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## Editorial Introduction

# Re-reading the Anamorphosis of Educational Fragility, Vulnerability, and Strength in Small States

## Special Guest Editor

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### **The *Raison d'être* of Small States Research**

Not so long ago, across many disciplines, the study of small states was seen as a futile project since “small states have been rendered synonymous to chronically vulnerable and problematic territories for which aid, assistance and especially favourable deals are legitimate” (Baldacchino, 2012, p. 237). Yet within the past eighteen months we have seen a popular resurgence of educational research on small states in comparative and international education (CIE) with at least two publications in 2011 (*Education in Small States: Policies and Priorities* by Michael Crossley, Mark Bray and Steve Packer, and *Tertiary Education in Small States: Planning in the Context of Globalization* edited by Michaela Martin and Mark Bray) and one in 2010 (*Education in Small States: Global Imperatives, Regional Initiatives and Local Dilemmas* edited by Peter Mayo). Before this wave of contemporary comparative analysis, the last comprehensive analysis in CIE of educational developments in small states appeared in the Special Issue in *Comparative Education* in 2008, *Comparative and International Perspectives on Education in Small States* guest edited by Peter Mayo.

This Special Issue of *Current Issues in Comparative Education* shows the *raison d'être* of small states research is more pertinent now than ever, and challenges doubts over whether small state studies is still noteworthy as a category of analysis (see Goetschel, 1998; Baehr, 1974; Christmas-Moller, 1983). The numerous submissions for this Special Issue corroborate the expanded interest in the topic, which beseeches the question: *What is now 'novel' about small states that has drawn new attention from researchers?* Perhaps an answer to this question rests in the economics of small states. Another – although not unrelated – answer could be the movement of small states from *government* to *governance*, driven by globalization and technology which call for innovation and inventiveness to partake in the knowledge economy. Indeed, globalization has changed the way small states are regulated since it creates both homogenization and new localisms as nation states are confined to particular spaces, topographies, and ecologies. Therefore, in a post-‘global financial crises’ era, this issue offers re-readings of the policies, performances, and practices of small states, and continues the resurgent discourse about what we can learn from them.

For some time now, small states research has been on an ‘empirical cliff,’ where there is emergent curiosity about why these states are successful, but diminishing empirical research about what constitutes success. Historically, the overall narrative on education in small states focused on analyzing individual states and searching for comparative patterns. Several prior studies have tried to address the educational challenges in small states, falling into two categories: single country studies or geo-strategic/geo-hemispherical studies (such as the Commonwealth, countries, the Caribbean Community [CARICOM], and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN]). Within this issue, we have found new conceptualizations of small states that move away from “methodological nationalism” (Robertson & Dale, 2008) and provide unique

comparative perspectives on the strengths, vulnerabilities, and fragility that have come to define small states. The authors use existent literature on small political jurisdiction (see Baldacchino, 2012; Mayo, 2010) to reassess how distinctive small jurisdictions, such as the *favelas* in Brazil, which exist within a large urban metropolis, also face and respond to the same encounters that small states do (see in this issue Straubhaar). This new form of social learning forms a jurisdictions perspective that helps us to draw lessons from small states and apply them to big problems.

From a public administration viewpoint, small states are seen as having the four defining behavioral characteristics of 'smallness': "exaggerated personalism, limited resources, inadequate service delivery and donor dependence" (Sutton, 2006, p. 13). Further, Baldacchino (2012) argues that a "deficit discourse" exists around small states that are premised upon their inability to develop certain institutions and power. Despite this, size does matter when it comes to getting things done, as small states present advantages such as strategic flexibility (Baldacchino & Bertram, 2009) and economies which can outperform larger ones (Armstrong, de Kervenoael, Li, & Read, 1998). Thus, we should move towards seeing smallness as complimentary and not an exculpation for economic development. On the one hand, small states define themselves as such only when it is advantageous to them and on the other hand international, multilateral, transnational, supranational, trans-regional regimes entities, and institutions identify with this concept of smallness only when such organizations wish to offer advice and expertise as active specialists. However, recipient states and regional regimes gladly accept being labeled small, fragile, and vulnerable to bring donor funding to obscured and obfuscated projects while showing linkages and legitimacy with international mandates and targets. Moreover, in some instances we are now seeing greater collaboration between small states across different sectors give rise to a form of "new mutualism" defined by (i) creating a multi-sectoral approach, (ii) setting international targets, and (iii) establishing regional benchmarks (Jules, 2012). After all, as various articles in this issue (see in this issue the articles by Baldacchino; Crossley & Sprague) point out smallness has numerous advantages and gives rise to self-autonomous regions within larger states, redefining what it means to be a large state or a jurisdiction in a large state.

