



View of Cebu City, Philippines, one of the hotspots of avian migration that stretches across the Pacific Ocean. This ecosystem is under constant pressure due to the conflicting demands of urbanisation and the need to provide for bird and mangrove habitats (image by author, August 2025).



Foreword

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Islands have often been associated with concepts of disconnection and isolation (Baldacchino, 2004). Stemming from the physicality that defines islandness, such associations have made the development of coherent and cohesive island studies challenging. This challenge was taken up by Foley and colleagues (2023) as they explored various meanings of 'island' and 'islandness' without coming up with a single definition. Their attempt seemed both idealistic and relevant when the authors themselves were isolated by distance and geography while having conversations on common themes. Drawing on social sciences, geography and public health, they collectively allowed their concepts on physical separateness to create a thematic unity across different topics.

What makes the concept of islandness compelling is the distinct experience of being separated geographically by tangible physical elements (sea or ocean) and well-defined physical space (island). From an outsider's perspective, the sea might be construed as something that separates; however, the sea can also be seen as something that connects islands, allowing them to create regional concepts of islands or archipelagic regions with commonalities and shared identities (Hayward, 2012). Interestingly, many of the prevailing concepts on culture and identity emanate from continental regions, hinging their narratives and (power) dynamics on the physical (large mass of) land, thus creating a seemingly homogenised worldview and land-centric conceptualisation. It is not uncommon for ideas of being an island to be marginalised in various discourses, even in landscape studies.

Reflecting on the identity of an island can lead to a perception of discrete characters and meanings that separate it from what can be conceived as the 'others'. From this recognition of otherness, it is then possible to speculate and reach an understanding on what it means to be an island. With the hegemony of narratives from continental others, the island is thus given a space to ferment its own ideas about what it means to be itself and how to distinguish itself from others, while forming connections with other islands culturally, socially and ecologically (Ronström, 2021).

In the context of these emerging perspectives on islands, islandness and archipelagic studies, this issue of *Landscape Review* takes on the challenge of what it means to be an island and how systems and processes inherent in these island communities take roots in the Pacific and beyond. In Oceania, islandness has long been understood through fragmentation, sometimes as islands separated by water. Yet, as our authors remind us, the concept of connectivity is shaped by deeply relational socio-ecological systems. Communities negotiate land, water and livelihoods through practices that continually traverse and redefine boundaries. Islandness is not about separation; rather, it is about connection, explaining the ongoing process of linking people, places and ecologies across fluid terrains.

Yujun Xu, a Research Professor at Zhejiang University, China, explores ocean geographies to expand this understanding. Through sailing across the North Sea, the ocean ceases to be an empty expanse and becomes a lived, navigated space rich with meaning and movement. Knowledge is not anchored but carried through currents, winds and embodied practices of navigation. The journey shifts the perception of space from being static to kinetic. Islandness, in this sense, is constituted through motion and routes as significant determinants of the destination.

Benni Pong, a registered landscape architect and current Vice President of the Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects, explores the vastness of the sea through the lens of avifauna that traverse the seas. Pong's focus on movement – the flight of birds across

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the East Asian–Australasian Flyway – echoes the idea of islandness as a human construct. Avian movements cut across human-defined boundaries, tracing pathways that connect islands, continents and ecological systems. These movements challenge the idea of landscape as bounded regions, replacing it with the concept of overlapping mosaics stitched together by multi-species networks. Birds suggest that islandness is not confined to land or sea, but extends into the skies, showcasing an ever-shifting web of relations.

Iderlina Mateo-Babiano, Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne, and her master’s scholars Adelaide Lee, Anh Nguyen and Shiyi Zhang explore the potential of using placemaking as a tool in community healing after a tsunami had devastated ‘Eua, an island in the Kingdom of Tonga. Using a Placemaking Sandbox developed by the Melbourne School of Design, students and community members collaborated in analysing different resilience strategies and solutions in recovering from disaster, primarily focusing on blue urbanism as a nature-based solution. Through blue biophilic placemaking, the project gained insights into how the experiences of the community have been shaped by islandness. Resilience evolved from the community’s concepts of family, church and place, leading them to a culture of caring for place.

These works by seemingly separated authors frame islandness as an ever-expanding landscape that is relational and ephemeral, yet with a degree of permanence and beyond-humanness. The question, then, is not simply how to define it, but how to understand its dynamics and interrelationships. Islandness is not merely geographic but experiential, existing not as discrete territories, but as the fragile and dynamic connections that sustain life unified by diversities. What appear as small, isolated pockets of life reveal themselves as a relational field: porous, dynamic and entangled.

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