

Chapter 1:

The Characteristics of Small States

In some respects, small states are not very different from medium-sized and large states. They exist in an interdependent world, and in many cases operate within a legacy from a colonial past. Their governments aspire to higher standards of living, but must struggle with limited material and human resources. Their education systems are structured according to familiar patterns with pre-primary education at the base and higher education at the apex. The basic organisation of schools and classrooms is also similar in small, medium-sized and large states.

However small states do have some distinctive features. Despite enormous variation in economics, culture and geography, certain features are common to all small states. Not all these features are relevant to the organisation and management of Ministries of Education, but it is useful to commence this book by identifying some of them.

With this in mind, this chapter begins by noting the range and diversity of small states. It then turns to some common features in the economies, societies and politics of small states. Both the diversity and the commonalities set a framework for analysis of Ministries of Education.

1. The Range and Diversity of Small States

Table 1 lists 71 states and territories which have populations below 1.5 million. Four points immediately stand out:

- *Location.* The states are scattered in all parts of the world -- Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and the South Pacific.
- *Culture.* This geographic spread brings with it corresponding cultural diversity. Swaziland, for example, is very different from Greenland; and the Turks & Caicos Islands are very different from the Cook Islands.

Table 1: The Small States of the World

Country/Region	Population 1988	GNP/hd 1988 US\$	Country/Region	Population 1988	GNP/hd 1988 US\$
<u>Africa</u>			<u>Europe</u>		
Seychelles*	68,000	3,800	San Marino	23,000	..
Sao Tome & Principe	119,000	280	Liechtenstein	27,000	..
Cape Verde	352,000	490	Monaco	27,000	..
Djibouti	381,000	1,210	Gibraltar +	29,000	4,240
Equatorial Guinea	397,000	350	Faeroe Islands	47,000	11,930
Comoros	442,000	440	Andorra	48,000	..
Swaziland*	737,000	790	Greenland	54,000	8,780
The Gambia*	822,000	220	Isle of Man +	64,000	5,910
Guinea Bissau	940,000	170	Guernsey+	55,000	..
Mauritius*	1,048,000	1,810	Jersey+	80,000	..
Gabon	1,077,000	2,760	Iceland	249,000	20,160
Botswana*	1,164,000	1,040	Malta*	345,000	5,050
Namibia*	1,262,000	2,440	Luxembourg	371,002	2,600
			Cyprus*	686,000	6,260
<u>Asia</u>			<u>South Pacific</u>		
Maldives*	203,000	410	Tokelau +	2,000	830
Brunei Darussalam*	243,000	14,120	Niue +	3,000	..
Qatar	350,000	11,610	Tuvalu*	8,000	650
Macau	443,000	2,990	Nauru*	8,000	10,230
Bahrain	481,000	9,470	Belau	12,000	..
Bhutan	1,373,000	150	Wallis & Futuna	15,000	968
Oman	1,402,000	5,070	Northern Marianas	17,000	..
United Arab Emirates	1,500,000	15,720	Cook Islands+	20,000	1,500
			American Samoa	36,000	..
<u>Caribbean</u>			Marshall Islands	41,000	..
Anguilla +	7,000	850	Kiribati*	67,000	650
Turks & Caicos Islands +	10,000	780	Fed. States of Micro.	86,000	1,500
Montserrat +	12,000	3,330	Tonga*	101,000	800
British Virgin Islands +	13,000	8,500	Guam	126,000	..
Cayman Islands +	20,000	3,480	Vanuatu*	151,000	820
St. Kitts & Nevis*	43,000	2,530	New Caledonia	154,000	5,760
Bermuda +	56,000	22,540	Western Samoa*	168,000	580
Aruba	60,000	6,750	French Polynesia	170,000	7,840
Dominica*	81,000	1,650	Solomon Islands*	304,000	430
Antigua & Barbuda*	84,000	2,800	Fiji	732,000	1,520
Grenada*	102,000	1,450			
US Virgin Islands	108,000	9,760			
St. Vincent & Grenadines*	122,000	1,100			
St. Lucia*	145,000	1,540			
Belize*	182,000	1,490			
Netherlands Antilles	191,000	6,380			
Bahamas*	247,000	10,560			
Barbados*	255,000	5,990			
Suriname	429,000	2,450			
Guyana*	799,000	390			
Trinidad & Tobago*	1,241,000	3,350			

* Sovereign member states of the Commonwealth

+ Associated States and Dependent Territories in the Commonwealth

- *Population.* The states have substantial differences in population size. The range is from 2,000 in Tokelau to 1,500,000 in United Arab Emirates.
- *Incomes.* Luxembourg, Bermuda and Iceland, with annual per capita incomes above US\$20,000, have populations among the richest in the world. By contrast in Bhutan, Guinea Bissau, The Gambia and Guyana annual per capita incomes are below US\$400.

