# The consequences of not incorporating local knowledge into local development

## *A case study from Mauritius*

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# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the consequences of not incorporating local knowledge into local development. The research field is global development, which is strengthened by indigenous studies and theories of endogenous development, self-determination, and local knowledge. The generalizable knowledge claim is achieved through a strategically selected ethnographic case study in Tamarin, Mauritius, which constitutes an extreme case of rapid development, ecosystem degradation, and exogenous influence in relation to the local knowledge of residents with Tamarin ancestry. The case study provides a clear example through themes extracted from deep knowledge of the relationship of patterns in the thematic analysis with data collected through participant observation, open-ended interviews, and semi-structured interviews. The findings show that local knowledge is largely perceived not to be incorporated into development, and residents experience severe consequences of these developments in terms of their way of life and local ecosystems.

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## 1. Introduction

Development since the 1950s has, in large parts of the world, largely been driven by external actors of authority rather than from within the area they've designated to be developed, or the people affected by it (Holcombe, 2014). This can be referred to as exogenous development, that is, development coming from the outside (Holcombe, 2014). Foreign-financed development is one common form of exogenous development, which has been shown to implement eurocentric development and norms as well as the financiers' own embedded agendas (Bonacker et al., 2017).

This, conversely, doesn't allow for a global diversity of societies and places with development that is based on the local culture, knowledge, and environment, in favor of the local population, who, in many cases, have a long-term ancestral connection to their home. It is therefore important to realize the severe consequences that development can cause and further research how development can achieve its potential to serve the people it is made for. In this manner, post-development studies advocate for societies to follow their own development paths without influence from the eurocentric model and imagine a new perspective on these societies (Matthews, 2018). On a global scale, the concept 'pluriverse' suggests a diverse world containing different practices with ecological considerations and emphasis on local initiatives in contrast to the present globalized development (Kothari et al., 2019).

In the past decades, donors, scholars, and practitioners have sought local ownership, participatory approaches, and a local foundation for development (Holcombe, 2014). There has also been an increase in vocabulary such as local, bottom-up, and participative approaches within development policy in the EU, for example (Ray, 1999). Endogenous development is a response to this through its multifaceted social change grounded in local knowledge, culture, and ecosystems of human groups, whilst also inviting imported technology, systems, and knowledge to meet the community's needs and achieve their potential (Tsurumi 1989 in Omi, 2024). Despite endogenous development being researched in several parts of the world, the theory isn't well-known in international development (Omi, 2024), but it could offer a way to actualize diverse global development with the revival of human connections to nature.

For development to achieve its promise of serving the people it is made for, there is an essential foundation from the principles of indigenous worldviews (see theoretical framework) that

underlies endogenous development, whose centrality is often lost upon endogenous approaches. From this foundation, two concepts can be highlighted in the principles of indigenous worldviews to aid in understanding their relevance for endogenous development. The first is what power locals, especially those with a long history in a region, have over their home and environment, starting with whether development is desired; this can be referred to as self-determination. The other is the information, understandings, beliefs, and practices gained from long-term relationships with cultural traditions and the environment; this is local knowledge. To demonstrate the centrality of the foundation of the principles from indigenous worldviews, self-determination, and local knowledge for development and the consequences of not adopting it, it is necessary to scale down to a micro perspective and advocate for the local perspectives on the matter. This is done through a case study in Tamarin, Mauritius, selected due to its unique colonial history, large foreign direct investment, and ecological devastation (see background).

## 2. Background

### Colonial history

Mauritius is an island off the east coast of Africa with a long colonial history. First reached by Arab seafarers in the Middle Ages, the island wasn't settled until the Dutch eventually decided to in 1638, however they left again in 1710. During their time on the island, they eradicated the endemic dodo bird, killed the land tortoises and large birds, eliminated the lowland palms and ebony forests, and introduced pigs and rats. They also enslaved people around the Indian ocean and brought them to the island, however, they rebelled and the survivors, which are called maroons, remained in the valleys and mountains after the Dutch left (Saramandi, 2025).

In 1715 and for the next decade, the French had colonized the island and settled there, whilst bringing slaves from the coast of Africa and India. Despite decapitations and public torture, many rebelled, creating a second wave of maroons in the history of the island. In 1810, the British "captured" the island; however, most French colonists remained on the island, with many things staying the same. Acers of land was granted to French colonists to grow crops which was then inherited by "white" family members, whilst the rest was turned into state land. Additionally, slavery was abolished in 1835 with a large "compensation" paid by the state to the colonists, however the enslaved people had to continue working on the estates for meager salaries and later had their land and assets stolen from them. From 1835 with expansion of sugar production ordered by the colonial office, a total of about half a million indentured laborers were brought from India and later there were great immigration waves from China. In 1968, Mauritius gained independence (Saramandi, 2025).

The land theft and dispossession described earlier are further driving many Mauritians out of their homes, because the old sugar estates are being turned into resorts, hotels, apartments, and bungalows for foreigners and the rich Mauritians for profit. Despite the truth and justice commission being launched in 2009, which received about 400 claims of land dispossession, the commission's recommendations have, in large not been implemented, and the creation of a land division in the Supreme Court in 2020 hasn't proven fruitful yet either (Saramandi, 2025).

Today FDI constitutes 43.9% of Mauritius' GDP, which is the fifth largest destination among what is classified as "Small Island Developing States" (UNCTAD, 2023). Tourist arrivals in

Mauritius consisted of about 1.28 million people in 2023, which is significant considering Mauritius' population being smaller than that at about 1.26 million in 2022 (Govmu, 2024).

**Change in nature**

There has been a significant impact on the nature in Mauritius during the 370 years of human interference, with the remaining indigenous forest only making up about 1.3% of the island and Mauritius being one of the most ecologically affected places on the planet (Koenig, 2025). This is especially critical because Mauritius is a diversity hotspot due to the high level of endemism on the island and 89% of Mauritius' endemic flora is threatened, as well as 24 native vertebrae species are extinct (CBD, n.d). One of the key drivers of biodiversity and habitat loss is the land clearing of development whilst tourism expansion has caused a near disappearance of wetlands (CBD, n.d) and with 80% of the land being private, this poses a significant issue (Koenig, 2025).

