

## Guest Editorial

### A conference anniversary: Unlocking the power of jurisdiction

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**ABSTRACT:** This editorial introduction commemorates the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *An Island Living*, an international conference convened by the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada, in September 1992. This event can be seen as the catalyst to a wide range of scholarly and policy initiatives – including this journal – that speak to the specific opportunities and strengths of small island states and territories in the contemporary world.

**Keywords:** Canada, islands, Prince Edward Island, small states, subnational island jurisdictions

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## Part I: Levelling up small states and territories

*David Milne*

It seems improbable for a single conference held three decades ago in September 1992 to have given birth to a veritable cascade of consequences. Yet, looking back upon these thirty years, this international conference – on the theme of *An Island Living* – was in so many ways the starting point. For the Institute of Island Studies (IIS) at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), Canada, it was the beginning of a new distinctive mandate for international island studies from which it has never strayed. It was also the launch of a North Atlantic islands partnership which has continued in one institutional form or another through three decades. It was the harbinger too for collaborative research and policy initiatives between Nordic and Canadian jurisdictions in the comprehensive North Atlantic Islands Program which ultimately led to three publications: Arnason & Felt (1995); Baldacchino & Greenwood (1998); (Baldacchino & Milne, 2000). The themes from the 1992 Conference then made their way into a host of subsequent publications which vigorously challenged former props and truisms in the scholarly literature, such as inherent vulnerability and the limits and constraints said to arise from small country size and/or insularity.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the architects of the '92 Conference, the late Professor Barry Bartmann and IIS Director Harry Baglole, for this happy outcome. It was they, through ambitious conference design and scope, who set participants to think afresh on economic

development in small island jurisdictions, sovereign or non-sovereign alike. Their sheer intellectual chutzpah broke new ground and prepared the way for a longer legacy of policy-driven thinking and initiatives, not just among island jurisdictions, but among all small states and territories. But the island focus was a fortuitous beginning, imaginatively capturing the appealing imagery of endogenous development and of sharing lessons of economic enterprise with others.

The conference focus was an exercise in *applied political economy*: how relatively small jurisdictions could best generate economic prosperity through smart strategic policy. Success was then in part a question of what powers a jurisdiction could exercise within its constitutional circumstances and how smartly these could be deployed in a real local economy. The focus was meant to be practical, activist and confident, unlike the somber, defeatist tone of the vulnerability school of thought. (See [Figure 1](#))

**Figure 1:** Some of the organizers and participants of the 1992 *An Island Living* conference gather outside Main Building of the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI). Front Row: Barry Bartmann (UPEI), José Monteiro da Silva (Azores), Walton Brown Jr (Bermuda), Elisabeth Naclér (Åland), Margrethe Sorensen (Greenland), Harry Baglole (UPEI), Carlos Pacheco Amaral (Azores). Second Row: Guðmundur Magnússon (Iceland), Robert Morgan (Cape Breton), Lino Briguglio (Malta), Greg MacLeod (Cape Breton), Laurie Brinklow (UPEI), Rosemary Ommer (Newfoundland), Peter Meincke (UPEI). Third Row: Michel Biggi (Corsica), Mary Rose Vella (Malta), Paul Streeten (USA), David Morgan (PEI). Back Row: Jean-Didier Hache (CPMR, Brussels), C.W.J. Eliot (UPEI), Jóan Pauli Joensen (Faroe Islands), Ian MacDonald (UPEI).



This feisty defence of small states – this ‘yes we can!’ spirit – arose from the firm conviction of Professor Barry Bartmann who had made microstates the object of his scholarly work for decades. His doctoral dissertation at the London School of Economics challenged

scholarly conventions and doubts about the sheer viability of small states and territories (Bartmann, 1997). His expert study of microstate success in international affairs, economic policy and good governance proved that small size itself was no barrier to prosperity or to admission to the international state system (also Bartmann, 2012). Small states had in fact been continuously demonstrating their economic and political viability for decades after the end of the Second World War. Yet gloomy prognostications still filled the air.

We must understand the weight of these decades of doubt. Seemingly grounded in the nature of things, paltry in size and population, small states were ‘small’, even ‘micro’, and so obviously disadvantaged. How could it be otherwise? But the mistake was to analyze territories *in isolation*, autarkically. This bears no relation to the actual ecological system within which the open economies of small jurisdictions operate, particularly in the post-war period of unprecedented international and regional integration. Practically no jurisdiction is really isolated and dependent on its own resources in a globalized world. Therefore, it makes no sense to analyze any small jurisdiction in isolation, as a stand-alone entity.