Additional aspects of diversity which are not shown in the table but which are worth noting include:

- *Area.* While some states are small, others are very large. The land area of Macau, for example, is just 17 square kilometres, while that of Botswana exceeds 600,000 square kilometres.
- *Geography.* Some states (e.g. Montserrat, Dominica) are composed of single islands; some (e.g. Tonga, Kiribati) are composed of many islands; some (e.g. Belize, Brunei Darussalam) are coastal enclaves; and some (e.g. Swaziland, Bhutan) are entirely inland.
- *Proximity to Other States.* Some states (e.g. Seychelles) are isolated, far from their nearest neighbours. Others (e.g. in the Caribbean) exist in clusters.

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* **Small States versus Large States** *
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* *When comparing small and large states, three categories of* *
* *features may be identified:* *
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* - *ones which arise equally in both small and large states;* *
* - *ones which arise in both small and large states, but* *
* *which assume greater prominence in small states; and* *
* - *ones which are distinctive to small states.* *
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* *This book is mainly concerned with the second and third* *
* *categories. It generally ignores the features which exist* *
* *equally in small and large states because discussion on* *
* *these matters is readily available in the standard literature.* *
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These features may have strong implications for the organisation and management of Ministries of Education. For example, cultural traditions affect the nature of interpersonal relations; population size determines the size of the pool from which ministries can recruit staff; national income affects the extent to which the country can afford large bureaucratic structures and employ expatriates; the area and geographic spread determine the extent to which district offices are needed for remote areas; and the proximity to other states influences the extent to which regional cooperation is possible. These points will be discussed in subsequent sections of this book.

2. The Economies of Small States

A substantial literature now exists on the economies of small states. The most obvious way in which it is relevant to the organisation and management of Ministries of Education is that a strong economy permits a larger bureaucracy with higher salaries and better support services. Beyond this, it is perhaps unnecessary to go into detail here on the strategies used by governments of small states to maximise economic growth.

However, it is worth noting several points. The first is that many small states, perhaps even more than medium-sized and large states, are heavily dependent on foreign trade. This influences the structure of the labour market, and thus also the education system. It may require people to learn foreign languages, perhaps to the detriment of local ones. It may also require extensive specialised training in commercial and other trade-oriented subjects.

Secondly, in many small states human resources are the most valuable asset. This is especially true of states which are geographically small, and emphasises the importance of education. In some small states human resources have even become an 'export' and earner of foreign exchange. Tonga, Cape Verde and Montserrat are three small states in completely different parts of the world which gain substantial income from the remittances of their nationals in other countries. Governments which anticipate and encourage emigration have to ensure that the education qualifications of their people are marketable in the destination countries.

Thirdly, many small states are heavily reliant on foreign aid. Indeed small states commonly receive much higher per capita allocations of foreign aid than do large states. This is partly a function of the strategic location of many small states, but also reflects their general visibility in international affairs. It may also reflect recognition that

small states have special needs, including in the operation of government bureaucracies.

Dependence on foreign aid may have major implications for the organisation and management of Ministries of Education. First, personnel are likely to spend considerable time preparing projects and liaising with bilateral and multilateral aid agencies. Some ministries have special units for negotiating with donors. Because of small-state manpower constraints, in some countries the donors themselves sponsor recruitment of expatriate staff to help design and implement aid projects. These matters are discussed at greater length in Chapter 6.

3. The Societies of Small States

One common characteristic of small states is a strong sense of national and cultural identity. This gives ministries' curriculum development units an important role. The people of small states wish history, social science and other teaching to refer specifically to their own situations, and may resent dependence on syllabuses and books prepared for foreign countries. Thus ministries may require not only curriculum development but also textbook-production units. Inevitably, the mix of small print-runs and near total importation of production inputs place significant pressure on already low education budgets.

Emphasis on national development may also have significant implications for recruitment policies. In order to reduce local unemployment, ministries are often under strong pressure to restrict employment opportunities to local citizens. Especially in states with just a few thousand people, this pressure limits the pool of expertise from which ministries can readily draw personnel.

Important features may also be noted in the interpersonal relationships of small states. In contrast to medium-sized and large states, everybody seems to know everybody else, and does so in a wide range of different contexts. For those running Ministries of Education, this may have several implications.