**Tamarin**

Tamarin is a village on the island's southwest coast in the Black River district. A few decades ago, Tamarin was a picturesque village with only a couple of homes and some small corner shops. During this time, however, the village has transformed dramatically with supermarkets, shopping centers, sporting centers, restaurants, offices, hotels, and a multitude of luxury villas, all covered in concrete with traces of the former natural environment difficult to detect. Amidst luxury neighborhoods and supermarkets are tin shacks belonging to descendants from the abolition of slavery who have lived there since then, some of whom might even have had property titles to the luxury developments (Saramandi, 2025).

## 3. Research aim & questions

The research aims to address the knowledge gap in endogenous development of the principles of indigenous worldviews' centrality, particularly regarding the concepts of local knowledge and self-determination for development. The goal of the study is to provide generalizable insights into the significance of self-determination and the specificity of local knowledge in international development. This does not imply a generalization of local knowledge; rather, it emphasizes the importance in international development of the principles from indigenous worldviews, local knowledge, and self-determination on the local scale. Therefore, Mauritius, as a local example, is essential to gain the micro perspective of how residents of Tamarin ancestry perceive integration of local knowledge and self-determination, as well as experience the consequences of development in Tamarin, Mauritius.

The research problem is operationalized through two research questions:

- Do residents of Tamarin ancestry perceive that their local knowledge is incorporated into the development of their village? If so, in what ways? If not, what has hindered this?
- What consequences do residents of Tamarin ancestry experience due to development in their village in relation to local knowledge in terms of A: everyday life, and B: changes in the local ecosystems?

The purpose of the first research question is to establish the residents' perception of self-determination in terms of whether local knowledge is incorporated into the rapid developments in the area. The consequences of current development in Tamarin are then investigated in relation to the first research question to establish how local knowledge and self-determination play a part in development.

## 4. Theoretical framework

This chapter begins by laying out the theoretical framework for endogenous development, whose knowledge gap is described in the next chapter: Previous research in Endogenous development, with the findings of the analysis in the conclusion. Next, the principles of indigenous worldviews are elaborated and paint a background for the concepts of local knowledge and self-determination. The holistic perspective of indigenous worldviews as a whole, self-determination, and local knowledge is applied to address the knowledge gap in endogenous development. Based on the research questions, they're also applied to the empirical evidence, which is an extreme case of their absence in development to demonstrate their importance and nuances clearly. Thereafter, socio-ecological system mismatch is described, which supports the holistic perspective of indigenous worldviews as a whole, local knowledge, and self-determination, and is applied to endogenous development to help explain the consequences of exogenous development.

**Endogenous development**

Development based on the local with self-determination is arguably not a new idea or phenomenon, despite not being the current standard. As Holcombe (2014) argues, local ownership and even full participation with development based in a local context have existed for millennia and still operate in some places. The contemporary origin of the concept of endogenous development, however, has a more recent history.

The concept of endogenous development was unfolding simultaneously in two different parts of the world without apparent knowledge of one another, which has resulted in some discrepancies between their meanings despite somewhat synonymous definitions (Omi, 2024). One use of the term originated from the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and went on to create research and projects by UNESCO and United Nations University, among others, and later the Comparing and Supporting Endogenous Development network (COMPAS), which has continued to be pursued in Africa after the network's termination (see Millar, 2014; Omi, 2024). The COMPAS network comprises universities and NGOs from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, and was established in 1995 (Millar et al, 2008).

The other concept of endogenous development originated from Tsurumi in Japan and has continued to inspire research, case studies, and projects based mainly in Japan (Omi, 2024).

The common definition between the two origins of endogenous development is development from within, in harmony with society's socio-cultural and biophysical ecosystems (Omi, 2024). Additionally, the concept has an inherent openness for exogenous practices and knowledge that can serve the local community's goals, and development options are locally determined with control over the process (Omi, 2024).

**Indigenous worldview**

A worldview can be described as the fundamental cognitive conception of the world from which life is made sense of as well as how to move through it (Hart, 2010). Although indigenous worldviews are not all the same and these differences shouldn't be disregarded, they originate from a close relationship between the environment and the people, which has led to many commonalities (Hart, 2010). A generalization of indigenous worldviews can therefore be outlined by some key principles, such as interconnection, cyclical perspective, holism, highly valuing nature, diversity, and equality (Hart, 2010). It's important to recognize indigenous peoples, their knowledge, history, and unique fights as different from other groups; however, the importance of these principles can and have provided insight to non-indigenous groups (Hart, 2010). In particular, it provides a diversity of worldviews based on the local in opposition to a hegemonic Eurocentric worldview (Hart, 2010).

Pertaining to a local worldview, living in harmony with society's socio-cultural and biophysical ecosystems based on the community's history in a region, along with some other key principles from indigenous worldviews, might already sound familiar from the previous subsection. This is because some of these principles were described as the basis of endogenous development. However, as the next chapter of previous research in endogenous development will show, the centrality of the principles of indigenous worldviews, despite the connection being acknowledged, isn't enacted. The consequences of disregarding indigenous worldviews as a whole have been established by Clements (2004), Loomis (2000), and Merino (2016). There's a risk that the concept may become diluted as more actors adopt it, potentially losing the indigenous system upon which it was based (see Loomis, 2000; Merino, 2016). Loomis (2000) argues against facilitating preconceived development models by harnessing practical indigenous knowledge and clarifies the importance of holistic and traditional perspectives in terms of harmony with nature for sustainable development. This is not recognized and therefore not achieved in endogenous development. This explains why the

holistic perspective of the Indigenous worldviews and self-determination is central to development (Persaud et al., 2025) and to the success of endogenous development.