In numerous small states, education has become a target of the reform agenda as part of broader new public management (NPM) and neoliberal restructuring. Given the pervasiveness of educational reforms premised upon NPM in small states, we could come to the conclusion that the "global speak" (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006) influences national discourses and thus many small states are starting to align national aspirations with global and regional thinking (Jules, 2008). Yet it remains important to see who continues to challenge and propel simpler conceptions of smallness. In what follows, first I revisit the definitional tenets of what constitutes a *small state* (those who self-identify as such as well as those in which the arbitrary definition of smallness has been ascribed by the Commonwealth Secretariat and World Bank as well as the United Nations Small Island Developing States [SIDS] project). Next, I argue that being seen as small in today's interconnected society is a survival characteristic within a post-bureaucratic society of vanishing scale, size, and space. Finally, I show how various chapters in this special edition make up the new mosaic of the *raison d'être* of small state research.

### **From an A Priori Definition to a Posteriori Conceptualization**

Early scholars battled with defining the characteristics of small states, categorizing them as either having a positive or negative impact upon state centric relations. An *a priori* definition of small states materialized in the 1960s with the creation of numerous states in the post-colonial era. While there is no widely accepted unified definition of small states (Baldacchino, 2012; Cowards, 2002), its vocabulary often focuses on population size, ecology, vulnerability to external shocks,

limited human and natural resources, nature of their economies, cost per capita of services, and dependence on trade. Early definitions of small states also distinguished *small societies* from *small territories* and called attention to the fact that small societies may exist in large states (Benedict, 1967). Attention was given also to the political and economic systems of small states; however, scholars soon realized that smallness is relative (Martin & Bray, 2011). Regardless, over time numerous characteristics merged into a *core definition* meant to encompass the perceived challenges facing small states through “economics of size” (Demas, 1965) and to describe state vulnerability and fragility (Briguglio, 1995; Bune, 1987; Holmes, 1976). Thus, interchangeable concepts of “small states,” “micro-states,” “small open economies” and “small islands developing states” (Armstrong et al., 1998; Commonwealth Advisory Group, 1997; Commonwealth Consultative Group, 1985; Commonwealth Secretariat & World Bank Task Force, 2000; Read, 2004) entered the academic lexicon.

In this small state literature a number of themes emerge. First, the definition about what constitutes a small state references population size. Kuznets (1960) sets an upper population limit of 10 million for small states; by this gauge, today 134 countries could be considered small. The core definition now sets upper size limits for small states between 1.5 million to 5 million (Armstrong et al., 1998; Bacchus, 2008; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2009; World Bank, 2012). However by these measurements a few large countries (e.g., Botswana, Jamaica, Lesotho, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, and The Gambia) with population sizes above 1.5 million are also categorized as small since they share several of the same characteristics of smallness – including small GDPs (Bernal, 1998; Commonwealth Secretariat/World Bank Task Force, 2000; see in this issue Crossley & Sprague). Once population size constraints had been taken into account, attention was turned to understanding what makes smallness unique. The joint Commonwealth Secretariat/World Bank Task Force (2000) notes that small states share and are shaped by numerous characteristics that impede their development including: vulnerability to external events; natural disasters that create havoc on national incomes; limited capacity in the public and private sectors; and the uncertain and difficult economic transition to a changing world trade regime. Further, the report includes specific challenges of remoteness and isolation; openness; susceptibility to natural disasters and environmental change; limited diversification; poverty and limited capacity; and access to external capital.

From this perspective, extensive studies have examined specific characteristics that impede the development of small states by focusing on South-South migration (Bartlett, 2012), the politics of education in small states (Grant, 1993), the effect of indigenous knowledge and values upon the policy process (Holmes & Crossley, 2004), research capacity (Crossley, 2008), financial and human capital limitations (Jules, 1994), impact of donor aid on local decisions (Jules, 2006; Jules, 2010), adult education (Jules, 2006), higher education financing (Baldacchino & Farrugia, 2002; Nkrumah-Young, Huisman, & Powell 2008), cooperation and collaboration (Jules, 2008; Jules 2012), post-socialist transformation (Jules, forthcoming; Jules, 2011), and the small scale syndrome (Baldacchino, 1997).

