

# GALAPAGOS REPORT 2011-2012

## HUMAN SYSTEMS

### ISLAND CULTURES

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#### How to cite this document

GNPS, GCREG, CDF, and GC. 2013. Galapagos Report 2011-2012. Puerto Ayora, Galapagos, Ecuador.

#### How to cite this article

Grenier C. 2013. Island cultures. Pp. 31-36. In: Galapagos Report 2011-2012. GNPS, GCREG, CDF and GC. Puerto Ayora, Galapagos, Ecuador.

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The **Galapagos National Park Service** has its headquarters in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Galapagos and is the Ecuadorian governmental institution responsible for the administration and management of the protected areas of Galapagos.

The **Governing Council of Galapagos** has its headquarters in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, San Cristóbal Island, and is the Ecuadorian governmental institution responsible for planning and the administration of the province.

The **Charles Darwin Foundation**, an international non-profit organization registered in Belgium, operates the Charles Darwin Research Station in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Galapagos.

**Galapagos Conservancy**, based in Fairfax, Virginia USA, is the only US non-profit organization focused exclusively on the long-term protection of the Galapagos Archipelago.



Photograph: Shilo Landis

## Island cultures

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The international workshop *Cultural Identities and Sustainable Lifestyles in Islands* was convened in Galapagos by the Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF) from September 28-30, 2010. More than 30 presentations<sup>1</sup> were given by 20 participants: eight permanent Galapagos residents; seven representatives from foreign islands; four scientists associated with the CDF, and the author. This article presents a summary of the highlights of the presentations followed by my analysis of the factors that best explain the presence or absence of insular cultures in the islands represented at the workshop.

Participants provided a number of definitions of culture. According to Bustamente, "it is what makes the everyday endowed with meaning, significance, value; it is something collective that is transmitted between generations." Ruiz Ballesteros described culture as "a combination of material and ideal traits, from which relationships among humans and between a society and its environment are derived." Grenier suggested that "culture has 'geograficity': it can be understood by examining the traces left by society in the region it occupies, and it evolves through time according to the connectivity of the region with the rest of the world."

### The situation in Galapagos

Residents of the Galapagos Islands stressed that the societies within the archipelago are changing rapidly. Floreana was described as an island driven by community spirit related to its relative isolation, where the hope for further tourism development is tempered by the fear of succumbing to the same process (Freire). Isabela is undergoing major tourism development, which is rapidly transforming social and economic relations within the local community (Zechettin, Espinoza). Speakers from San Cristóbal expressed the suffering of old settlers when faced by some of the current changes in the urban landscape (Cox). Santa Cruz was described as "urban", "materialistic", "continentalized" and "living with their backs to the sea" (Betancourt).

The speakers from Galapagos gave differing views on the relationship between culture, space, and time. According to Zechettin, the number of years of residence in Galapagos does not determine one's love or concern for the islands. For Cruz, Galapagos residents are divided into three categories: older colonists (two generations and more) with a "strong ecological conscience;" residents who arrived about 20 years ago, who have a "warm respect" for conservation; and newcomers, "opportunists removed from the reality of island life." To Masaquiza,

<sup>1</sup> See summaries of the presentations in Grenier (2011). Throughout this article, the name of the speaker is provided in parenthesis; a list of speakers and their affiliations is presented at the end of the article.