**Self-determination & local knowledge**

Indigenous studies show that the common top-down development imposed on indigenous communities leads to results that aren't necessarily aligned with indigenous value systems, local realities, or worldviews, and has destructive outcomes for local ways of life (Persaud et al., 2025). Therefore, the important concepts: self-determination and local knowledge have been chosen in addition to the holistic perspective on the principles of the indigenous worldviews as a whole to analyze the data. This is supported by Clements (2004), who found that a holistic and systems-based approach, which is based on the principles of indigenous worldviews, was necessary in a non-indigenous community to enhance self-determination.

Self-determination can be defined as an entity's free choice over its own actions without external compulsion (Merriam Webster, n.d.) and is central to the post-development notion of societies' own development path (Matthews, 2018). The concept of self-determination is used in many ways (see Clements, 2004), but for this thesis, it's relevant in relation to groups of individuals and indigenous peoples due to its connection to endogenous development. For indigenous groups, self-determination is often used to refer to the right of indigenous peoples to freely decide their own development and political status as minorities inside another country (Clements, 2004). For groups of individuals, it refers to autonomy and strengthening the position of the group in society in terms of decreasing the hegemony and the group instead gaining control and influence over their lives and reality; creating a close relation to agency and resistance (Clements, 2004). Applied to development and the common territory of a local community, self-determination would encompass the locals' right to decide their own development path among themselves.

It's important, however, to recognize that self-determination in endogenous development means that "development" isn't necessarily the locally determined objective. An example of this is Sumak kawsay (Buen Vivir), which is an indigenous political project turned life philosophy, centered on living in harmony with the environment, and is described by Merino (2016) as an alternative to what is already labeled as an alternative development. This means that it's a third type of development created as an alternative to the more people-centered

development models, which from the beginning were created as an alternative to mainstream development focused on economic growth.

Local knowledge is based on the indigenous knowledge system, which consists of the practices and knowledge of an indigenous community over generations in a local environment that enables stable lives within this environment, which is inherently holistic (Nel, 2006). As described in the introduction, local knowledge is the information, understandings, beliefs, and practices gained from long-term relationships with cultural traditions and the environment, but applicable to non-indigenous communities.

The indigenous knowledge system is supported by ecological studies and the hypothesis of socio-ecological system mismatch, which entails that mismatches between the ecological scale and management scale can cause severe consequences with degradation in both ecological and social systems (Cumming et al., 2006). Applied to endogenous development, this would signify the ecosystem on the scale of the territory of a local community, which would necessitate a matched social scale of management that knows the true situation of the ecosystem on the ground (Cumming et al., 2006). However, if the social scale is exogenous, meaning no knowledge of the local ecosystem, this can result in severe consequences such as deforestation and loss of ecosystem goods that locals depend on (Cumming et al., 2006).

## 5. Previous research in Endogenous development

This chapter conceptualizes the knowledge gap in endogenous development based on the principles from indigenous worldviews, local knowledge, and self-determination described in the theoretical framework. This is done by describing the research and initiatives done in endogenous development and demonstrating the knowledge gap they pose, which is central for endogenous development's operation. Lastly, research on the post-colonial dimension to self-determination and local knowledge is presented due to its centrality to endogenous development in post-colonial communities and to aid in explaining the central themes in the case study, such as the specific circumstances of agency and resistance, this entails.

Tsurumi's (1989 in Omi, 2024) work on 'A genealogy of the theory of endogenous development' states that a balance between keeping grounded in local life and openness to the outer world for endogenous creation is necessary (Omi, 2024:105-106). However, keeping grounded in local life in balance with the openness to the outer world is a loose connection to the holistic and interconnected nature of the locality, self-determination, and local knowledge. In Japan, Tsurumi's work has been further applied in different academic fields as well as inspired community development and international development cooperation, but the theory's specifics have mainly not been adopted (Omi, 2024: 93), resulting in an even looser connection to the holistic perspective of indigenous worldviews as an entierty.

There has also been extensive research about endogenous development in Europe, largely due to the EU initiative Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale (LEADER), which is a community development project. The initiative has, however, taken the form of top-down development (Ray, 1999) which is an opposition to development being based on self-determination and local knowledge. Since 2014, LEADER has also been extended with Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), which is described as having the potential to integrate local needs and solutions (ENRD, n.d), which also negates development being based on self-determination and local knowledge.

COMPAS (2007) has the mission to systematize endogenous development approaches for government, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They have conducted a multitude of case studies focused on natural resource management and

farmers' worldviews as well as research into methodologies of the importance of traditional knowledge, and diversities of sciences and knowledges (COMPAS, 2007). Although COMPAS (2007: 15) states the guiding principle "Increasing local control and enhancing the dynamics of local knowledge", it's only described as an aim to achieve this instead as the basis for endogenous development. Additionally, self-determination isn't used but "local control" which posits an inherent difference in that the former denotes free choice over its own actions without external compulsion, whilst the latter is the power to make the decisions. With the establishment of COMPAS, much research and framework development ensued in Africa from 1996, such as the book: Endogenous development in Africa (Millar et al, 2008). However, in Endogenous development in Africa (Millar et al, 2008: 6), it's stated that a "culture-sensitive approach" formed the basis of what they call endogenous development, and this position is vastly different from being based on local knowledge and self-determination.

There is often a post-colonial dimension to endogenous development and self-determination, which can take different forms. In Mahele o Maui, Hawaii, this has taken the form of a fight for sovereignty by reclaiming land ownership and cultural heritage, whilst in Lemah Tanjung, Indonesia, it centers on the fight against environmental and development degradation through political activism as a form of resistance. Essential for both are agency, natural resources, and cultural heritage, which have been severely impacted since colonial times (Indriyanto et al., 2025). Additionally, it can result in contested geographies based on the colonial history of a territory belonging to different groups, such as different communities, government, and institutions (Howitt et al., 2013). Howitt with colleagues (2013) describe the risk that NRM becomes state-centered, resulting in many systemic failures of management over sea and land, as was the case for his research focus in Malaysia and Australia.

