participants from the island of Marettimo remarked on the MPA (Zone A) situated close to their island and what they felt to be disproportionately high levels of protection. Certain activities are limited or prohibited in MPAs, depending on the specific designated zone. Zone A means tourism is limited, as are local practices such as certain fishing activities, and this was not well received. Locals argued that the entire archipelago should have equal levels of

protection and it is unfair to designate a zone with the highest level of protection solely around one island. Fishers on the smaller islands, particularly from the Aegadian Islands, complained they were not involved in any planning for the MPAs and have had little opportunity to participate in their management. With this in mind, locals accused authorities on the larger islands of making decisions regarding MPA zoning to purposefully shift tourism activity towards them: *“The people from Favignana and the administrators think only of themselves”* (Tourism stakeholder, Marettimo). This argument was further supported by some who were keen to point out that the Mayor is also the president of the MPA management body, and therefore has a direct influence. Residents of the smaller islands felt disadvantaged and burdened with the additional protection, fearing it would hinder the development of tourism in general, and ecotourism in particular.

Meanwhile, NGO and academic participants remarked that a higher level of MPA protection can serve as an advantage for the islands as it gives them the opportunity to attract more marine ecotourists. They believed that it is thanks to the MPA that tourists visit the smaller islands and this has benefitted local economies.

Furthermore, in terms of municipality decision-making, most participants across the study area agreed that the smaller islands are overlooked in marketing activities: *“In terms of tourism, Lampedusa belongs to the Serie A, whereas Linosa belongs to the Serie B”* (Local community, Lampedusa). There were frequent complaints that Linosa had been purposely excluded from the content of a new mobile application that was being created, promoting only Lampedusa and not the wider archipelago. A minority of participants viewed this lack of promotion positively as it could mean fewer mass tourists, a less disrupted island environment, and greater ecotourism potential.

The core-periphery framework used for this analysis reveals dominant-subordinate relationships are clearly perceived by participants with respect to tourism governance in the cases studied. In each archipelago the larger islands (Favignana and Lampedusa) are dominant, serving as the seat of the main government for the subordinate, smaller islands of Marettimo/Levanzo and Linosa. As well as the seats of authority being physically located in the main islands, participants felt that the smaller islands are almost wholly dependent on the larger islands of the archipelago for decision-making. In line with the findings from Jordan (2007) and Chaperon and Bramwell (2013) these cases support the assertion that peripheral islands tend to have less influence and are dissatisfied.

As both the Pelagian and Aegadian archipelagos are also under the jurisdiction of administrative authorities in Sicily, itself a periphery of Italy, a nested peripherality - as proposed by Weaver (1998) - is evident. Sicily acts as a gateway to both archipelagos and can be considered an external core to the dominant islands, creating a dependent relationship between them. Subsequently, the subordinate islands of Marettimo, Levanzo, and Linosa face a ‘double exploitation’ (Weaver, 1998), being dependent on both the dominant islands and the external core. Geographical peripherality further increases the detachment between the islands and the tourism decision-makers. Decision-makers have different priorities to those of the local communities they govern (Andriotis, 2004) and neglect of the subordinate islands is common (Baldacchino and Ferreira, 2013; O’Healy, 2016). This leads to a situation whereby peripheral islands, especially the smallest within archipelagos, are governed by people that are not in tune with their needs, and yet are dependent on them for decisions which impact their livelihoods.

4.2 Connectivity

Connectivity was also a predominant theme as it impacts daily lives and the islands' tourism potential. The main argument, expressed most strongly by tourism stakeholders, was that poor connectivity between islands means tourists are encouraged to only visit the largest islands in the archipelagos. For the Aegadian islands, the hydrofoil service operates between the islands in a circular manner, meaning that at times there are limited seats available to passengers that do not embark at the first stop. The most peripheral islands (Marettimo and Linosa) suffer from the infrequency of ferry crossings and additional journey costs. For the Pelagian archipelago, visitors have to fly to Lampedusa and then take a boat to Linosa. Alternatively, they can take a 7-hour trip by ferry from Sicily to Linosa. Either way, stakeholders complain it makes them a much less competitive destination: "*The Aegadian islands should be promoted as the centre of the territory and not as a periphery*" (Local community, Favignana). Furthermore, the reliability of the service is poor and often suspended in bad weather; berthing is not possible in the more peripheral and exposed islands due to their inadequate port infrastructure: "*It should not be a centre just in Summer but also in the off-peak season*" (Local community, Favignana). Hydrofoils heading to Marettimo are often diverted to Favignana in bad weather, leaving tour operators in Marettimo without business and the main island reaping the profits.