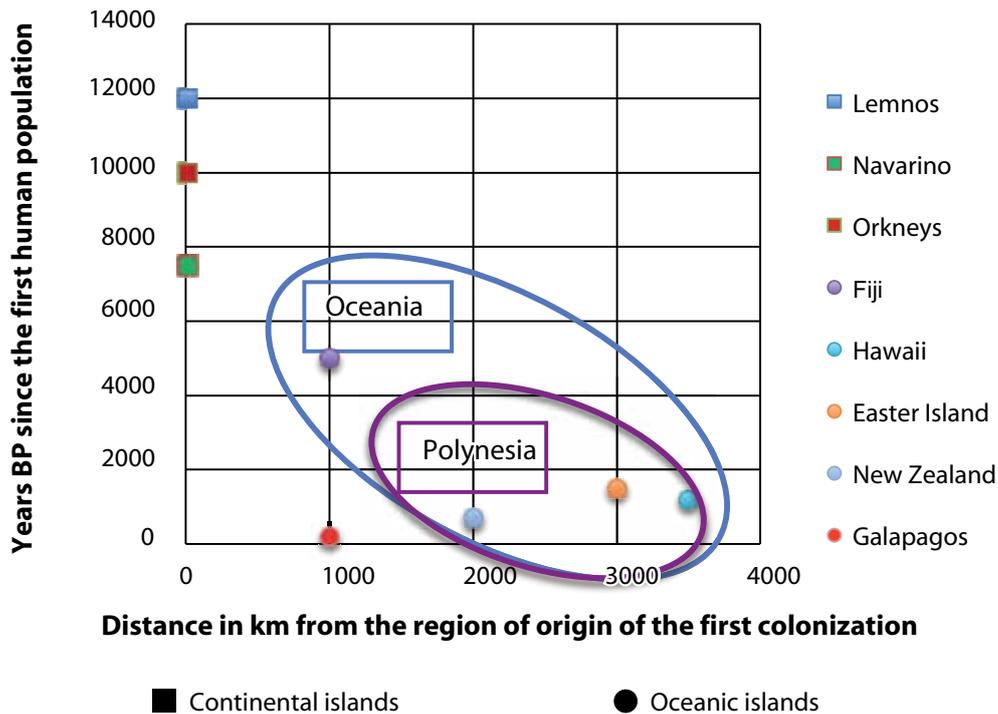


Figure 1. Geohistory of the first insular human settlements.

representing the Salasaca community in Galapagos, it is difficult to maintain the Salasaca culture in the Islands because this implies regular trips away from the archipelago to maintain ties with their home region.

The speakers from Galapagos also presented different views on the possibility of creating an island culture in the archipelago. According to Zapata, we cannot wait for an island culture to be created on its own, rather it is necessary to establish habits that will ensure the sustainability of Galapagos. For Cruz, the only way to create an island culture in Galapagos is to seek a shared vision of the archipelago among all stakeholders. And for Espinoza, “social capital” must be created through environmental education of children.

Presentations on the scientific analyses of the culture of the Galapagos population highlighted the following:

1. Population, economic, political and scientific dynamics in Galapagos are all driven from outside the archipelago, creating a common culture between mainland Ecuador and Galapagos (Bustamante).
2. The very short human history in Galapagos (closely linked to the evolution of the Modern World system / period of globalization) and a concomitant process of geographic opening (whose amplitude is currently causing both an ecological and sociocultural “continentalization” of the populated islands; Grenier, 2010) have prevented the formation of an island culture adapted to the specific insularity of the archipelago (Grenier).

### Where do island cultures exist among the islands discussed?

The islands discussed during the workshop are very diverse. They include oceanic islands (Galapagos, Hawaii, New Zealand, Fiji, Easter) as well as continental islands (Navarino, Lemnos, Orkney). They are located in the tropics (Hawaii, Galapagos, Fiji) and temperate zones. They have oceanic climates (New Zealand, Orkney), Mediterranean climates (Lemnos), and subtropical climates (Easter Island); only Navarino is located in a cold region. Their shapes and sizes are highly varied, ranging from small islands (Easter Island, 172 km<sup>2</sup>) to large islands (New Zealand, 268,000 km<sup>2</sup>). They belong to countries with major differences in economic development and have permanent populations of highly variable sizes, from about 2500 inhabitants in Navarino to over 12 million in Hawaii. Their populations consist of various cultures: European (Orkney, Lemnos, New Zealand), Polynesian (Hawaii, New Zealand, Easter), Melanesian (Fiji), American (Hawaii), and Latin America (Galapagos, Easter, Navarino).