# 6. Materials & methods

## Methodology & data collection methods

The thesis is based on the experiences of residents with Tamarin ancestry and in accordance with Creswell's (2003) motivations for epistemology, the study therefore adopts a constructivist and advocacy knowledge claim in order to understand the participants' perceptions and bring forth their voices. Creswell (2003) describes that an advocacy/ collaborative approach necessitates participants to be active collaborators during the field study with research based on participants' opinion formation. To achieve this, the focus of the research questions within the research of local development and self-determination was created after a month in the field of understanding the issues they face and the problems they find relevant. The focus of the study is therefore to deeply understand these experiences and the diversity of them, and to achieve this, as Creswell (2003) describes, a qualitative method is chosen.

De Vaus (2001) describes that the central part of method selection is for the evidence collected to be able to answer the research questions as unambiguously as possible. To answer the research questions in this thesis, data is needed that constitutes residents of Tamarin ancestry perception of how local knowledge is incorporated into the development and their experiences of the consequences of this development. To understand these perceptions, a study in the environment of these experiences within the group and a deep exploration of the phenomena is required. The research strategy best suited for this description according to the writings of Creswell (2003), consists of an ethnographic case study. To gather this data, the data collection methods consist of participant observation to understand the experiences, as well as open, informal, and semi-structured interviews as described by Creswell (2003) to be able to discuss and understand the implications of what is experienced.

Generalization is then carried out through what Flyvberg (2006) describes as a strategically selected case study that constitutes an extreme case of foreign direct investment and a unique colonial history. This clarifies the importance of local knowledge and self-determination in development through themes extracted from deep knowledge of the relationship and patterns in the thematic analysis.

## Material

The time in the field was informed by 20 respondents living in Mauritius; however, only 10 of them are residents of Tamarin ancestry who experienced life before the major developments began around the 1990s, and therefore provides the data for the research questions. This is because there aren't many people from this group left in Tamarin. Most of the participants are around the age of 60, with one participant older than that, as many younger individuals felt they didn't have enough experience from that time to answer the questions. Among the older individuals, many had passed away or had difficulty responding due to their age. The 10 participants represent different genders, social groups, occupations, religions, and ethnicities. The data consist of semi-structured interviews with each of the 10 participants, of which two were not recorded and are therefore based on notes from the interviews.

Assisting in interpreting these interviews and contextually important information are the many hours I spent with all 20 participants during the two months outside of the semi-structured interview, and living with one of the participants for the entire duration of the field study.

The interviews were carried out in English and French, as well as two in Creole, which were translated by my key respondent. The interviews in French are translated by me and with help from the key respondent. This however means that there's a risk of miscommunication and possible meanings getting lost in translation.

## Analysis

The analysis of the data was made according to Naeem with colleagues' (2023) systematic six-step thematic analysis process, which is a further development of Clarke & Braun's (2016) thematic analysis framework. Naeem with colleagues' (2023) has created a methodological roadmap for thematic analysis that is intended to increase its replicability and rigor. It consists of 6 steps: 1, transcription, familiarization with the data and selection of quotations, 2, selection of keywords, 3, coding the data, 4 development of themes, 5, conceptualization through interpretation of keywords, codes and themes, 6 development of

conceptual model. In the adoption of this analysis structure, certain decisions in the thematic analysis need to be clarified. Firstly, as Naeem with colleagues' (2023) describes, quotation selection is not mechanical, but is affected by the theoretical and philosophical approach. It is therefore necessary to reiterate the constructivist approach in this thesis and clarify that the quote selection reflects the subjective realities of participants in relation to anything that is relevant to the research questions. Additionally, the quote selection is aided by the theories aforementioned to explore the incorporation of local knowledge and the consequences of development. The coding is done inductively by summarizing the keywords in line with a constructivist paradigm, with co-construction of knowledge with participants and patterns to arise from the real data. Similarly, the themes are created inductively whilst meeting the theoretical background.

**Reflexivity**

It's important, as Hagberg and Ouattara (2012) describe, to acknowledge how the social setting is impacted by the anthropologist. I've attempted to minimize this by never sharing my own opinions about this topic or anything I think could impact their answers during my two months and interviews; however, impact is unavoidable and embedded in it and life in the social setting is influenced. A discussion on reflexivity is therefore necessary.

In this case, I'm a foreigner similar to the ones addressed in the interview questions which might impact how participants respond. This has been attempted to be minimized by first spending a month with the respondents in order for everyone to feel comfortable and to express what is truly felt. Additionally, this involves respondents and I informally talking together as a group during two months, which helps true feelings be expressed. I also had the key respondent I lived with to discuss with, ask questions and understand everyday life through observations.

It's also important to note that a person being the tool for data collection and analysis means an inherent impact on what's being studied. This can involve being a foreign woman in interviews to personal beliefs, however, the impact of this can be minimized through a transparent process, adherence to analysis structures and justification for the choices made in

the research, all expressed above. I did not have the opportunity to analyze the data with the respondents either, which further means a risk for a subjective impact. This is, however, minimized through a transparent process of interpreting of the data described in the method, but no impact is impossible, despite intention.

Lastly, it is evidently not optimal for me as a foreigner to discuss endogenous development in another region, but this also attempted to be minimalized by living the everyday in Tamarin and becoming like family with the respondents. It's important to note however that I'm not attempting to describe what endogenous development would mean for them, but to help advocate for it through communicating the consequences they experience from it, which need to be done by someone.

**Ethical considerations**

The project abides by Vetenskapsrådet's Research ethics principles within humanistic-social science research (2002), and the Principles of Professional Responsibility published by the American Anthropologists Association (2012). This includes clarifying the aim and nature of the research for participants, ensuring their anonymity, considering the safety of their participation, continuously searching for consent during interviews, and asking for permission to use information shared by participants. Lastly, it's central to evaluate whether the study's results are worth the harm it may cause respondents, and due to the collaborative nature in the creation of the research problem, it is of value to the respondents and shouldn't cause harm due to the anonymity and exclusion of sensitive information.

