

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RAPA NUI (EASTER ISLAND), CHILE 1967-2001

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In the fall of 1999, I became a graduate student at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, under the supervision of Dr Douglas Porteous and began work on a Master's Degree in Geography, focusing on contemporary development issues on Easter Island.

To date, little research has been conducted in this particular area. The majority of the literature has focused on the prehistory, archaeology, anthropology, and ethnology of the island. Thus, the purpose of the research is to produce a historico-geographical account of the social, economic, and political development of Easter Island since commercial air travel to the island began in 1967 and to examine future development visions for the island. This study first addresses how Easter Island has been managed since 1967 to 2001. Secondly, and more specifically, it analyzes future development visions concerning the island, held by international, national, and local stakeholders. More importantly, this study will fill a gap in our knowledge of the island's contemporary development issues.

Initially, I spent three months on Easter Island (May to July 2000) and one month in Santiago, Chile (August 2000) collecting data for the above examination. Research involved a multi-method approach. Documentary research, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Statistical material pertaining to Easter Island from 1967 to 2001, as well as maps, newspaper reports, municipal records, official development plans, and land-use plans were collected. The transformation of the landscape (e.g., land-use changes), the impact of tourism (e.g. environmental), and local urban life (e.g. changes in urban Hangaroa) were observed. Thirty three interviews were conducted (24 in Spanish and 19 in English) with Rapanui and Chilean officials both on the island and in Santiago, Chile. Respondents were engaged in individual discussions of future development visions concerning the island (e.g., the possibility of a new port and changes associated with land reform).

A grant provided by the Easter Island Foundation enabled me to complete a second field season in February 2001. It was valuable to return to the island for a number of reasons. First, research in 2000 was carried out on the island during the tourism industry's low season. This allowed only minimal observations regarding tourist behavior to be recorded. Observations made at that time will be compared to observations made during the second field season. Second, the island was hosting the annual Tapati Rapa Nui festival during the 2001 visit. This festival has provided a forum for the preservation of the Rapanui cultural identity and a means to express a resistance to Chilean culture through the celebration and practice of Rapanui traditions and customs. The theme of Tapati, as a form of cultural resistance, is important to the thesis as it demonstrates their continued cultural resistance throughout a process of modernization

and acculturation. Third, with the majority of the research completed during the first field season, the second season provided an opportunity to 'tie up any loose ends'. All data collected to date was re-examined to determine if any required clarification or if any valuable information was absent. Further information was collected and more interviews were conducted.

For the purpose of this article, it would be an extremely difficult task to summarize three decades of change associated with the modernization as well as its impacts on Rapanui society, so I have chosen to provide a brief synopsis of the future of development of Easter Island as discussed by Rapanui and Chilean participants during interviews. Participants openly expressed their opinions and concerns regarding the various proposed projects and important issues associated with future land reform (e.g., the possibility of a new port and the delivery of state land from Vaitea).

Porteous (1981:234) predicted that future development initiatives would remain in the hands of Chile because of its strong interest in Easter Island as a potential "resource base" in the Pacific Ocean. As demonstrated in social and economic improvements over the past three decades, Chile's presence on the island continues to be powerful, and plans to strengthen their presence in Oceania are constant. Subsequently, development programs and strategies have primarily been undertaken in the hands of Chile's various government agencies, both in Santiago and on the island, and by the Chilean Navy. Government subsidies have funded the betterment of education and health facilities as well as services, the development of the tourism industry, regular maintenance to the airport, and infrastructure upgrades, all of which have improved the overall situation on the island. Furthermore, as Cole and Parry (1986) point out, investment in the areas of infrastructure is vital in order for tourism to succeed.

Understandably, the role of the Rapanui in the modernization process has been limited as they do not possess or have access to the resources required to sustain and improve the current economic and social conditions on the island. Despite this, the Rapanui have participated to some extent in the development of the island, but have not played a primary role. It cannot be disputed however, that the Rapanui remain in almost total control of the tourism industry. For the Rapanui, tourism has provided a steady flow of economic revenue and created numerous employment opportunities. They are involved in every facet of the industry such as managing hotels, promoting tourism, operating tour agencies, and making decisions regarding the future of tourism on the island. McCall (1981:135) observed in the 1970's, the role of the Rapanui in tourism as "...islanders have taken the initiative to control tourist development from the very beginning and so far have successfully kept it for themselves". Over the past three decades, tourism, unlike other sectors of de-

velopment, continues to be managed by the Rapanui.

