Tony Gallienne (2024). *Guernsey: How we live together*. Gallant Publishing. 375pp. ISBN: 978-0-9556-3522-9. £14.00.

The governance of small states and territories is difficult for a variety of reasons, not least the inability to take advantage of economies of scale. But smallness also means that decisions are based heavily on personal connections. This is true in elections, with candidates being elected on a personal vote and not necessarily because of their policies or party affiliation. The problems are accentuated in islands which have their own distinct identity.

These issues are well documented in Tony Gallienne's new book. *Guernsey: How we live together* is a follow up from his first book *Guernsey the 21st century* (Gallant Publishing, 2007). It is by any standards a substantive work, embracing theoretical discussion of numerous issues, including quotes from hundreds of commentators, with a description of how Guernsey has evolved over the centuries and an analysis of current issues. The author is well qualified to write about Guernsey. He was born and brought up in there, has worked both there and in the UK, and has held numerous positions in the island including being a founding member of the Guernsey Literary Festival.

The book is structured around some key themes such as the social contract, the "second curve" (most things start small grow and thrive and finally plateau and decline and that to make progress there is a need from time to time to start on a new course) and the progress trap, which focuses on how a particular way of life can overreach and destroy itself.

Guernsey is, by any standards, a successful and prosperous community. As Gallienne states: "We have one of the highest per capita incomes and one of the highest life expectancy rates in the world. We live on a beautiful island. We are a community with a strong sense of identity, belonging and meaning. We have full employment. Most of us have well lived lives ... Culture and sport are flourishing. Women and the LGBTQ+ community have become freer to make their own life decisions. We do not fear crime or each other" (p. 332).

However, Guernsey also has well recognised problems that it has simply failed to deal with.

Gallienne has strong words on education which he describes as "Guernsey's worst political, policy, management, delivery, social, cultural and moral failure of the last 25 years". Guernsey has spent a quarter of a century of debate and uncertainty about the shape of its secondary education system; and, although the policy trajectory has eventually been agreed, the delivery has proved to be equally contentious. The central issue has been whether to retain the system of selection at age 11 by academic performance. Guernsey has followed other jurisdictions in moving to a less selective system; but the implementation has been botched, in particular by having to use buildings that were no longer 'fit for purpose', both through age and facilities. Polarisation is now on wealth and social class. Gallienne states that education has become "an engine of inequality". It has not proved to be a ladder of social mobility.

Gallienne also notes that Guernsey has a housing crisis, with prices that are way above those in the south east of England although lower than in Jersey. The high cost of housing means that many young people without the benefit of a Bank of Mum and Dad are forced to leave the island and settle elsewhere.

Guernsey has also been deficient in maintaining its basic infrastructure – roads, ports and airport – and its overall financial position is less sound than it used to be.

All that is good about Guernsey has been achieved despite Guernsey's dysfunctional political system. But the problems it faces are because of it.

Guernsey is not alone in struggling to attract the right quality of people to its parliament and to its government. The situation has been compounded both because of the personalization of politics endemic to small jurisdictions but also a botched reform of the structure of the island's parliament. After a poorly structured referendum in which turnout was low, Guernsey has moved to single constituency of 38 members, which led to an election in 2020 that Pich and Reardon described as *The strangest election in the world* (*Small States & Territories, 4*(1), 2021). The politician who comfortably topped the poll, Gavin St Pierre, in a *Jersey Evening Post* article on 25 January 2025, said:

> It produces a "democracy" that is more Athenian than representative in its nature, akin to a random fruit machine resulting in 38 individuals being dragged off the street one day and dropped into government the next. This is almost certainly the reason that it is truly unique worldwide, without any long line of visiting jurisdictions keen to understand how it works.

In the 2020 election the turnout was 80%, perhaps because of the novelty of the system. But, in the 2025 election, turnout fell to 72% but with much lower voter registration. Voters as a proportion of eligible voters fell from 49% to 39%. One suspects that the current system will not survive until the next election.

The Parliament elected in 2020 proved problematic. Gallienne quotes a number of members describing how toxic the environment was and how tribal it had been become. The conflicts led to a successful vote of no confidence in the Chief Minister. Gallienne rightly says that "it is the job of deputies to balance competing interests and demands and decide on the most appropriate way forward for the whole of the community, not just to bow to the loudest voice or the most powerful interest group" (p. 123). But the political system makes this difficult because it is those with the loudest voices who tend to have the biggest say in elections. Acting as Gallienne suggests is not a vote winning proposition.

Gallienne has a lengthy discussion on the differences between executive government and committee government, with the contrast between Jersey having the former and Guernsey the latter. However, in practice the differences between the two types are blurred and arguably the right people can make either system work effectively and the wrong people can make neither system work. In this context, Gallienne comments "the important point that was never addressed to any extent in the various reviews and changes was how to improve the quality of candidates and politicians" (p. 84).

Gallienne has done a service to the people of Guernsey in writing such a thought-provoking and well-researched book which also contributes to the growing volume of literature on the problems of governance in small states. It does what it says in the title: how the people of Guernsey "live together", although it does not cover how to address the underlying problems in the political structure.

Politicians, leading officials and others who wish to contribute to addressing the issues that Guernsey faces would be well advised to read this book.

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