

## **The artificial worlds of Maldives. Past, present, future?**

The aim of the presentation is to present the significant changes in the Maldives' economy over the last half-century, leading to a big diversification of the types of social and economic space in this small island country, as well as possible future scenarios, taking into account internal and external threats. The traditional understanding of resources as mineral or agricultural seems to be too limited in relation to the territories of the Global South, especially tropical island areas. In this period, tourism has joined the fastest-growing sectors of the world's economy. The resources of tourism are hidden in the characteristics of the natural and social environment. Resources *per se* are also evolving. The paper concerns the Maldives – half a century ago inhospitable and inaccessible to tourists, now visited by over 1.5 million people a year. This change was possible thanks to the restructuration of the natural environment – deep and requiring significant investments, the use of modern technologies and the adaptation of social solutions. The latter took place in stages – more and more relaxing the restrictive rules of contact between the natives and tourists. Initially, the construction of tourist resorts covered only uninhabited islands, creating an "alien" world inside the country with natural features unknown to the natives and inaccessible to them, and perceived by tourists as a "tourist paradise". The newcomers were rarely aware of the scale of the transformation of the original environment. In this way, an artificial world was created inside the Maldives. But one artificial world or many? The increasing variety of forms of development of hotel islands raises the question of the number of such artificial worlds. In 2023, there were 159 hotel islands in the Maldives, out of about 1200 islands that make up the archipelago. Another 187 were inhabited by natives and by 2011 were virtually inaccessible to tourists. They formed a separate "world". A special case – yet another world – was the capital island of Malé, which gathered the majority of the population and almost all tourists before they were transported to tourist resorts. Gan Island – the second tourist gateway to the Maldives and the former British air base – is yet another variant of space organization. Finally, more than 800 islands are uninhabited – some still untouched with untransformed nature, others treated as a place for obtaining building materials or a landfill, the number of which, in the face of rapidly increasing tourist traffic, is growing rapidly. Interestingly, some of the waste filling the atolls becomes a base for the creation of artificial islands and the expansion of the country's territory. Yet another artificial world! In this way, the Maldives went from

being a homogeneous territory back in the 1970s to a very diverse territory in 2020s. In a significant area, conditions originally absent have been created. It is worth asking what are the chances of surviving this "new wonderful world" under conditions of intense internal pressure on limited resources and external pressure related to global warming.