## 7. Empirical evidence & analysis

### Self-determination

One of the main themes found in the analysis is self-determination, and as described in the theoretical framework chapter, it refers to residents of Tamarin ancestry deciding their own development path and being able to follow local knowledge as long-term inhabitants of a common territory. This theme can be explained by the influence capacity and impact, where the former refers to the innate ability to have power over the development in the village, whilst the latter refers to the physical actions locals perceive they can make in an attempt to affect the development process in the village.

Influence capacity has its background in colonial history, with respondent 10 describing the present as neo-colonialism, where “it's not a question of being white colonizers, it's about money, it's about international power” in terms of both the local dynamics of the colonial history and foreign actors. The colonial history has generated generational wealth and land distribution in favor of a small group of people, who, due to owning the land despite not having lived on it, now control the development of this land. Respondent 1 states the commonly used phrase for this situation, “if you don't have money, you have no power” and “the problem is the distribution of the land”. This dictates the influence capacity residents have over development, but also who development is made for, since land owners decide what happens to the land and often search for the highest profit. Respondent 12 expresses this through describing that foreign actors are perceived to be prioritized in development, stating, “[Powerful actors] look at foreigners more than Mauritians”. Respondent 12 continues to describe that “[If foreigners] want to buy land here, they have the land. All parties they follow the rules and quickly, really quickly. If we Mauritians want to change things, it takes 60-80 years”. This summarizes respondents’ general perceptions of their starting point for influence capacity.

This post-colonial dimension to self-determination and endogenous development mirrors the case of Indonesia and Hawaii, where there’s a continued fight for sovereignty, natural resources, and cultural heritage (Indriyanto et al., 2025). This further corroborates Howitt with colleagues’ (2013) conclusion on the colonial history’s impacts on the self-determination of locals as evident in the empirical evidence of how colonial land and monetary distribution largely determine the capacity to influence. Additionally, the exogenous pathways of

development described to be prioritized in the empirical evidence makes the impact of endogenous development slim.

For impact, respondents 9 and 16 describe that in bigger development projects, such as supermarkets, residents don't have any influence unless it's considered to have a strong effect on them, and even then, they might have two weeks to create a petition and get signatures. This can result in development actors coming to listen, but in the end, they don't care; respondents 9 and 16 use the phrase from above, "[we have] no power over money and land". This adds the post-colonial dimension again with respondent 10 stating, "it's being a colonizer and saying you've talked to your slave. [The colonizer] owns the money and [the colonizer has] talked TO the people. You've talked, but it's a one-sided type of way".

Even attempts by residents to inform about the harmful development practices done by exogenous actors based on their local knowledge are turned down. Respondent 17 recounts this in reference to pesticides being used on sugar cane and washed into the ocean, harming the marine life that "[Sugar cane owners] said it's bad, you know, that they can't stop it". In a similar manner, respondent 10 describes attempts by residents to dispute approved environmental impact assessments (EIA) of development projects, and even hired independent experts who corroborate the harm, but without a successful impact so far.

Respondent 14 states that the governmental system should generate this impact by representing their voices through voting in elections in combination with the village council, whilst others, such as respondents 9 and 16, feel that these institutions can't fulfill the local impact needed. Respondent 13 describes in coherence with many others that "We don't have control" in reference to development, instead, "they have control [over] what to destroy, and what to [build]" referring to rich people with land as well as foreigners.

This empirical evidence shows that local impact is perceived as small, and there's therefore a difficulty in creating cultural specificity and thereby mediating negative effects from development, such as pesticides in streams. This is in coherence with previous studies that have shown the importance of cultural specificity for local mediation of negative effects from modern development (Ray, 1999) and that exogenous pathways can hamper community resilience (Wilson, 2013), which is mediated by self-determination. Additionally, it's largely perceived that development can't be controlled, and that locals are generally not being

included in any part of the development process, making endogenous development, which is based on the local, in harmony with society's socio-cultural and biophysical ecosystems (Omi, 2024), impossible.

**Self-empowerment**

Self-empowerment in this thesis refers to the residents empowering themselves in opposition to power, authority, or right being given to them to act, which creates a negotiation of power within the prevailing power structures of development in the village. This theme can be described by agency and resistance, where agency refers to exerting a space for self-determination in the development sphere, whilst resistance centers on actions directly opposing the dominant system relating to development.

Agency is like many other themes related to the post-colonial dimension in Tamarin, where respondent 10 states, "we are negotiating with powers which are trying to colonize us, and we don't reject them at all, but we negotiate" referring to development actors. Respondent 10 continues, "At this time, you don't have that power to be in the direct conflict". The foundation for agency in Tamarin is what respondent 10 explains as "[Development actors] won't be able to alien what Tamarinian is for [us] people and the place" and "you won't have the soul, the mind, and the people's thoughts". Respondents 13 & 15 also describe the agency they exert from local knowledge to the consequences of development, such as preventing erosion by replanting trees and other root system plants on the beach, using uprooted plants for medicinal uses, and giving back to nature.

Central to agency in Tamarin is informally bringing the community together to do something, as respondent 17 explains, "We all get together in some places quietly and then we start talking about, in the future, what we can do". Respondent 16 corroborates this when explaining how they bring the community together, find their own sponsors, or even pay themselves when community services are not provided. Respondent 10 describes this as "the grassroots level but with a vision". Additionally, respondent 16 describes how for smaller things, agency can be created through the village council to fix things such as a light gone out, dirty streets, or a drain not working.

A recurring theme for agency creation, especially when bringing the community together, is to "teach the kids" as respondent 17 describes, and similarly, respondent 9 describes that

agency is to “teach the children how to grow together” because they’re the future. Respondent 10 explains how this is, “very emancipatory because we are looking ahead for the kids” and in this way, they can imagine a different future.

In coherence with Indriyanto et al.’s (2025) case study in Hawaii and Indonesia, agency is exerted within the post-colonial reality to address the lack of autonomy and the development degradation. Similar to Clements’ (2004) description of self-determination for groups of individuals, there is an aim for autonomy and strengthening the position of the group in society in terms of decreasing the hegemony and the group gaining control and influence over their lives and reality. Self-determination and the locals’ right to decide their own development path have not been achieved yet, but the cultural, socio-economic, and even politico-administrative planes for endogenous development in the common territory of the local community are being contested.