It would appear on the surface that the Rapanui have few complaints regarding the development of the island as the general social and economic conditions have gradually improved since the early 1960's. However, the lack of control that Rapanui officials and representatives have over the different aspects of development has created conflicts not only with the Chilean government and its agencies, but also among Rapanui officials. Since development strategies and plans have ultimately been implemented under the control of Chilean governments, the Rapanui are susceptible to Chilean decisions governing the island. Subsequently, development programs and projects have, in various instances, demonstrated the specific objectives of Chile and ignored Rapanui development visions and concerns. As a result, the development process on Easter Island over the past three decades has stratified its participants into contrasting parties. Different groups with specific opinions have in turn created an unstable social and economic development platform. For instance, political control over the island and increased geo-political power in the South Pacific is the main motivation for the Chilean State. Economic gains incite the actions of foreign investors and Rapanui developers, while Rapanui traditionalists contest development to protect the cultural heritage and patrimony of the island.

After five months of fieldwork on Easter Island, it was evident that the future of development would not be exempt of problems or conflicts between the different groups regarding potential projects and plans. Proposals for a new port, a monumental lighthouse, a resort/golf course, as well as the redistribution of state land to the Rapanui have stratified participants into opposing factions.

THE PORT

Rapanui officials initially discussed the idea for a larger port in the late 1970's, but plans were quashed when allocated government funding diminished. A proposal for a new port in the early 1990's was dismissed because of its ecological and social impacts on the surrounding area; nonetheless in 1995 the intention to build a new port at La Pérouse was announced by the Ministry of Defense. Plans to construct the port were justified on the basis that it would make unloading cargo easier, incoming ships would be accommodated with a new harbor, and cruise ships could now unload their passengers more efficiently.

This proposal has been met with a considerable amount of resistance. One of the largest objections to a new port is its intended location: La Pérouse. This area remains untouched by modernization and contains numerous archaeological artifacts. Thus, the construction of a port in this area would inevitably have a significant impact on the existing landscape. Various Rapanui people are further concerned with the social, economic, and environmental problems associated with a new port, regardless of its intended location. Such problems as garbage accumulation, water contamination, pollution, the arrival of more vessels, increased visitors, and the demands of ships placed on islanders, were all concerns expressed by Rapanui participants. Furthermore, they sincerely feel the island does not require a larger port or has a need for it. There was a consensus among these participants that a new port is not imperative because of

the island's relatively small size and limited population, plus the fact that very few vessels actually stop at the island aside from supply and cruise ships. As a result, such individuals contend that the purpose of a new port would be to support the economic and political interests of Chile rather than the Rapanui. They further question the decision for the construction of a port to accommodate visitors who stay for brief periods of time and contribute little to the economy.

However, some Rapanui officials feel that a new port is a wise addition to the island and could be viewed as an economic benefit for the Rapanui if the project were carefully planned and executed. A port would establish a valuable infrastructure providing the Rapanui with additional employment as well as increased economic activity, but more importantly greater economic activity in the area of tourism.

Rather than constructing a new port, many participants agreed that the existing port facilities could easily be upgraded or expanded in an attempt to solve prevailing problems with supply ships. They concurred that rather than constructing a new port in an alternative location, money should be invested into improvements for the present structure.

THE LIGHTHOUSE

In past years, the Chilean Navy has attempted to construct a monumental lighthouse on top of Rano Kau, near the ceremonial village of 'Orongo, to signify their presence in the South Pacific. The Rapanui are adamantly opposed to such a project because several lighthouses exist on the island already and its location is in close proximity to the sacred site of 'Orongo, which would impact the visual aesthetics of the area. As a result of Rapanui protest, the construction of the lighthouse was halted. In 1998, a new proposal by the Chilean Navy was granted, and a new structure is to be erected on the summit of Maunga O'tu'u. Rapanui participants opposing the structure stressed that this lighthouse should not be permitted, not only because of its intended economic expense, but also because of its symbolic and geo-political intentions rather than practical value.

AIRPORT

The Chilean Ministry of Public Works, Direction of Airports, has approved the construction of a new terminal building and will begin work within the next five years. With the possibility of more airlines flying to the island in the distant future and the number of tourists growing each year, the new terminal will have the capacity to handle more passengers, as well as offer modern services. The old terminal building will not be destroyed, but rather there have been suggestions that it could be transformed into a cultural center for the display of Rapanui artwork. Its construction has not been met with any degree of resistance or protest from the Rapanui. All of the participants interviewed agreed with the Ministry's plans for the new terminal and discussed the importance of the new structure to improve airport services for both residents and tourists.

