

Doing 'Island Studies' in a Small Island University

Dr Godfrey Baldacchino

Rector's Delegate, University of Malta, Malta

Island Studies Teaching Fellow, University of Prince Edward Island, Canada

Visiting Professor, Universita' di Corsica Pascal Paoli, France.

Overview

This session will serve as a critical commentary about, first, the specific nuances involved in working or studying at a small island university; and, second, the equally specific challenges involved in teaching 'island studies' in a small island university.

Some implications of working and studying in a small island university include: the likelihood of operating as a monopoly institution of higher education; the need for flexible specialisation amongst academic and administrative staff; the strong likelihood of students returning home (possibly to their parents) on a regular basis; the public obligation to provide a wide remit of courses and disciplinary programs, but not always being able to do so; working without the critical mass available in other, typically larger universities; balancing the needs of offering local tertiary education opportunities while encouraging islanders to seek opportunities for seeking education elsewhere ...

The main challenges involved in teaching island studies at a small island university deal with the extent to which such studies are 'mainstreamed' when the emphasis and pressure is towards credentialing that rewards that pursuit of knowledge required by the mobile elite – mono-disciplinary, professional and vocational pedagogies, and/or passports for inter/national education or employment. The island studies rubric here may, very occasionally, hold up on its own two feet; but is otherwise melded and folded within established, more mainstream, educational programs. Otherwise, there remains much cynicism, even hostility, towards the academic credentials of 'island studies', since they differ from 'mainstream'/mainland studies, with which small island universities regularly measure themselves. Indeed, how does an island studies student explain his/her choice and growth to parents, friends and potential employers? How does an island studies scholar explain his/her professional interest and expertise to peers, superiors, potential funders, journal editors and promotion panels?

Based on personal experiences in various tertiary education institutions, and tapping into a rich research base, this session should be of interest to students as well as scholars and administrators of small island universities.