

**Statement on
Sustainable Development in the North Isles of Shetland**

*resulting from Investing in Small Island Recovery,
an Island Dynamics conference that took place in Shetland on 16–22 April 2012*

Between 16 April and 22 April 2012, an international group of 17 scholars and practitioners working in small island environments met in Shetland for an Island Dynamics conference. *Investing in Small Islands Recovery* considered the economies of Shetland's North Isles in order to acquire knowledge of small island development and possibly provide insight into how Shetland's communities might be sustained. This conference was a collaboration between Memorial University of Newfoundland's Harris Centre and the University of the West of Scotland's Scottish Centre for Island Studies. Founded in Shetland in 2009, Island Dynamics undertakes conferences, retreats, and research projects that explore issues facing small islands around the globe. Other Island Dynamics events have taken or will soon take place in Lerwick, Malta, Spitsbergen, and North Cyprus.

With Nordabrake at Saxa Vord as our base, we visited residents, authorities, development workers, educators, and community champions in Yell, Unst, Fetlar, and Lerwick. Delegates also presented their own international research to North Isles residents during a public workshop.

As participants of *Investing in Small Island Recovery*, we wish to make the following statement on the basis of our visit to Shetland and our expertise and experience from island communities in the North Sea, North and South Atlantic, Caribbean, Baltic, Mediterranean, and South Pacific. We bring valuable comparative and international knowledge that you might potentially find relevant.

Shetland is an impressive place. We admire the immense energy, expertise, and skill its residents employ to ensure the present and future prosperity of their communities. During our visits, it occurred to us that Shetland's greatest treasure may be its social capital: Multiskilled and creative, both native Shetlanders and incomers have struck a balance between maintaining tradition and embracing contemporary solutions, building a suite of enterprises in areas as diverse as tourism, green energy, environmental stewardship, manufacturing, and aquaculture.

The Shetland model of working with businesses and national authorities to ensure the just, flexible, and community-controlled distribution of oil and gas revenues could serve as an example to other peripheral regions endowed with natural resources of interest to global economic players. The improvements Shetland has made to its education, transportation, and communication infrastructure are clear evidence of well considered, planned, and executed long term vision. The maintenance and continued improvement of these provisions, which are vital to island sustainability, could contribute to social, cultural, and economic development in line with the desires of Shetland residents.

There are, however, clearly a number of long-term concerns affecting the North Isles' future. We note in particular the labour market issues that already impede economic development. Lack of available housing, especially housing for new residents, represents a bottleneck that exacerbates the difficulties local businesses have in hiring and retaining skilled employees. It is vital that local authorities and other organisations encourage and enhance support for enterprise development, especially at the startup stage. We would also like to draw attention to the need for effective planning for succession in not only family businesses and specialised public and private sector positions but also, perhaps most importantly, in the voluntary sector. Community organisations frequently depend on very committed but overstretched individuals, who may risk burnout that could have significant negative consequences for their communities and organisations.

Finally, we wish to use this opportunity to thank all of those we had the privilege to meet for their unfailing hospitality, frankness, and generosity. Special thanks are due to Robert Thomson, Hannah Eynon, Robert Jamieson, and Jay Hawkins for their contributions to organising this event. We would also like to thank: Nic Boxall, Murray Cooper, Martha Devine, Aaron Foord, Ross Gazey, Marie Hallam, Karen Hannay, Vivien Henderson and the caterers at North Unst Public Hall, Katy Jackson, Cheryl Jamieson, George Jamieson, Janet and Peter Kelly, Brian Nicholson, Elisabeth Nicolson, Mary Nicolson, Sonny Priest, Gillian Ramsay, Jane and Kenny Ritchie, Andy Ross, Duncan Sainsbury, Shona Skinner, Jackie Smiles, Steven Swan, Claire and Kyle Sylvester, and Christopher Thomason.

We note with sadness the passing of Elma Johnson, who had looked forward to taking part in the event, which surely would have been all the richer for her participation.

Signed, on the date of 24 April 2012, by:

- Convenor: Adam Grydehøj, Director (Island Dynamics)
- Godfrey Baldacchino, Canada Research Chair in Island Studies (University of Prince Edward Island, Canada)
- Gordon Cooke, Associate Professor of Industrial Relations (Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada)
- Mike Danson, Professor of Scottish & Regional Economics (University of the West of Scotland)
- Hannah Eynon, Local Development Officer (Unst Partnership)
- Bojan Fürst, Knowledge Mobilization Manager (Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada)
- Marina Karides, Associate Professor of Sociology (Florida Atlantic University, USA)
- Lois McMahan (Australia)
- Trevor McMahan, PhD Candidate (RMIT University Melbourne, Australia)
- Silke Reeploeg, Lecturer (University of the Highlands & Islands, Shetland)
- Graeme Robertson, Executive Director (Global Islands Network)
- Christine Roehrer, Environment, Climate & Natural Resources Adviser (UK Department of International Development, Scotland)

- Stephen A. Royle, Professor of Island Geography (Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland)
- Robert Thomson, Development Worker (Fetlar Developments Ltd)
- Vikki Trefler, Development Officer (Isle of Rum Community Trust, Scotland)
- Geoff Whittam, Reader in Entrepreneurship (University of the West of Scotland)
- Balkiz Yapicioğlu (University of Manchester, England).