Governance of Small Jurisdictions: Guest Editors' Introduction

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Key words: small and island states, governance, smallness, statehood, vulnerability

Abstract

This article introduces a symposium on the Governance of Small Jurisdictions developed from selected papers first presented at a conference at the Islands and Small States Institute of the University of Malta in November 1999. It notes the important role of the University of Malta in promoting the study of governance in small states, and recognises other leaders in the small and island states study movement including the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration which co-hosted the beginning conference.

The article then considers the notions of smallness and statehood as generally used in this branch of scholarship, reflects on what small states have in common, introduces the other articles which make up the symposium, and provides a list of some 90 states with populations of under one million sorted into three categories: (i) sovereign states, (ii) states in federations, and (iii) associate states, self-governing territories and self-governing colonies.

In this introduction to the “Governance of Small Jurisdictions” symposium we note first the role in the study of small states of the Islands and Small States Institute established by the University of Malta, which served as host for the conference in which earlier versions of the symposium articles were first presented. We then identify a number of other leaders in the field of “governance of small states” scholarship and practice, and comment on the way in which the defining terms “small” and “state” are used, in this scholarship generally and in this symposium particularly. Next, we connect briefly with the debate about what small states have in common, and finally we offer a short introduction to the articles which follow. Our introduction concludes with an appendix listing the states which satisfy our criteria of smallness, in the three categories identified in our earlier discussion.
The University of Malta and small states scholarship

The articles included in the symposium which constitutes this edition of Public Organization Review: A Global Journal have been developed from a selection of the papers presented at an International Conference on the Governance of Small Jurisdictions held in Malta in November 1999. The conference was hosted by the Islands and Small States Institute of the University of Malta in close collaboration with the Management and Personnel Office which is part of the Office of the Prime Minister of Malta and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA).

The Islands and Small States Institute developed from a special program within the University of Malta’s Foundation for International Studies. It has, within a very short span of life, developed an international reputation for academic excellence in the study of issues relating to small states, and its conferences have given rise to a number of publications in special editions of refereed journals (as on this occasion) or in book form. It has been active in other ways too, notably in its contribution to the construction of a vulnerability index which aims to supplement GNP per capita statistics with an index of fragility arising from small size, insularity and proneness to natural disasters; and several University of Malta scholars now associated with it have made significant contributions to the ongoing work of the IASIA Working/Special Interest Group on Small and Island States, about which more will be said below.

The aim of the conference which gave rise to this symposium was to explore issues of governance in small states from as broad a perspective and as wide a geographical base as possible. This theme has not hitherto been as widely explored as some others, such as the issue of economic vulnerability. Where governance issues have been discussed, they have often been examined from a fairly limited public administration perspective. While this conference did not neglect those areas, it went beyond them in ranging from a search for analytical models to actual case studies of governing institutions in individual countries. The articles which follow seek to reflect these perspectives and diversity.

On the study of governance problems and issues in small states generally

There can be little doubt that the study of governance problems and issues in small states has increased dramatically as the number of small states has grown with the decolonising movements that followed the end of World War II. Not all the states which emerged from that movement were small, of course. But many were, particularly when the former imperial powers had shed direct control of their larger colonies and came to address what remained, often described picturesquely as “remnants of empire”. The creation of many small states in this period swelled the membership of international associations such as the United Nations and