The lack of self-determination is not idly accepted, however, there’s also a resistance being enacted with respondent 1 describing how “9-10 years ago we started fighting [back] in Tamarin” in reference to the development prevailing in the area. Respondent 14 explains that “we are polite, but also there's a limit” where dissatisfaction is building up and without answers or change, “we reach the limit and we change the government” to address this, as a form of resistance. On the local scale, respondent 16 describes how resistance is enacted in creating petitions and getting signatures for larger development projects, but ultimately, the development actors don’t care about the concerns they bring forth, and nothing is changed.

Resistance to developments lack of incorporation of local knowledge, has for example, taken the form of a fight against the previously described FDI project on the mountain that is building luxury villas. Respondent 13 describes how “[My friend] was protesting the building on the mountain. He was stopped because they put him in jail”. Respondent 10 also recounts how “we got experts with our own [money for] expert private associations [to investigate]…[and] the expert came with the results that EIA are not respected” for the mountain, but also other places in the village. In the end, however, respondent 11 explains, “there were people who [fought] not to build apartments on the mountain because it destroys nature on the mountain, but they did not succeed, there was no power to do that…they built [it anyways]”.

Respondent 10 references the present fight back to colonial times, where he describes that "the runaway slaves, they were big fighters, big strugglers, they were called the maroons… they were the resistance against the colonizers. Now we have the neo-colonizers and [as a response] we have the neo-maroons, this is my term". Respondent 10 further describes how "our power remain that they will never be able to proceed up to their final aim of colonization...because there's that sort of inner resistance" where "a tamarinian is proud of being a tamarinian" and "the pride is a form of resistance".

This draws a parallel to the fight for sovereignty and the fight against environmental- and development degradation in Hawaii and Indonesia described by Indriyanto et al.'s (2025). There's also a resilience against the consequences that Clements (2004), Loomis (2000), and Merino (2016) described of disregarding the holistic nature of principles of indigenous worldviews and local knowledge based on harmony with the socio-cultural and biophysical ecosystems of society in Tamarin.

**Ecosystem consequences**

A main theme found is ecosystem consequences, which are the perceived effects on local ecosystems due to development in the village. The theme can be divided into terrestrial ecosystems, which refer to land-based ecosystems, and aquatic ecosystems, which are water-based ecosystems

The perceived effects on local terrestrial ecosystems due to development in the village are largely attributed to the construction in the village by development actors. Respondent 12 states, "we have enough development here. It's too much. It's developing really, really, really fast here". Respondent 9 elaborates that "there were many green [areas] everywhere, but [over] time it had disappeared because of the construction of houses and more houses and apartments everywhere, etc". It's important, however, to note that this construction isn't only perceived to be made by the rich on the island, foreigners, and big development projects, but also residents of Tamarin ancestry who could only afford a small piece of land and had to fit an entire growing family. Respondent 9 explains, "They have to destroy, to cut trees and the greenery just to build houses [in order] to accommodate the family".

This construction has resulted in the deforestation of fruit trees, which formed part of the local food sources, and a space deficit to grow vegetables and keep animals. Respondent 17

explains, “[there] was plenty, plenty of fruit trees”, and respondent 14 illustrates, “In every plot of land you can see coconut, mangoes, avocado”. Respondent 1 explains, “Every house had some land around it, and then you could-, everybody was growing their food, their vegetables ... It was not really any stress of surviving”. Lastly, respondent 12 states, “we have fewer animals. Before, we had ducks, goats, everything. Now, we only have dogs. Even before, we had chickens, we have their eggs, we eat them, and everything. Now, no one can do anything”.

In one part of the village, there was an old forest that had been deforested due to the construction of luxury villas and resorts. Respondent 13 describes, “before there were trees 300 years old, I [called] this place … Amazoni. You [could] walk from the beach, [and] coming here, it was trees everywhere and sugar cane on the back. But, it belonged to people all this time, [and now] to get money, they need to cut the trees”.

Another luxury foreign project described previously that is constructing major villas on the mountain has caused detrimental effects to the mountainous ecosystem, including the destruction of monkeys’ and bats’ natural habitat. Respondent 9 describes how “monkeys fled from the mountain because [the development actors] have destroyed their habitat, and they were fleeing from the mountain to visit the people in the village, and bats also”. Additionally, respondent 9 explains how the concrete foundation of the construction has resulted in “the soil doesn't anymore absorb, it can’t absorb the rain water”. This has further caused problems of flooding as respondent 14 describes, “The construction was-, you see, you construct, construct, construct. You remove trees. Now there is flooding in Mauritius. Why [is] there a flood? … But when you cut the path of the water when [it comes] from the mountain … You get a flood”.

In coherence with Merino (2016), it’s demonstrated in the empirical evidence that local knowledge carries deep information about the local ecosystems. As Loomis (2000) describes, holistic and traditional perspectives in terms of harmony with nature are central for sustainable development, and this is evident in the case of Mauritius, where the opposite is taking place. The consequences of disregarding such knowledge have been established by people such as Clements (2004), Loomis (2000), and Merino (2016) and this is seen with the major foreign project on the mountain in Tamarin that destroyed the local ecosystem and habitat for monkeys and bats, which had to migrate to the village for food.

Additionally, as Cumming with colleges (2006) describes, if the social scale is exogenous, meaning no knowledge of the local ecosystem, this can result in severe consequences such as deforestation and loss of ecosystem goods that locals depend on. Indigenous studies also show that the common top-down development leads to results that aren't necessarily aligned with local value systems, realities, or worldviews and has destructive outcomes for local ways of life (Persaud et al., 2025). A combination of this is evident in the empirical evidence, where severe deforestation due to the major construction that has occurred which has removed fruit trees that residents used for nutrition, the space to grow vegetables, and the area to keep animals such as chickens.