However, none of these criteria explains the presence or absence of an island culture. None of the speakers argued that an island’s biophysical characteristics were determining factors in the maintenance of an island culture within an insular population. Therefore other explanations for the presence/absence of an island culture must be considered. One such explanation is that it is the geohistories of these islands and their societies in the ecumene (the portion of the planet occupied by humans throughout history) and the Modern World

system that determine whether or not island cultures emerge or endure.

### Geohistory of the first human settlements

Two criteria from the geohistory of these islands provide hypotheses related to island culture (Figure 1):

1. Age of the earliest human settlements: the longer the human occupation of an island, the greater the possibility that an island culture has developed.
2. Distance between islands and the regions of origin of the first colonists: the more isolated the insular population, the more unique its culture.

All islands presented here have a much older human population than Galapagos, and form two groups based on proximity to the regions of origin of their first inhabitants. The first group includes continental islands that were populated earlier because of their proximity to continental populations. The second group includes the more distant oceanic islands that were populated later, because of the need for potential settlers to master navigating long distances. Thus the islands of Oceania were originally populated by inhabitants of other islands who already had an island culture, who then produced a new culture with what could be called "double insularity."

Melanesia was the earliest inhabited island in Oceania because of its proximity to the source regions of these islanders. New Guinea was considered the origin of the Fijian culture (Rupeni). More recently, when the Polynesians dominated marine navigation, they were

able to colonize more remote archipelagos, which then provided centers for secondary settlements. The three sides of the "Polynesian Triangle" cover much of the Pacific, including Hawaii (populated from the Marquesas; Sproat), Easter Island (from Gambier; Vargas), and New Zealand (from Tahiti; Mead). These islands have a certain cultural unity, although the isolation of the most remote islands, such as Rapa Nui/Easter, has enabled the development of unique island cultures.

Galapagos is an isolated oceanic archipelago, but does not form part of Oceania. The permanent human settlement in Galapagos is less than two centuries old and the inhabitants originated from mainland Ecuador.

Although the geohistories of the earliest human settlements in all of these islands explain the emergence of island cultures, neither the length of time a human population has existed on an island nor an island's isolation are determining factors for the maintenance of that culture. To understand the presence or absence of island cultures, it is necessary to examine their paths (entrance and situation) within the Modern World system.

### Status of islands in the Modern World system

The eight islands and archipelagos presented can be classified into three groups according to their position in the current World System (Figure 2). This classification explains the type of colonization that took place, each island's relationship with the mainland, and thus the level of its geographic opening.

