

Insularity

While everyone agrees that islands possess a geographical specificity, linked to the geographical discontinuity between land and sea, situations generated by this geographical fact, which are grouped under the term 'insularity', are not necessarily perceived in the same way, depending on the author and the discipline. The great diversity of islands, at the level of the planet, but also at the level of the country or region, is a reality that geographers have long recognised. The geographical particularities of islands also constitute a generally acknowledged reality. Nonetheless, there are those who refuse to attribute any particular value to insularity: an island must be regarded as a space like any other, such as mountain, plain or valley; for them, then, insularity is no more than a mere geographical object. Others, to the contrary, consider insularity to be at the heart of the issues affecting islands, and give it a central place in their scientific investigations.

An analysis of insularity relies significantly, but not uniquely, on quantifiable data, and leads to the defining of different indices that make it possible to classify islands according to various criteria. An assessment of these indices will seek to find answers to certain questions: are some islands more 'island' than others? What is the size at which an islet becomes an island? What dimensions in area cause an island to become a continent? This approach, which aims at a typological classification of islands, primarily according to spatial or demographic criteria, is disputed, in particular by geographers who are representative of the cultural geography trend. Preferring to ignore the debates that aim at eliminating this or that island judged to be too large or too small, too heavily or too sparsely populated, they make their appeal to social insularity.

Thus, for Philippe Pelletier, insularity is the dynamic relationship that is built up between an insular space and the society that lives in it, the issue of size being in his view less important than that of human settlement. François Doumenge has tried to develop and enrich this qualitative and quantitative approach to insularity through the creation of different indices based on geographical and statistical data. For statistics, insularity is all the more pronounced when the location is more isolated from other islands, and most of all from a continent, and insularity is only effective when the whole emerged land is exposed to marine influences.

Geographers are not the only ones to use the concept of insularity. Economists, demographers and statisticians have also reflected on the importance of the island in the economic and political domain. Naturalists, however, are definitely the most interested-and have been so for some time-in islands and their theoretical contributions to sciences related to biology. Scientific works carried out on islands and islets by biologists have made possible essential developments in the framework of the theories of evolution of species and of insularity.

See also : ocean

Bibliographie