For the aquatic ecosystems, there has been dumping of soil from major construction projects into a local river as described by respondent 10, "it has killed the ecosystem it's not the same, once they try to build on a certain level, they have to [level] it where [there] is a surplus of soil and [they] just dive it into that river". Watersheds are also polluted by pesticides as described by respondent 13, "they put pesticides wherever, and all the rivers go on [to] … the sea" and "the ecosystem is finished".

This has further impacted the coral reefs and marine life, according to respondents 13 and 15. Respondent 14 explains that "the marine life is very decreased" and respondent 12 corroborates this with "It's really changing, before, we had lots of fish, lots of beautiful squid and everything.". This is also impacted by the foreign large industrial fishing boats that have the permit to fish in the Mauritian sea, which respondent 12 explains by saying "Now, all the industrial zones, like the ones in Japan, they come here to fish. Others come to fish in our sea". Respondent 15 describes that the destruction of the coral reef and harm to marine life are also caused by fishermen walking on the corals, sunscreen being worn in the ocean, and climate change. Additionally, respondent 9 explains how "some hotels have added sand and rocks … just to elongate the beach to have a larger space for their own development. It destroyed coral in the sea". This has also altered the currents, which further impacts the marine life as respondent 13 explains, "[it]changed the ecosystem, [when] you change the current and [the developers] don't know about this".

This relates to the theoretical framework in the same manner as the terrestrial ecosystems, with Clements (2004), Loomis (2000), and Merino (2016) corroborating the consequences of

disregarding local knowledge which in this case is destruction of the marine ecosystems. Similaly, Persaud with colleagues (2025) explaining how common top-down development has destructive outcomes for local ways of life has been shown with traditional fishing now being difficult due to the industrial fishing boats. The understanding of development changing the currents, which in turn impacts the marine ecosystems, is also an example of Merino's (2016) description of how local knowledge carries deep information about the local ecosystems, and Loomis (2000) clarification of the importance of holism for harmony with nature and sustainable development.

The ecosystem consequences in relation to local knowledge can again be explained by Cumming with colleagues' (2006) socio-ecological system mismatch, where the social scale governing local ecosystems has been exogenous, without incorporation of local knowledge of the local ecosystems in Tamarin.

**Clusivity**

The last main theme discovered is termed clusivity in this thesis and refers to both exclusion and inclusion in regards to development's impact on the way of life. This can be described by two parts: economic accessibility and physical limit. Economic accessibility refers to residents of Tamarin ancestry's monetary ability to access and afford opportunities, goods, and services in the village. Physical constraint refers to the physical limits that are put up in the village for residents of Tamarin ancestry, which hinder their freedom of movement within Tamarin.

For economic accessibility, respondent 9 describes the positive aspects that are leading to more inclusion as, "More jobs, more income, more development, more all the things… it wasn't easy for all people in Tamarin" referring to the struggles of the poorest. In particular, respondent 1 describes "there's a lot of houses that are expensive, there's a lot of money, and they need… a lot of service" which means that "there's a lot of work for people who are good at maintenance for houses. Additionally, it has diversified the job market with respondent 9 explaining "it has allowed a lot of people to get more job [alternatives] instead of depending on the sea".

The increased income has also enabled concrete houses to be built by locals, which is described as safer for the cyclones. Respondent 14 describes "people from the bottom, they go

to work in the place where the foreigners rent, they save their money also, they invest and they construct houses in concrete". However, respondent 11 explains that "it has become so expensive with the [development] projects, the foreigners and all who are going to come to Mauritius". This means, as respondent 14 states, that "the Mauritian, in Tamarin, can't buy. You will not be able to buy a portion of land and construct a house…because it's very expensive". So, despite there being an inclusion of more jobs for the locals, respondent 13 describes that "we have a minimum wage" and respondent 11 explains that "foreigners are entering the tourism business…But only he doesn't work, he hires other people to do that". This results in a divide and exclusion, which additionally means, as respondent 1 explains, that "The young Mauritians…can't get a job that pays enough that they could buy something here, you know, in this region".

The monetary injustice experienced isn't only bound to houses and land or the job market, respondent 13 explains, "It's getting more expensive because of all the investment", with respondent 12 elaborating "with evolution and everything, life is getting really hard…You have to work a lot to have less". Equally, respondent 9 explains that you "have to do two or three or more jobs in one day" to go around which as respondent 12 explains means that "Now, we live with stress here" and "Now, no one can do anything". Another consequence is as respondent 12 states "prices are skyrocketing here, the price of food is really, really increasing". Respondent 10 describes this as "it's a false consciousness because when you go in the parking, you've got plenty of cars, you've got people who have the money, but once you are on the shelf we don't buy things at the same price… it's a very differentiated". Respondent 10 continues to explain "the huge amount of money [they're] reaping from it, [they] need to think about the social cost about which [they] are hampering".

The respondents explain how this has resulted in a cultural and social loss with respondent 13 expressing "We lose the whole tradition and we go in the new system", describing that before "You can say it's a family". Similarly, respondent 11 recounts, "It's not the same culture when you're little…the mentality isn't the same anymore" with respondent 15 elaborating that there's a shift in mentality to capital seeking and a self-interest state of mind. Additionally, the traditions stemming from being a fishing village are also disrupted as respondent 12 explains, "before, we had plenty of fish. Now, all the industrial zones, like the ones in Japan, they come here to fish. Others come to fish in our sea". Respondent 13 however, retains that "We still have the same energy and philosophy".

This means that the socio-cultural part of an endogenous development approach described by Omi (2024) is strongly missing, and in turn that residents of Tamarin ancestry are excluded from the social management scale explained by Cumming et al. (2006). This is also connected to Howitt with colleagues' (2013) contested geographies, where residents of Tamarin ancestry don't have ownership of the local social sphere anymore, which connected to the colonial history's impact on self-determination. Additionally this can have severe consequences for the NRM which can result in systemic failures of management over sea and land, as was the case for Howitt with colleagues (2013) research focus in Malaysia and Australia. Lastly, the local worldview is disrupted, which has consequences for the interconnectedness and holistic perspective bound to that worldview (Hart, 2010).