CONTROL TOWER

A new control tower will be built to replace the existing tower. Resistance has not been directed at the construction of

the new tower, but rather has focused on its architectural design. Concerns were expressed when several designs were presented to the local Development Council to construct the tower in the form of a moai. It is believed by some Rapanui and Chilean officials that a tower in the form of a moai would represent the cultural importance of the statues on Easter Island, but also create a unique cultural landscape for tourism. Opposing Rapanui participants however, contest this proposal citing that a control tower in the shape of a moai is not only distasteful, but a form of disrespect towards the Rapanui culture and their ancestral heritage. Thus, in respect to the historical significance of the moai, it should not be reproduced in a manner which denounces its traditional meaning.

RESORT/GOLF COURSE

Absent from the contemporary landscape of Easter Island are the five-star resorts that are characteristic of many other island destinations. However, this is not to suggest that such a project has not been proposed. In 1999, it was reported that an area within Vaitea would be reserved for a 'tourist project' that would include the island's first golf course. This 'tourist project' is thought to be in the form of a resort, which would be accompanied by a golf course.

Many of the Rapanui participants were strongly opposed to the idea of resort/golf course. They explained that a project of this magnitude would undoubtedly require foreign investment as Rapanui businesspersons do not have access to the necessary capital. Thus, in this case, generated revenues would be channeled off the island. Also, small hotels and residencies would not have the ability to compete with a five star resort. Lastly, Rapanui participants question the intentions of the Chilean State to reserve a portion of land, which is suppose to be returned to ethnic Rapanui.

On the contrary, some Rapanui and Chilean participants believe a resort/golf course is a viable alternative for tourism, but only if the Rapanui administer and control the project. Partnerships could be created with foreign investors and through these partnerships, the Rapanui would have the opportunity to maintain a level of control and share economic benefits. Such a project would also produce temporary and permanent employment for the Rapanui as well as generate a significant amount of income. Revenues generated from this project could also be used to fund other projects such as the ongoing conservation of archaeological sites.

As it is today, the proposed 'resort and golf course' is simply an idea; no proposals have been submitted nor have any plans been established

CONTEMPORARY LAND-USE

After speaking with participants, it was apparent that unsolved problems remain between the Rapanui and the Chilean government in respect to land titles and ownership, Rapanui participation in the land-use process and the decision making process. More importantly, many Rapanui still do not possess land on which to raise and support families. As Halseth (1996:1281) explains, contests regarding land-use planning initiatives are not merely a fight to gain access or the right to the development of, but a fight to gain control over local "decision

making power" about the future of the land. There is a consensus among the Rapanui that all of the land should and does belong to the Rapanui. In 1888, they signed over their sovereignty to Chile but not their land. The Rapanui are now in the process of re-establishing their rights to govern ethnic property. The Chilean government has agreed to deliver individual land parcels in the size of five hectares each to awaiting Rapanui from the Fundo Vaitea. This process of distribution will finally return expropriated land to the Rapanui from control of the state, but also provide an opportunity for them to develop this land.

Plans have also been made to distribute various parcels of land from within the National Park. This decision has created an ongoing debate between Rapanui and Chilean officials as to whether or not protected areas should be included in the redistribution of state land. Various Rapanui and Chilean participants agreed it was acceptable to distribute land from within park boundaries based on the premise that designated areas were exempt of any archaeological artifacts. Opposing participants believe parkland should remain untouched because maintaining the ecological integrity of the National Park is more important as it is directly linked to the prosperity of tourism for the Rapanui.

The future development of this area is particularly important. First, because it remains untouched by modern development; and second, there is no land-use plan or regulations to assist with the future development of this area. These two factors could have a significant impact on the transformation of this area. Individuals may choose to utilize land for dwelling purposes, agricultural production, or develop their property into small residenciales or other related tourism services. However, it remains uncertain how this area will be organized or developed once the process of land distribution is complete.

When participants in the study were asked to discuss their thoughts regarding the future development of Vaitea, a large number stressed that first and foremost, people were finally reclaiming their rights to Vaitea thus, irrevocably returning the land to the hands of the ethnic Rapanui. Aside from their fight to re-establish their rights as landowners, many Rapanui simply need land for subsistence purposes. Some Rapanui who still do not possess any land, have actually begun to occupy areas without official decrees from the state.