Once this intellectual obfuscation was removed, the entire focus of development in small economies could shift from numbing vulnerability to exciting and entrepreneurial policy strategy and activism. No guarantees of success for small territories, of course; but no foreclosure of opportunity either. Economic evidence already suggests that, all considered, small states do better than most states; and the citizens of small territories enjoy an even better quality of life than those of small states (McElroy & Pearce, 2006). In short, globalization has improved the odds for the small, while exposing risks even for large continental countries. This suggests the need for a more subtle and nuanced understanding of the modern international political economy than what the proponents of the economic vulnerability thesis had ever assumed (Briguglio et al., 2009).

## **Part II: The conference and its aftermath: Looking back from a long odyssey**

*Godfrey Baldacchino*

My islands journey began on my first ever arrival in Canada at Charlottetown airport, Prince Edward Island, after a harrowing four-leg journey that started in Bridgetown, Barbados. After being welcomed by Harry Baglole at the airport, I was whisked to Shaw’s Hotel at Brackley for a most welcome sleep. The next morning, as I awakened and looked through the window of my room, I beheld this most beautiful sight: calm and shimmering water, surrounded by greenery with a large white bird – an egret? - slowly wading in its shallows. Awestruck, PEI’s beauty captivated me at once. Even after all these years, it continues to enthrall my wife and I.

The conference itself was a blast. So unlike conventional academic conferences, here was a mixed gathering of scholars, policy makers, business leaders and politicians – including two former Prime Ministers – from various small states and territories across the broad North Atlantic. They had come not to moan about their predicament or ask for handouts but to learn from one another how best to put their jurisdictional powers to work for economic success. It was an honour for me to join Rob Greenwood in co-editing the proceedings of this remarkable conference: eventually published as Baldacchino and Greenwood (1998).

Such was the beginning of my island odyssey: a sociologist with sustained interest in the study of islands, now moving into interdisciplinary waters, particularly political economy and political geography. In its closing session, the Conference instructed organizers to conduct further detailed work on a select group of case studies of North Atlantic islands. The IIS and

NORDrefo, a Scandinavian research institute on regional development based in Stockholm, soon afterward agreed to assume this mandate. They jointly launched an intense program of research, collaboration exchange, and visitations on six islands in the North Atlantic: Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Iceland, the Faroes, the Isle of Man, and the Aland islands. As part of that program, the Institute of Island Studies organized a SSHRCC Summer Institute in PEI in 1995 to further this work, where once again I joined scholars in intense exploration of the research themes and served as principal rapporteur of the Summer Institute. Shortly afterward my attention was drawn to a fierce debate amongst Prince Edward Islanders over the Confederation Bridge, then being built that would resolutely connect PEI to the rest of Canada in 1997 – or, as some Islanders would argue, Canada to the Island. This debate divided Islanders between ‘doom and gloomers’ and project ‘boosters’, and who could only agree that major changes would surely come in its wake (Baldacchino, 2008). When David Milne came to Malta in 1997 to join me in co-editing the book summarizing the research findings of the eight-year *North Atlantic Islands Program*, the book proceeded well toward publication (Baldacchino and Milne, 2000).

By this time, I had laid down a solid track record of work with the IIS. It was natural then, that when the IIS and UPEI were considering candidates for a position in island studies in the new federally funded Canada Research Chairs (CRCs) Program launched across the country on the occasion of the new millennium, I was encouraged to apply. There were 26 expressions of interest, five candidates were shortlisted; each of whom was subsequently interviewed. When I learned that I got the position, my trajectory was truly set.

I spent ten years as CRC in Island Studies at UPEI (2003-2013). They were times of great academic productivity, with its momentum spilling over many subsequent years, and which is ongoing. Conference participation and organization; dozens of books, book chapters and journal articles; exciting explorations of archipelagos, of island tourism, of cold water islands, of secession and independence movements; of heritage management on densely populated islands, of island entrepreneurship, a comparison between islands and remote rural regions, even an island cook book ... (Google Scholar, 2022). Each of these edited forays built and consolidated networks and pushed the frontiers of knowledge and collaboration. An authored book, *Island enclaves* was a global review of subnational island jurisdictions (SNIJs) practicing, or being used for, offshoring and creative governance (Baldacchino, 2011). An *Island Studies Journal* was set up in 2006: presciently launched as an open access journal, and its impact has been tremendous (Stratford, 2015). This was followed by *Small States & Territories*, launched in 2018, also in open access, intended to address these jurisdictions more explicitly. An island studies reader was conceived as a self-publishing venture and then edited and republished (by Routledge) eleven years later (Baldacchino, 2007; 2018). Four volumes of island studies readings spanning over two millennia were curated and collated (Kelman & Baldacchino, 2017). A ‘rethinking the island’ book studies with US publisher Rowman and Littlefield International delivered ten books (Rowman.com, 2022); the last is a co-authored text examining the ‘how’ of island studies and is at the publishers (Stratford, Baldacchino & McMahon, 2023). A new book series, dedicated to small state studies, was launched with Routledge in 2019 (Routledge, 2022).