For physical constraint, respondent 10 refers to a "constraint upon movement" and explains for privatized areas how "when we were kids we used to go there and run wherever we want now you go there and you see the watchman on the gate, if you want to go in the hotels you're going to have [to have] money to enjoy". Similarly, respondent 9 describes how "When I was young, I was free. I could go everywhere", now however "It's privatized. When you go over there, when you want to go for a walk in the forest, some owner says that you can't. You can't pass through the beach. It's private. It's my land". It's a similar situation for the mountain in tamarin with respondent 10 describing, "you are in Mauritius, you can't go in at the mountain…this is a privately owned property, so you can't anymore…now you are like an alien in your own area".

Respondent 10 also explains how, "restriction like that…is a big thing you know, you feel constrained in your freedom of movement in some way, even in some beaches". The respondents describe the feeling of constraint on some beaches as a big issue because Mauritius' beaches are legally public land. Respondent 9, for example, describes, "You can't walk on the beach because the owner says that it's private". Additionally, beach access is a big issue with respondent 1 describing "now they've blocked all the. . . public roads accesses to go to the beach, now they all. . .  more or less stole it".

There's also a cultural heritage that is lost through these physical constraints. Respondent 16 describes how, before they had direct access to the river in Tamarin and went there to clean clothes, collect water, and play, but now there's no access to the river at all; it's private

property, and they have closed it off. This means that they're not able to show the younger generations areas of cultural importance to them, such as the river and the forest that was around the river before any development. Respondent 11 describes the privatization and walls as barriers "before you didn't have like this, barriers like this, everybody [was] together". Respondent 13 explains that before, "all village people, they were also coming here (an area of Tamarin), collecting grass for the cows, they were working there, collect mangoes…[now the inheritors of the land] all sell it, and the village, we have no access now here, because it's a residence. It's a private".

This has severe consequences for the local worldview described by Hart (2010), which is connected to the common territory of the local community and harms the ability to enact the common principles from indigenous worldviews. Additionally, it severely harms the socio-cultural system of traditions passed down for centuries and the ability to pass on local knowledge that is bound to the territory (Hart, 2010). It's also connected to the colonial history, similar to Indonesia, of how exogenous development degradation is possible, as well as the current fight for this cultural heritage, as in Hawaii (Indriyanto et al., 2025).

## 8. Conclusion

The research aim of this study was to close the knowledge gap in endogenous development of the principles of indigenous worldviews' centrality, particularly regarding the concepts of local knowledge and self-determination for development. This was done through a strategically selected case study in Tamarin, Mauritius, to attain generalizable insights into the significance of self-determination and the specificity of local knowledge in international development.

The first research question to be answered was:

- Do residents of Tamarin ancestry perceive that their local knowledge is incorporated into the development of their village? If so, in what ways? If not, what has hindered this?

This was answered by the two main themes, self-determination and self-empowerment, where it was found that there's a low perception of residents of Tamarin ancestry having the power to decide their own development path and incorporate local knowledge. The common perception is that locals don't have any impact in terms of control or ability to incorporate or inform of local knowledge for development in their village. What has hindered this is the influence capacity connected to the post-colonial environment of Mauritius, where foreigners and wealthy landowners mainly determine development, both in terms of who it is built for and who is constructing it. This, however, does not mean that residents sit idly by and observe; instead, they exert agency and put up resistance. This is done by contesting development projects such as protests and trying to overrule building permits, keeping an inner resistance, and making what they can happen by themselves, such as teaching the children in hopes of a better future.

The second research question to be answered was:

- What consequences do residents of Tamarin ancestry experience due to development in their village in relation to local knowledge in terms of A: everyday life, and B: changes in the local ecosystems?

This was answered by the two main themes, ecosystem consequences and clusivity, referring to inclusion and exclusion in everyday life. The consequences of development in relation to the low incorporation of local knowledge and self-determination become evident with the main theme demonstrating the many ecosystem and, conversely, community impacts this has

created. The empirical data and analysis have shown that the social scale governing local ecosystems has been exogenous, without the incorporation of local knowledge of the local ecosystems.

It was found more specifically that the terrestrial ecosystems showed how extensive construction has resulted in deforestation of food sources and hundred-year-old trees, as well as a loss of space for growing vegetables and keeping animals, despite disapproval from locals. This isn't without its complexities, however, with locals forced into a scenario of deforestation and construction of houses in an act of survival. Additionally, the luxury villas on the mountain, in Tamarin, have resulted in the destruction of monkeys and bats' natural habitat, causing them to flee to the village and creating floods despite warnings from the residents. The aquatic ecosystems demonstrated the observations of dumping and pollution in the local watershed, notwithstanding local protests. This has further contributed to the destruction of coral reefs and the decline in marine life, in combination with other factors such as harmful fishing practices that aren't informed by local knowledge. Lastly, the elongation of the beach to enable further development has altered the currents affecting erosion and marine life.

The theme of clusivity showed a mix of inclusion and exclusion for economic accessibility, as more jobs and a diversification of jobs have contributed to inclusion in the workforce; however, the jobs are exclusionary in their separation in terms of money and power from the foreigners and the wealthy. The exclusion in terms of economic injustice is, however, broader as the skyrocketing prices of everything in the area result in locals not being able to afford to buy a house, land, or even food. Additionally, the minimum wages in this expensive area result in locals needing multiple jobs and having to work harder to have less.

The exclusion in physical constraint in terms of the physical barriers that are put up in the village for residents of Tamarin ancestry, hindering their freedom of movement within Tamarin, was, however, larger. The privatization has resulted in culturally important places for residents with Tamarin places being cut off and being made inaccessible, harming the ability to perform traditions and pass on centuries of local knowledge. Additionally, the high prices to enter commercial spaces are described as hindering their freedom of movement in tamarin. Lastly, the strong foreign influences have resulted in a change of culture and mentality to a more individualistic manner and capital-seeking mindset.

This study has contributed to current research by demonstrating, through a case study in Mauritius, how local knowledge, self-determination, and holistic and interconnected local worldview are central and indivisible from endogenous development.

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