

Andrew S. Downes (ed.) (2008) *Labour Markets in Small Developing States*, London, Commonwealth Secretariat, 135pp, £20.00stg. Available in the USA from Stylus Publishing: [www.styluspub.com](http://www.styluspub.com). ISBN: 978-0-85092-871-6.

It is very refreshing to see another excellent publication tackling a subject matter that has been in the sights of the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec) for a good many years. With 32 of its 54 members classified as ‘small states’, many of which are also ‘small island developing states’ (SIDS), ComSec has assiduously nurtured a pedigree of studies that look at the interface of education and development. This scholarship is based on the premise that smallness of scale, compounded by insularity or remoteness, provides distinctive challenges for educational policy and practice. While each jurisdiction is unique and manifests a great political, cultural and economic diversity, such differences are also patterned. And so, small (often island) states can, sometimes to their own surprise, benefit much from sharing experiences and working together on a regional, international or institutional basis. ComSec has been a consistent, key player in this respect: ComSec-supported research into the relationship between smaller scale, isolation, and educational provision in post-colonial contexts has a long and distinguished pedigree, and can certainly be traced back to the work of Kazim Bacchus and Colin Brock in the late 1980s.

That sequence of publications, targeted specifically to and for small states - to which I also had the privilege of contributing with a co-edited book in 2002 - had a seven-point agenda: post-colonial educational provision; training policies and strategies for educators and educational administrators; professional collaboration and institutional development in post-secondary and tertiary education; the organization and management of Ministries of Education; the fostering of local and regional research, evaluation and consultancy capability; examination systems; and the adoption of information and communication technologies.

Interestingly, this Downes collection departs quite significantly from these concerns. The shift is partly an outcome of a change in focus, with stronger private sector and market driven considerations. The ultimate concern, of course, remains ‘development’; but the focal point in this book is the examination of labour market conditions and human resource development initiatives in small states. More revealingly perhaps, contemporary challenges may be different from those of even a few years ago, and thus require different priorities.

In his succinct editorial introduction, Downes identifies eight key “features” that emerge as the fairly common denominator to the large number of small states reviewed in the volume. These features are: high levels of unemployment (though not in the Indian Ocean); high levels of semi-skilled and unskilled labour (though not so much in the Caribbean); the international migration of workers; failure of education and training systems to respond to market needs; inadequate labour market information systems; weak labour market regulation; high rural to urban migration; and large informal markets, segmented from formal ones.

To analyse these features, the authors adopt a hybrid (or eclectic) combination of both neo-classical and institutional tools. This basically means that the “theoretical rigour” of the

neo-classical school are applied and integrated within the realistically idiosyncratic context of small states. Noted. What remains missing is to conceptualize small states differently.

Labour markets, more than any other markets in the world, remain stubbornly national. And so, in dealing with human resources, the default perspective is to look at such resources ‘in place’. But this is increasingly less so generally, and especially in small developing states. In some cases, 70% of the work force which has received tertiary education in small states has migrated to industrialized countries. Some of those who leave *do* come back, but may leave again, and develop into a pattern of brain rotation or brain circulation. Ultimately, one must recognize that ultra-national mobility is part of the survival algorithm of small and island state citizens. Which begs the question: how to balance the rights and interests of the mobile with the need to prevent the erosion of the development process of small countries? Perhaps we are conceiving of the wrong form of development?

The book features four, tightly written chapters that address the burgeoning questions outlined in the introduction within the context of the three regions with the largest concentration of small states: Mahendra Reddy writes about the Pacific; Andrew Downes (again) writes about the Caribbean; and Happy Siphambe considers Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean. The majority of the cases reviewed are island states and territories. Roli Degazon-Johnson takes a more focussed look at the migration of teachers and nurses from the small Commonwealth states.

One feature of the brain and skill drain (or rotation/circulation) that the authors do not consider is the demographic safety valve that migration affords to small jurisdictions (see p. 44). An expanding population means that an economy that is growing at the same rate would only maintain, and not improve, current levels of development. Sub-national island jurisdictions like Niue, the Cooks and, to a lesser extent, Tokelau – which, while not sovereign states, are nevertheless included in Reddy’s chapter – enjoy considerable self-determination, but remain incorporated within a larger and richer state (New Zealand). This arrangement has many benefits, but the ability of these islanders to operate fully in the New Zealand labour market is certainly one of the most prized.

On a different tack, I find it rather ironic that the editor in particular makes a clarion call for three initiatives: the introduction of a “national production plan” (p. 6), of labour market information systems and of social partnership arrangements in small states, the latter based on the success of the Barbados model (and where the editor is based). In the smallest jurisdictions, the networking and social webbing of workers, employers and government officials makes such ‘social partnership’ a daily reality; labour market information is well known, though possibly not documented in such a way that makes it just as well known or accessible to outsiders. And planning at the national level is fraught with difficulty, given that the small economy is so open, elastic (some would say vulnerable) and hypothermic. Meanwhile, Barbados has embraced the ethos of labour relations (including the elusive protestant work ethic?) as practised in various developed countries; and this matches the country’s overall respect for the formalism and institutionalization inherited from the colonial experience.

Finally, *Labour Markets in Small Developing States* does well to grapple with a perennial difficulty of the educational systems of small states and territories: their ability to function as effective passport or visa providers for the well educated, without necessarily meeting the needs of the local economy and society. Developing well-paying and challenging jobs in prestigious economic sub-sectors - and so developing the human resources that would be required to take up those jobs - is a challenge in locations where there is hardly any private sector (other than the informal economy) and where exports depend considerably on one or a few unprocessed natural products – sugar, banana, bauxite, coffee, copra, phosphate – which may not require particularly sophisticated skills to mine or harvest. In such situations, it is not beneficial that at least some of the population is afforded the means to leave? Some of these emigrants would come back, as they do, when and if the right employment or business situations present themselves in their home jurisdiction. Creating such enticing prospects for return is one major challenge for small states. No surprise, therefore, that the more successful small states have managed, not so much to hold on to, but to lure back their brightest and ablest; they have developed private sectors that include small scale manufacturing, branded tourism experiences, banking and finance industries and similar niche sectors with attractive conditions of employment in order to do so.

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~~Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti, *Isolario*, Valencia, Spain, Vicent García, 2006, hardcover, 80pp, €560, ISBN: 8487988849.~~

~~Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti's *Isolario* is a late 15<sup>th</sup> century island book that covers the Greek Archipelago, describing each island with a sonnet (hence the author's name), and illustrating each with a map. It is the second surviving illustrated island book, after Christoforo Buondelmonti's *Liber insularum archipelagi* [*Book of the Islands in the Archipelago*] composed around 1420, from which Sonetti borrows liberally. Sonetti describes many islands with just 17 lines of poetry; islands with richer histories are accorded a few more lines, or a whole extra sonnet, while a total of eight sonnets are devoted to Crete.~~

~~Sonetti's work exists in three manuscripts, namely Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, Cartes et Plans, 17874 (7379); Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, P/21; and Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, It. IX.188 (6286) - see below on the alleged Paris manuscript; and two printed editions, published in Venice, c. 1485 and 1532. The maps in the Venice edition of c. 1485 are the first nautical charts to appear in print, and thus this edition is of considerable historical significance.~~

~~The book under review here is a facsimile of the copy of the c. 1485 edition in Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, INC/1261. A facsimile of a different copy of this edition~~