The cost of maintaining resilience in marginal island environments: An example from the Faroe Islands

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Abstract

[The following abstract is for the session titled: "Archaeological Studies of the Long-Term Resilience of Food Supplies to Climatic Shocks in Arid North America and the North Atlantic"] Maintaining resilience often requires trade-offs. While these are often studied in terms of their impacts on social and ecological systems, an analysis of the effects on human well-being can provide a more complete understanding of the full range of costs involved. The late-Norse/early-medieval period in the Faroe Islands provides a case study; in the 12th and 13th centuries, the resilience of this small North Atlantic island community faced significant challenges in the form of combined social, political, economic, and climate change. Though the resilience of the Faroese social-ecological system (SES) was ultimately maintained, some of the trade-offs incurred had profound social implications. Using primarily historical, archaeological, and paleoenvironmental data, the analysis presented here examines some of the impacts on human well-being by focusing on changes – positive or negative – in several dimensions of human security, including access to food, environmental impacts, and economic security. The results suggest that the successful preservation of the Faroese SES entailed, in part, a disproportionate distribution of the "costs" across different segments of society. The Faroese case study serves as a reminder of the need for policy makers to consider the impacts on human well-being across social strata when proposing responses to social and environmental challenges.

Keywords: Food Security, Trade-offs, Well-being, Social, ecological Systems, Sustainability

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