The multiple levels of peripherality in archipelagos and the *layering* that is present makes connectivity challenging (Spilanis *et al.*, 2012; Baldacchino, 2015). To reach the most peripheral islands visitors usually incur additional costs, accept longer journey times, and face more inconvenience than for visiting the main gateway destination. Visitors may be unable to reach their final destination due to cancelled ferries, or may be 'stranded' on the more peripheral island and unable to return to the mainland for flights home, deterring them from a return visit (Chaperon & Bramwell, 2011; Baldacchino and Ferreira, 2013). Similar sentiments to those in the present study area are revealed in studies of Greek Islands (Andriotis, 2004), the Azores (Baldacchino & Ferreira, 2013) and the Maltese Islands (Chaperon & Theuma, 2015) where local tourism stakeholders argue that poor connectivity makes their destinations less competitive, and the residents themselves are often isolated from services only available on their respective mainland.

Again, a much smaller number of participants presented opposing views. There were some who preferred the poor connectivity, seeing it as a way to safeguard the environment and benefit tourism. The physical separation and sense of isolation from the dominant island or mainland can attract tourists (Baum, 1997; Ankre and Nilsson, 2015) and the more pristine ecosystems have the greatest potential to attract ecotourists (Zeppel, 2006; Weaver, 2008). Ecotourists are considered to have more disposable leisure time (Fennell, 2014) and may not be deterred by the longer journeys that these holidays entail. Limited connectivity can serve not only as a self-regulatory measure to control tourism flows but can also influence the type of tourist, and prevent unsustainable mass tourism development (McElroy and de Albuquerque, 2002).

4.3 Collaboration

Tourism stakeholders across the area of study were quick to point out that there is a distinct lack of willingness to work together: "*There is bad blood amongst the locals of Lampedusa and Linosa*" (Local community, Linosa). At times, this lack of collaboration has turned into fierce competition, and an unpleasant rivalry to win customers. This rivalry appears between

tourism stakeholders on the same island and across islands within the same archipelago. There was an attempt to set up a cooperative in Levanzo, but it failed. When operators reached capacity (e.g. boat tours) they refused to recommend customers to others. Owners of restaurants and shops on Linosa complained that tourists tended to visit the island with their own ready-prepared food, as they are advised (wrongly) by individuals on Lampedusa that there are limited supplies on the smaller island. Participants believed this is done on purpose, and with bad intent, to encourage visitors to buy all necessary supplies on Lampedusa: “*This is a dirty tactic used by the people of Lampedusa*” (Tourism stakeholder, Lampedusa). In Levanzo, rivalries were expressed by youths singing insulting chants about Favignana in the streets. These are typical attributes of islands and archipelagos due to their contained nature and competition arising from tourism (Mitchell, 2002). These acts of rebellion by those on the subordinate islands are usually explained away and dismissed by residents of the dominant islands as jealousy of the tourism successes they enjoy (e.g. Chaperon and Bramwell, 2011).

5. CONCLUSION

For the archipelagos researched in this study, the community and stakeholder responses to tourism development clearly revealed core-periphery conflicts. Taking an ethnographic approach allowed key themes to emerge which centred around governance and decision-making for tourism, connectivity between the islands and the mainland, and lack of collaboration between tourism stakeholders within and across islands. The overwhelming view was that those at the periphery were at the mercy of decisions taken by those at the core, and they see their islands’ tourism potential as being disadvantaged by this. In this respect, these findings support the conclusions of other similar studies, where the periphery perceives a neglect by the core and complains of a purposeful intent to monopolise the socio-economic benefits of tourism (Britton, 1982; Weaver, 1998; Jordan, 2007).

The vast majority of participants did not appreciate the potential for small island empowerment in their local tourism development. The extent to which the islanders can use ecotourism as a means to achieve *optimal autonomy* (Weaver, 2017) has not been realised. Many locals are not aware that within, or even thanks to the core-periphery relationship, ecotourism could offer them the opportunity to redress the balance of power and to reap tourism benefits. For instance, the decisions taken by the core to more comprehensively protect the coastal areas in the more peripheral islands (through the delineation of MPAs) provide for greater conservation of the environment and consequently a more attractive ecotourism product, yet these decisions are met with suspicion. This is understandable given the perceived lack of priority being given to promoting the smaller islands to international tourists. The same can be said for the limited connectivity and the extent to which this can attract tourists that are seeking the kind of environment this supports.