Meanwhile, and in parallel, UPEI and the IIS pioneered an island studies minor (starting in 1998) and launched a master’s degree in island studies in 2003. Over a hundred students have graduated from this programme, including many proud international graduates. Both programmes are ongoing. Island studies at an undergraduate level now has a bespoke text: Randall (2021). ‘Island studies’ programmes of some kind now also exist in Tasmania, Shetland and Malta.

UPEI also hosted the 7<sup>th</sup> *Islands of the World* conference in June 2002 on behalf of the International Small Islands Studies Association, and aptly titled ‘New horizons in island studies’. I served as Vice-President and then President of ISISA, for a total of 12 years (2010-2022). The leadership of this unique association has now passed on to Dr Laurie Brinklow, the current Coordinator at UPEI’s IIS.

### **Small states and territories and islands**

Small islands and archipelagos offer remarkable lessons to the study of small states and territories. Their sheer numbers in terms of sovereign states, and their canny realization of the strength in such numbers, means that the international community – starting with the United Nations – cannot disregard this group of countries and their interests. Back in 1994, the UN organized its first small island developing states (SIDS) summit, in Barbados; this is now part of a ten-year cycle. The UN also has a high representative on its staff that monitors and supports the SIDS file. And, via the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), small countries have found both voice and influence, securing a high-profile ‘victory’ at the Paris 2015 UNFCCC 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties with a reference to the aspirational goal of an increase in the mean temperature of the planet since pre-industrial levels by not more than 1.5<sup>0</sup>C “to stay alive” in the adopted agreement (Benjamin & Thomas, 2016; UN, 2016).

Meanwhile, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea was agreed to in 1982 and was enacted in 1994. Since then, being an island, and so capable of supporting economic and human life, allows a state to claim an exclusive economic zone, promoting the territorialization of huge swathes of ocean. This has transformed many ‘small island states’ into ‘large ocean states’, especially in the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Morgan, 2022).

In a further parallel, subnational island jurisdictions have sharpened their visibility on the international scene. They have been targeted as the sites of Very Large Marine Protected Areas (e.g. Singleton & Roberts, 2014). They have sought, and often secured, non-voting and associate membership status on various regional or international organizations, now at the table where decisions are taken. Niue and the Cook Islands could join the UN as full sovereign states, but their governments refrain from doing so, in part to retain New Zealand citizenship (Levine, 2016). The tension between sovereignty and non-sovereignty persists in a number of island jurisdictions: a 2019 non-binding referendum in Bougainville delivered an overwhelming endorsement for independence from Papua New Guinea (Connell, 2020); while three referenda in New Caledonia have locked that archipelago with(in) France, but a road map for greater autonomy is still on the horizon (David, 2019). The shifting sands of offshore finance and anti-money laundering initiatives – dramatically exposed in the Panama Papers and Paradise Papers – have seen small island states and territories rejig their legal and operating parameters, trying to maintain vital service industries while sitting on the right side of the law (Hira, Murata & Monson, 2019)

Small islands are also so good and useful to think *with* (Gillis, 2006). Increasingly becoming ‘geographies of hope’ (Turner, 2010), they express humankind’s aspirations and ambitions: whether for exclusive, secure and safe neighbourhoods (Rofe, 2006); or for sustainable living. Artificial islands are the new gated communities, for those who can afford them (Jackson & della Dora, 2009). Other islands have taken laudable green energy initiatives that make them poster-children of a decarbonized future, premised on self-sufficiency and sustainability (e.g. Björnberg & Tarus, 2021). They make a welcome and timely departure from a continental bias that has blinded us, especially since the industrial revolution (Easton, 2022). Islands are the ‘elsewheres’ that cast our current predicaments in stark relief (Bonnett, 2020).

Islands are also heterotopias which, according to Foucault, are “effectively enacted utopias”: places both real and imaginary that can simultaneously represent, contest and invert the societies in which they are nested (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, p. 24; Ong, 2017).

### Part 3: Our Conclusion

Island studies has come a long way from 1992. Its spirit is feisty. We owe the island pioneers a great debt for setting us in this direction and gifting us this confidence. We featured two such pioneers – Professor Barry Bartmann and IIS Chair Harry Baglole – at the outset of this editorial. They set their sights high with the *Island Living* Conference and never looked back. They built and sustained an international network of scholars, first in the North Atlantic and Mediterranean theatres, and then reached out to the wider world of islands. They fostered a policy-centered approach to island development, inspired the launch of various island studies programmes, and sent out into the world ambassadors of ‘Islandia’.

Achievements on this scale are rare.

We are in their debt.

Such modest men, we salute you on this 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

### Disclaimer

This article did not benefit from research funding. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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