The Pacific islands within the oceanic and continental

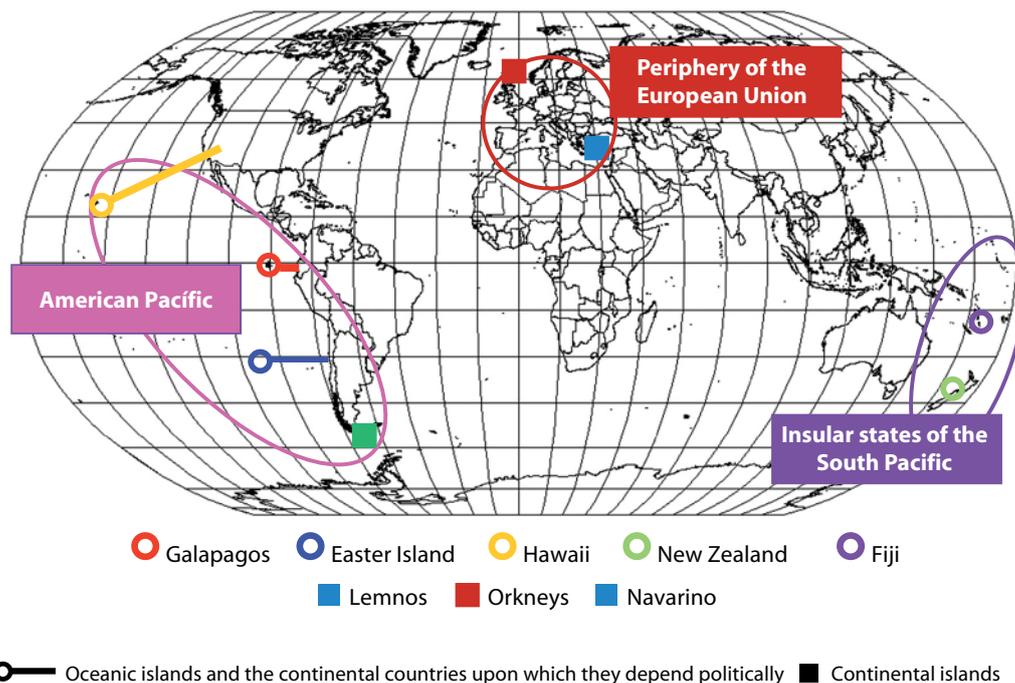


Figure 2. Location and category of the islands discussed at the workshop.

American region were colonized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in a particularly brutal manner. On both Easter (Vargas) and Navarino (Massardo) islands, the indigenous population came close to extinction. In Hawaii (Sproat) the native population also suffered a considerable decline, while Galapagos was populated by forced settlement. The colonization of the islands of the "American Pacific" focused on extraction of natural resources followed by the production of raw materials for global markets. Today, these islands are under the sovereignty of North or South American countries.

The Orkney Islands (Kerr) and Lemnos (Dodouras) are both part of the periphery of the European Union and their relative isolation is compensated by special subsidies. The populations of Orkney and Lemnos have the same culture as the nation to which they belong, with slight differences due to their insularity. They have a common history over millennia, and a common language and religion.

New Zealand and Fiji, two independent island nations in the South Pacific, still maintain their original island cultures. British settlers took much of the land belonging to the indigenous inhabitants of New Zealand and imported manpower from India to work on sugar plantations in Fiji. Even so, the indigenous people managed to keep their traditional cultures alive, through fierce fighting that led to a treaty in New Zealand (Mead) and because the colonization in Fiji was relatively late and superficial (Rupeni).

Finally I propose nine criteria that explain the permanence or lack of permanence of an island culture in the islands presented (Table 1).

1. The presence of an indigenous population that has lived in the islands prior to colonization or assimilation by Europeans is a factor that favors the development and permanence of an island culture. Galapagos is the only case presented where there was no indigenous island population.
2. The colonization of these islands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by various groups (missionaries, businessmen, soldiers, settlers, etc.) from Europe or America works against the permanence of an island culture. Some of the European islands, however, were settled prior to the century of imperialist expansion and have thus experienced different trajectories than the others, all of which were colonized territories (including Galapagos, Ecuador's only colonized territory).
3. Different types of colonization have different effects on island culture. In Fiji and New Zealand, colonists had to accommodate themselves to the indigenous inhabitants who maintained part of their culture. In American Pacific islands, colonization nearly caused the disappearance of the indigenous populations, which is obviously unfavorable to the maintenance of island cultures.
4. The establishment of a foreign population in an island is considered an important, unfavorable factor that could derail the maintenance of an island culture, if the new settlers bring their own lifestyle and culture. In all of the islands, except Orkney islands, Lemnos and Fiji (where Hindus now represent 40% of the population), the immigration of settlers was extensive and their numbers now exceed the indigenous population.
5. Autonomy or political independence favors an island culture, by affirming a national or regional identity. Of particular note are the two South Pacific island states: in Fiji, the "kastom" or traditional Melanesian governance has recognized political authority (Rupeni), while in New Zealand, the Maori have achieved official recognition of their cultural values with some of them incorporated into the country's laws (Mead). The autonomy of Orkney or the state of Hawaii has allowed these islands to maintain an intermediate level of island culture. Other islands are politically and administratively integrated into their sovereign country; for example, Galapagos is a province of Ecuador (although today it has special status) and Easter Island is a department of Chile.
6. The existence of a policy to strengthen culture favors the maintenance of an island culture and is related to the previous point [except for Easter Island, where the Polynesian cultural renaissance resulted from Rapanui population struggles and also Chile's recognition of its cultural diversity (Vargas)].
7. The extensive geographic opening present on these islands since the 19<sup>th</sup> century is unfavorable to the permanence of an island culture; Lemnos is the only island discussed whose society and island ecology have not been scarred by connections with the rest of the world (Dodouras).
8. Tourism drives the current geographic opening in Galapagos and Easter Island, and plays an important role in Hawaii, where there are many more tourists than permanent residents. Tourism is unfavorable to the permanence of an island culture because it involves major geographic opening.
9. Tourism can result in the "folklorization" of an island culture. This has been the case in Hawaii and Easter Island, where cultural shows are created specifically for tourists and native cultural events become tourist attractions, often making it impossible to distinguish between the two (Sproat, Vargas). For now, Navarino does not show this tendency, but the policies of the Ethnobotanic Park Omora to recover the Yaghan