- It may be much more difficult to apply neutral bureaucratic rules. For example, it may be difficult to remove an inefficient employee on grounds of inefficiency alone, because he is quite likely to be a relative or family friend of the person who would have to fire him.
- It is not unusual for people who cannot get formal appointments to arrange to be invited to social functions or family reunions in which they meet casually the person to whom they want to

speak. In extreme cases, supplicants may call at the officer's home, which is easily identifiable. In this way, senior officers can be 'met' or accosted through unofficial as well as official channels. They themselves use both established and unorthodox approaches with their superiors.

- Because people in small states know that they have to live with each other on a long term basis, they develop strategies for 'managed intimacy'. As explained in the box below, individuals find ways to avoid conflict and mute hostility.
- Yet it is also obvious that the societies of small states are not always harmonious and pleasant. Indeed many small states are torn by bitter hostility and strife. This may be another feature of small societies, in which it is often more difficult to accommodate divergent views.

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Small States and 'Managed Intimacy'

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Small states have highly personalised societies in which people know each other in a multitude of settings, and in which relationships are longlasting. In such situations, people must develop what has been called 'managed intimacy'. In the words of Lowenthal (1987):

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Small-state inhabitants learn to get along, like it or not, with folk they will know in myriad contexts over their whole lives. To enable the social mechanism to function without undue stress, they minimise or mitigate overt conflict. They become expert at muting hostility, deferring their own views, containing disagreement, and avoiding dispute in the interests of stability and compromise.

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In large societies, Lowenthal points out, it is easy to take issue with antagonists you need seldom or ever come across again. But to differ with someone in a small society where the two of you share a long mutual history and expect to go on being involved in countless ways is another matter. This feature of small societies may have major implications for the operation of a Ministry of Education.

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4. The Politics of Small States

The social features outlined above may have a direct relationship with the political features of small states. In turn, the nature of political features may have major implications for the operation of Ministries of Education.

On the positive side, the very smallness of small states gives their inhabitants an influence on their leaders that would be denied to most people in larger states. Leaders known personally even to the poorest are less likely to try to exclude any group from consideration. Moreover the leaders themselves may retain and promote a strong sense of community and equity.

However, the political forces of small states are not always so favourable. Although in theory a small territory with an informed electorate should be able to operate a representative democracy very well, in small states with powerful élites it may be difficult for an opposition to develop. Partly as a result, single-party states and dictatorships are far from unknown in small states. Intense class divisions and highly visible extremes of influence and wealth make consensus and democracy in many small states more pious principles than practical realities.

Other features arising from the highly personal atmosphere may be summarised as follows. In small states:

- the role of the individual takes on greater significance;
- interpersonal relationships can be deeper and much more harmonious, which greatly assists the work of managers;
- top political leaders are more likely to communicate directly with one another, which improves intersectoral coordination;
- but on the other hand, individuals are more susceptible to group pressures; and
- criticism of political leaders and senior administrators may be muted, often informal, but where it does appear is likely to be personal in form and strident in tone.

5. Summary

Although small states display considerable diversity, it is also possible to identify common features. This chapter began by noting the range and diversity of small states, highlighting geography, culture, population, incomes, area, topography and proximity to other states. It then turned to the commonalities. Separate sections looked in turn at the economies,

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The Politics of Small States: Contrasting Pictures

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Small states may operate at extremes of the political spectrum. This has been noted by Diggins (1984), who set out two contrasting pictures. On the positive side, he suggested:

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the very closeness and intimacy of a small society produces a feeling of identity of the individual with his whole community which is more difficult to achieve in larger nations. Or again, with small populations there may be less danger of communal, ethnic or tribal divisions and rivalries.... In politics, a small population can often more easily judge and choose its political and other leaders from personal knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses than in a large society, where judgements of this kind have necessarily to be based mainly on television and other media which distort or conceal the true personalities of the individuals being judged. It seems it is easier in small societies for a general neighbourliness and mutual dependence to develop than would be possible, or at least likely, on a larger scale.

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But Diggins noted that it does not always work like this. He continued:

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The tendency to parochialism and ignorance in political affairs ... easily plays into the hands of a would-be petty dictator, particularly as the absence of broader political issues tends to inhibit the formation of coherent, stable political parties with programmes based on principle rather than personalities.... In small countries it is relatively easier for a determined, unscrupulous individual with rather more than his share of charisma and ruthlessness to dominate all or most aspects of the country's life.

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What implications does this have for a Ministry of Education?

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societies and politics of small states. Many of the features commented upon have important implications for the organisation and management of Ministries of Education. For example reliance on foreign aid may have implications for staffing and structures, close interpersonal relations may require special management techniques, and bureaucrats and politicians in small states may have slightly different types of relationships from their counterparts in large states.

Further Reading

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