However, whilst islands in an archipelago (and archipelagos themselves) are dependent on others, and this may cause dissatisfaction at the most peripheral islands, this research also shows that tourism can offer an opportunity to exert some degree of control. A small number of local community and tourism stakeholders at the more peripheral islands are, to some extent, aware of their islands’ tourism potential, in particular for ecotourism. Unsurprisingly, experts on tourism and the environment and ecotourism operators voiced greatest support. Ecotourism is well suited to the outer peripheral islands of archipelagos exactly because they are richer in natural resources, and it can be complementary to existing mass tourism. In this

respect, this study provides some empirical evidence for one component of Weaver's (2017) 'virtuous periphery syndrome' – *geopolitical dependency but optimal autonomy*.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge that although ecotourism can provide some positive outcomes for small islands, it is not a panacea for development and its potential for being the sole driver of optimal autonomy must not be overstated. Evidence on the outcomes of using ecotourism for development, from destinations across the globe, has provided mixed results. There are success stories, but the list of failures is relatively high, often owing to structural, operational and cultural problems (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). Ecotourism can lead to economic and social inequalities, rather than addressing them (Ma et al., 2019; Åhsberg, 2020).

It seems that in this case, the practical implication is the need to forge a greater awareness amongst local community and tourism stakeholders of the significant potential of ecotourism in their peripheral islands, as well as its pitfalls. Stakeholders should be encouraged to collaborate in the development and operation of ecotourism as a potential way of garnering empowerment and for a 'virtuous periphery syndrome' to be achieved. Although Weaver's (2017) arguments are optimistic, there are a small number of notable studies where micro-level analysis has identified instances of 'autonomy', where tourism can be a factor in redressing inequalities and drive small island empowerment (see Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013; Monterrubio *et al.*, 2018; Amoamo, 2018, 2021), and this study provides support for this perspective.

This research demonstrates that dependency theory and core-periphery research in tourism continues to have value and is especially useful when applied to archipelagos, which are themselves an emerging focus of research. Early analyses of tourism from a dependency perspective were at the macro-scale, making observations about the movement of tourists from the more developed, metropolitan cores to the less developed peripheries (Turner & Ash, 1975). Research also focused on the dependence of less developed countries on developed countries for investment to grow their tourism industries (Britton, 1982). Recent research has focused on dependent relationships *within* countries, in the context of power relations between mainland urban areas and peripheral, rural or coastal areas (Mbaiwa, 2005; Lacher & Nepal; 2010, King & Dinkokung; 2014, Monterrubio *et al.*, 2018). Dependencies within countries have also occasionally been analysed in small island and archipelagic settings (Weaver, 1998; Jordan, 2007; Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013). The shift from global analyses of trade and mobility across countries, to the internal, local analyses of tourism development within countries and archipelagos, has allowed the dependency perspective to remain relevant, and micro-level analysis in this context makes the application of the core-periphery framework more useful.

Over 100 islands in the Mediterranean are claimed by just six of the European Union member states (Ruggieri, 2011), meaning that core-periphery relations and remote decision-making is a common feature of governance for islands in this region (Weissenbacher, 2020), including those featured in this study. In 2020, the period immediately following the data collection, island destinations experienced a catastrophic closure of their tourism sectors to international visitors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As these destinations recover, it remains important to examine and address these underlying core-periphery dynamics for future sustainable growth. A limitation is that the sentiments revealed in this study may only be held by these Italian archipelagos, and further research is needed to see whether the same learning can be applied to other European and non-European archipelagic settings.

5.1 Key contributions

The contribution of this research to the literature on the development of tourism is three-fold: First, it addresses criticisms of the application of dependency theory in tourism, which frequently imply that this perspective promotes an overly-negative view of tourism and its potential for contributing to sustainable development. By empirically investigating Weaver's (2017) *geopolitical dependency but optimal autonomy* paradox, it has revealed how the potential for peripheral island empowerment through tourism development may not be limited by the nature of tourism development itself, but by perceptions of dependency held by tourism stakeholders and local communities. It may be possible to address this issue through action-research and policy interventions, helping to achieve a virtuous periphery syndrome that much tourism research has regarded as antithetical to the nature of tourism growth.

Second, we have shown the continued utility of the core-periphery framework, and the development of this into the ideas of nested or layered peripheries, and how this can be applied to understanding tourism development, thus adding a new empirical study to an underdeveloped area of research. This framework has been applied here to understand tourism in archipelagos, but can also be applied in spatial contexts where these relationships are less obviously apparent, such as in federal, or highly devolved governance systems in continental states, or where tourism is developed in other nested and layered peripheral settings.

Finally, the nature of tourism in peripheral areas means that ecotourism could offer a sustainable development pathway in which the natural resources that form the basis of the tourism product could also provide a source of autonomy and empowerment for local residents who can exploit them through tourism. This relationship between dependency and different types of tourism can be the focus of further studies.

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