With the majority of the land being delivered from Vaitea, inevitably new settlement will begin in this area. Participants were asked about their thoughts regarding the possibility of urban development in this area. The majority of Rapanui and Chilean participants felt that urban development should be restricted to Hangaroa because it has already been established as the central node of the island, providing all modern economic and social services. Also, there is no need to urbanize outside areas because there is a sufficient amount of land in Hangaroa and its surrounding perimeter to accommodate a growing population. Furthermore, rather than urban development, Vaitea could be used for agriculture or tourism alternatives. Several participants felt that tourism based development was a strong option for the Rapanui. Landowners, for example, could convert land parcels into small residenciales allowing tourists to experience the countryside through such activities as hiking, biking, and horseback riding.

All of the participants agreed that development could have the potential of being extremely disorganizing and detrimental to the landscape without the implementation of a development plan or strategy. Furthermore, participants discussed the fact that many Rapanui lack the practical knowledge and/or economic resources to develop their land. To avoid potential problems, participants repeatedly stressed that some type of development plan must be established to ensure effective land-use and that the government of Chile provide educational and economic resources to assist landowners with development projects.

The second half of this study was extremely important because it provided Rapanui participants an opportunity to voice their concerns, express their opinions, and give shape to their visions of the future of development on the island. Although the Chilean government has been the main voice directing development strategies in the past, after conducting this research, it was evident that Rapanui officials and community representatives, despite their own disagreements, are determined to play a strong role in the decision making process regarding future development plans. Undoubtedly, the future will not be exempt of conflicting views and unsettled debates, but it is clear that the Rapanui are concerned about future development initiatives as well as their potential impacts on the island and therefore are intent on participating in the next phase of modernization.

With my research completed on Easter Island, I have temporarily relocated to the East Coast of Canada to complete my thesis. First, I wish to thank my family for their unconditional support. I would also like to thank my supervisor Douglas Porteous for his continued support, both academically and financially, and the Easter Island Foundation for providing the opportunity to return to paradise one more time. More importantly, I would like to thank the people of Rapa Nui. Without their endless cooperation and generosity, I would not have been able to finish the research. I cannot possibly begin to list all of the individuals who have helped me through this incredibly difficult and challenging task, but would like them all to know that I thank them from the bottom of my heart. I will have the experience of Rapa Nui with me forever and plan on returning in the near future.

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A LOOK BACK

THE SOUTH SEAS OF TO-DAY. BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE CRUISE OF THE YACHT ST. GEORGE TO THE SOUTH PACIFIC

By Major A. J. A. Douglas, F.R.G.S. and P.H. Johnson, B.A., B.Sc., F.R.G.S. Cassell and Company Ltd, London 1926.

The following is a chapter plus some text from the Introduction of a book published in 1926, describing a scientific expedition that cruised the Pacific in 1924. The group visited the Marquesas, Tahiti, and Rapa Iti before stopping, briefly, at Easter Island. What science was conducted is unclear. They did make a film record of the journey and the whereabouts of the footage they shot would be of interest, if it still exists. Of particular concern is the presence on Easter Island of a Ford automobile, described as "very, very old and decrepit". This apparition, belonging to Mr. Edmunds, is a real mystery of Easter Island. How did it get to the island? And when?

From the Introduction:

The *St. George* was a three-masted barquentine of 694 tons gross, with a length of 191 feet, a beam of 32 feet, and a draught of 17 ft. 6 inches. She was built as a yacht by Ramage and Ferguson of Leith, in 1890, has an inner hull of iron encased in a sheathing of teak, and is fitted with auxiliary steam engines of about 800 horse-power. Her ordinary cruising speed was between 6 and 7 knots. She was fitted up specially for this voyage and proved herself to be a wonderful sea boat....

Many of these islands can only be visited by means of a ship chartered or bought especially for the purpose, for they lie far off the track of regular shipping; some of them are so remote that many months elapse without a sail appearing above the horizon.

Books without number have been written about the South Seas, but very few have been innocent of exaggeration, and few, if any, give a true picture of life as it exists there to-day. We, the writers of this book, have striven to paint this picture as we saw it, frankly to avow of disappointments, to confess to the vanishing of many a cherished illusion, and to face the fact that the old island life has gone for ever and that change and decay are everywhere.

And yet some of us, at least, found happiness on these palm-girt shores, and know that even to-day the magic works, and he who looks can find the golden key to unlock the door between this prosaic world and the dream-lands of childhood's fancy. Old Polynesia is dead, but her spirit lingers and the pitiful remnant of her people still preserves something of that charm which has ever proved so attractive to the stranger.

Man has changed and is changing, but Nature cannot alter, and even we moderns can still see what Cook, Bougainville and others saw: a loveliness of landscape, a vision of sea and sky, a depth of colour amazing in its beauty; the fairest spots on earth and the gardens of the world.