**Table 1.** Criteria of island culture.

CRITERIA	ISLANDS							
	Lemnos	Orkney	Fiji	New Zealand	Hawaii	Easter	Navarino	Galapagos
With indigenous population	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Colonized during the 19 <sup>th</sup> century	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Where the indigenous population nearly disappeared	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	Not applicable
With a high proportion of the population foreign	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Politically autonomous or independent	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Policy to promote an island culture	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	Not applicable
With major geographic opening since the 19 <sup>th</sup> century	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
With substantial tourism (>resident population)	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
With island culture folklorized for tourism	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	Not applicable
<b>SYNTHESIS:</b> with strong island culture	YES?	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO

■ Criteria unfavorable to the permanence of an island culture

■ Criteria favorable to the permanence of an island culture

culture as a tourism resource may have this effect (Massardo).

10. In synthesis:

- a) The islands of the American Pacific have no island cultures, or at least no culture that has spread throughout the population. Three of the four islands in this group are oceanic, but depend on a distant mainland state.
- b) In the two Pacific island states, a strong island culture exists in the general population; although in New Zealand it is perhaps more symbolic among residents of European origin, who have converted their isolation from Great Britain into a form of local culture.
- c) In the European islands, island culture seems strong, especially in the Orkneys.
- d) Of all the islands presented, the Galapagos are the only ones that have none of the factors that favor an island culture. Three of the nine factors, which refer to an indigenous population, are not applicable to this archipelago.

## Conclusion

An island culture is like an endemic organism: it is not created overnight but develops slowly, under particular geographic conditions related to space, limited resources, and isolation. An island culture is adapted to a particular combination of natural environment and location within the World System. It is unique, although it can be compared with other cultures with similar geographical conditions.

In Galapagos, the history of the islands' oldest families covers barely a century. The lifestyle of today's population is similar to that of the inhabitants of mainland Ecuador, as opposed to being adapted to the particularities of the archipelago. The possibility of forging an island culture in Galapagos as well as ensuring the survival of its unique ecology depends on finding a way to reduce the geographic opening of the archipelago and at the same time inventing a lifestyle more adapted to a certain degree of insular isolation.

## Acknowledgments

The workshop was made possible by the kind sponsorship of Galapagos Conservancy and The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust.



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### List of speakers and their affiliations

- Betancourt, R – Entrepreneur, Santa Cruz
- Bustamante, T - FLACSO, Quito
- Cox, W – Naturalist guide, San Cristóbal
- Cruz, E - WWF-Galapagos, Santa Cruz
- Dodouras, S - Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos, Greece
- Espinoza, M – Naturalist guide, Isabela
- Freire, M – President of the parish board of Floreana
- Grenier, C – Charles Darwin Foundation (2008-2010), Galapagos
- Kerr, S - Heriot-Watt University, Scotland
- Masaquiza, L – Representative of the Salasaca community, Santa Cruz
- Massardo, F - Universidad de Magallanes / Parque Etnobotánico Omora, Chile
- Mead, A – Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
- Ruiz Ballesteros, E - Universidad Pablo Olavide de Sevilla, Spain
- Rupeni, E – International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Fiji
- Sproat, K – University of Hawaii
- Vargas, P – University of Chile
- Zapata, F – President of the Governing Council of Galapagos
- Zechettin, E – Hotel owner, Isabela

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