As these research foci show, a *posteriori* conceptualization should now focus on what it means *to empirically study* small states rather than what it means *to be identified as* a small state. This perspective involves looking at the *small* within the *large* and thus retuning to Benedict’s (1967) sociological characteristics of small states. This implies inquiring into the segmentation that exists within larger states that may embody the necessary elements of smallness and thus qualify for small states research. Finally, we are no longer restricted by geographic jurisdiction; emphasis has now moved to political jurisdiction instead (see Mayo, 2010; Baldacchino, 2012).

### **Moving Towards Small State *Anamorphosis*: A Paradigmatic Shift in Perspective**

Anamorphosis suggests that the spectator needs to use a specific vantage point while observing a distorted projection of an image to perceive its true shape. If we apply the concept of anamorphosis to the *raison d'être* of small state research, not only do we see the research within the research (i.e. the empirical study of smallness), but we might view small state research as a gateway to understanding the challenges that larger states face. We would like to argue that this Special Issue represents an anamorphic perspective of re-reading the *raison d'être* of small state research. This perspective illuminates that small states are increasingly relying on networks (regional and sub-regional), which in turn allow them to constrain their efforts on the best possible solutions to policy challenges. No longer is isolationism premised upon 'old regionalism' or 'closed regionalism' seen as a creditable policy response, instead we are seeing the rise of 'new regionalism' or 'open regionalism' centered on open membership, regional and global trade liberalization, trade facilitation, and the inclusion of regional level into the global market (Bergsten 1997; Girvan 2001; Kuwayama 1999). Conceptually, several authors here point out, there is now a movement from incremental change towards fundamental change, including measures that act boldly on competition and innovation since everyone wants to be seen as being modern. Methodologically, we authors adhere to the call by Robertson and Dale (2008) to move away from methodological nationalism and begin to see that education is not primarily associated with the working of the nation-states, but is often formed through several collaborative governance structures (Dale, 2003; Dale & Robertson, 2002; Jules, 2012).

In this edition, Godfrey Baldacchino and Michael Crossley and Terra Sprague were invited to pinpoint the key conceptual issues that small states face. In arguing that academia has paid little attention to small states, Baldacchino reviews the cynicism of the analytical category of smallness by looking at its behavioral issues. In problematizing size and scale, he notes that while there is no agreed definition of the ecology of small states, current trends suggest evidence of a "small scale syndrome" based on a "package of behavioural issues" (p. 14). The main point of this article is that in defining small states, we get wedged at the conceptual phases and do not move beyond them. Michael Crossley and Terra Sprague draw on their recent research for the Commonwealth Secretariat to discuss the implication of the post-2015 international targets upon small states. In reviewing the existent literature to date on small states, they note that in a post-2015 era, small states would benefit tremendously from collaboration and use of the banner of smallness to access "nuanced and contextually sensitive attention" (p. 29). They remind us that larger states can learn much from smaller states, particularly in an era defined by the uncritical tendencies of international educational policy and practices transfer.

The second part of this Special Issue pays attention to issues of fragility, and focuses on to the ways in which we have sought to conceptualize it. Rolf Straubhaar combines the literatures on fragility – a state-centric concept – (Mosselson, Wheaton, & Frisoli, 2009), small states and small jurisdictions to argue that a *de facto* jurisdiction such as the *favelas* in Brazil should be categorized as fragile small states. He cautions that although localized setting such as *favelas*, with their own semi-autonomous jurisdictions, lack institutional capacity and are not defined as fragile small states in the traditional sense, we should nevertheless combine the literatures of fragility and small states to reconceptualize the ways in which we study and comprehend smallness and *favela* life. Pigga Keskitalo, Satu Uusiautti and Kaarina Määttä, in looking at Sámi education and language, call attention to new distinctive features of small assemblages by showing how such a label can bring about educational transformation. In discussing assimilative language educational policies, they argue that national educational characteristics should acknowledge historical-cultural burdens and draw upon indigenous conceptualization of time, place, and knowledge. They further note

that given the small nature of the Sámi community, a distinctive Sámi pedagogy within such a small community would transform as well as improve inclusive education.

The third part pays attention to vulnerability, and focuses on the ways international agencies use it to their advantage during policy negotiations. Jerome De Lisle notes that donor relationships differ in situations and contexts based on the “strength of the recipient country’s economy” (p. 64). In reviewing educational change in Trinidad and Tobago (TT) De Lisle explores its vulnerability, smallness, and islandness by looking at externally funded secondary school reform projects to identify “facilitators and barriers” (p. 65) to change. De Lisle compares the impact of large-scale international assessments, such as IEA in 1991 and PISA in 2009, which occurred before and after the 1999 secondary reform, and concludes that after the reform was implemented, TT scores on international assessments had no significant changes. In contextualizing “barriers to change” and why system reforms fail, De Lisle identifies three factors: ambiguity, failure to connect, and resource constraints. He also identifies four drivers of changes: leadership, planning and support, involvement and commitment and collaboration and communication. Using the population benchmark of 10 million defined by Kuznets (1960), D. Brent Edwards Jr. makes the case that El Salvador is vulnerable and should be defined as small state. He reviews the role international agencies such as USAID have had in education reform, and highlights how institutional power manifests itself during the formal and informal policymaking stages as well as within the final national policy. His main point is that El Salvador can be observed as a small state since it lacks institutional capacity, which is a key characteristic of some small states.

The fourth part of this Special Issue provides a comparative perspective on education in various small states. Justin J.W. Powell looks at the extent to which higher education institutions reflect global norms as they seek to become global players, comparing higher education in the wealthy small countries of Luxembourg and Qatar. In looking at the role of national universities in building scientific capacity, Powell focuses on the influence of global league tables in a climate where numerous challenges exist in developing and strengthening world-class universities. Powell concludes by noting that in these hyper-diverse societies, universities “[emulate] global goals simultaneously with serving local needs” (p. 101) since they seek to become internationally competitive institutions focused on national skill formation. Richard O. Welsh compares the SIDS of Jamaica and Singapore beginning in the 1960s. He shares how Jamaica’s GDP was more than Singapore’s in that era, and by 2010 Singapore’s GDP was nearly seven times more than Jamaica. In seeking to understand this divergence in economic development and its link to quality education, Welsh posits that Singapore utilized a “positioning” educational strategy while Jamaica had an “adapting” strategy. He shows that the development trajectories of these states differed based on their role within the former British colonial setting as well as their connections with multilateral organizations. Valentyna Kushnarenko and Ludmila Cojocari use the post-socialist small state of Moldova to chronicle the internationalization of higher education reforms in state universities as demand for education access increased. In drawing upon interviews with university administrators and focusing on how “international collaborative networks” function (p. 134) the authors argue that the internationalization of higher education is seen by administrators as necessary to seek internationalized foreign partnership. Further, national collaboration helps shape the “Go Global” policy that promotes “greater respect for pluralism and multiculturalism” (p. 138) in higher education.

The final section presents several case studies that look cultural influences on educational developments in small states. Matthew J. Schuelka reviews inclusive education in the isolated small state of Bhutan as it shifted its educational policy from an elite monastic tradition to a secular

system. In reviewing the educational changes in Bhutan during the last fifty years, Schuelka explores the underlying assumptions between the characterization of Bhutan as a small state and its educational development to include the “policy problems” of access, cost and quality and set to the tone of “international audiences” (Steiner-Khamsi & Stope, 2006; Jules, 2008). Finally, Lindsay J. Burton looks at how the colonial history of the Solomon Islands, particularly among the Kahua people, continues to shape perspective of a community-based early childhood education program. This collaborative ethnography highlights the continued challenges facing small state and local efforts to deal with these challenges. From a local perspective, Burton examines the influences of international policy discourse upon the small jurisdictions (local level) and notes that local programs are based on “indigenous efforts...to counter the continuation of colonization” (p. 158).

In sum, we hope that the insights provided in this Special Issues will continue to inform both theory and practice as well as convey ways for policymakers, governments, and international agencies to re-conceptualize policymaking as they seek to undertake to further waves of global reform. In education, reform is engendered through different ways and legitimated by institutions; we suggest that the researchers, students, practitioners and policymakers may want to move towards a global anamorphosis and identify the best vantage point to see the potential benefits of these reforms and their palpability. The *raison d'être* of small state research is one such anamorphic lens that may offer exemplar experiences to those in search of them.

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