

Yvonne Guo & Wu Jin Jie (Eds.). (2016). *Singapore and Switzerland: Secrets to small state success*. Singapore: World Scientific. ISBN: 98-1-4651-39-7. US\$36 (pbk); US\$52 (hbk).

Few countries around the world are seen as better examples of politico-economic success than Singapore and Switzerland. From Costa Rica, via Rwanda, Georgia and all the way to Fiji, politicians, commentators and ordinary people express a desire or hope for their countries to one day become their respective region's Singapore or Switzerland.

International organisations, rating agencies, journalists and think tanks list both as among the world's most successful economies and political entities, on the basis of such criteria as GDP per capita, ease of doing business, economic freedom, transparency, lack of corruption, good governance, standard of living and quality of infrastructure. Both Switzerland and Singapore are arguably more prosperous per capita than the world's largest and most powerful economies.

This apparent achievement seems even more impressive in light of the perception that both Singapore and Switzerland have become prosperous thanks to good policies, and not because of any kind of large deposits of petroleum or other natural resources. This is what makes them so desirable as models to follow. If good governance alone can bring incredible prosperity, then a careful study of the Singaporean and Swiss models can offer indispensable lessons to policy-makers and scholars across the globe.

The editors of *Singapore and Switzerland: Secrets to small state success* proclaim that one of the two key questions their volume aims to address is: what, if at all, could Singapore and Switzerland learn from each other? Yet, one might also argue that the book is likely to be of even greater interest and relevance to those outsiders who wish to learn about and from both Singapore and Switzerland. This easy to read collection of fact-filled essays dedicated to various aspects of politico-economic governance in both (relatively small) states presents a timely opportunity for not just getting a better understanding of the two models, but also appreciating the key differences (and their consequences) between the Swiss and the Singaporean systems and solutions.

The book is divided into 11 chapters that look at various aspects of the two countries' domestic and foreign policy. The themes under examination include: the public administration systems in the two countries; foreign policy; approaches to international trade; financial sector; public infrastructure and transport policy; education policy; solutions to the challenges posed by ethnic and linguistic diversity; immigration; and inequality.

Each chapter can be read as a separate article and one does not need to necessarily follow the order in which the chapters have been organised by the editors. While this makes it convenient for those readers who may only be interested in specific areas of governance or particular policies, it makes the volume as a whole appear perhaps a little too disjointed. It means that the volume might be perceived as lacking a sufficiently strong, coherent argument or narrative that would seem rather necessary for convincingly answering the second key question identified by the editors, namely: What do the divergent success strategies of both countries tell us about good governance in small states?.

The strength of the volume lies in two areas: first, most chapters are remarkably easy to read and are accessible to even to those who may know little about either of the two states; second, the authors' efforts to consistently compare and contrast the various solutions to diverse social, economic and political challenges faced by the two countries are commendable.

With regards to the first strength, the book can be used as a convenient and brief introduction to grasping the basic components of the Swiss and Singaporean models, and as a potential inspiration for further scholarly inquiry. In particular, it excels at identifying and briefly (but often engagingly) analysing the key, unique policies, solutions and characteristics of each of the studied countries. For instance, Chapter 1 offers a short but captivating presentation of the unique features of the Swiss democracy. It convincingly explains why and how the various features of the Swiss political and fiscal system have resulted in cantons competing (in the field of effective provision of public goods) for tax-paying residents. Unsurprisingly, their competition has translated into a generally high standard of public administration across the Confederacy. In another example, Chapter 5 gives a useful summary of the innovative solutions adopted by Singapore in the field of land transport and public transport infrastructure. It draws attention to the state's efficient use of fiscal tools to finance some of the key road infrastructure, control congestion, reduce negative externalities associated with car usage, and transform private car usage within the city into an expensive privilege.

The book's second strength lies in its insistence on comparing the two models. The authors make sure that the models are reviewed and evaluated against each other. Throughout the book, one is presented with divergent policies that appear to be delivering equally desirable results. The advantage of this approach is that it reminds the reader that there may indeed be multiple routes to achieve similar targets and, depending on circumstance, one set of solutions might be more appropriate than another. It also highlights how, ultimately, both countries have excelled in the field of policy innovation, in trying new approaches, attempting to be different and more attractive than their neighbours. The book is an excellent reminder of the importance of political experimentation and creativity. In addition to offering a good overview of the innovative solutions, it also promotes a sober review of other potential policy options and approaches that could be tried in other jurisdictions.

At the same time, the book suffers from some limitations: some minor, others more fundamental. Regarding the former, some readers who may be more familiar with the history of Singapore, might find the authors' insistence that the city-state rose from poverty to prosperity thanks to its governing party rather controversial. Singapore has been among the wealthiest cities in Asia for much longer than it has been independent or ruled by the People's Action Party (PAP). This does not mean that PAP's feats have been trivial or that the Party does not deserve any praise. Its policies have not just allowed Singapore to remain wealthy, but have led many ordinary Singaporeans to share in the gains of economic growth. However, it does suggest that there is more to Singapore's wealth than post-war good governance.

Turning now to more fundamental limitations: despite constantly drawing the reader's attention to the fact that both Switzerland and Singapore are "small states", the volume misses an opportunity to engage more critically with the question of the impact of size on policies and institutions. The very question of what constitutes a small state in international affairs is only briefly addressed and without much attempt to explain not just why, but also how, quantitative circumstances generate qualitative outcomes, in both domestic and foreign policy.

The authors rightly acknowledge that both Singapore and Switzerland lack any substantial natural resources and hence needed to rely on good governance and diplomacy to create prosperity. Is it then smallness *per se* or the lack of natural resources that matters more as an incentive for meaningful reforms? Geography is clearly an important variable in any explanation of the two countries' success. But: how exactly does it translate into specific politico-economic consequences is the fascinating question that remains insufficiently explored in this volume. A greater engagement with the question of the impact of the two

countries' size (and other geographic features) on both their policy choices and their politico-economic performance could have enriched the argument and made it more relevant to students of small states and territories, as well as to those who might be interested in the question of the applicability of either model to larger (or, indeed, smaller) states and territories.

Chapter 1's analysis of the difference between the political systems in two countries, or Chapters 9 and 10 discussion of the differing approaches to the questions of multiculturalism and immigration, could have greatly benefited from considering to what degree the divergent approaches are dictated by the significant geographic differences between the two states. While both Singapore and Switzerland can be broadly categorised as "small states", they are certainly qualitatively distinct not just due to their divergent histories, but also due to their very significant geographic differences. These differences should deserve more attention in a volume dedicated to understanding "small state success".

Likewise, Chapter 2 contains a number of interesting and valid observations regarding small state diplomacy and even briefly discusses the meaning of smallness. However, despite this, the presented approach to smallness appears overly simplistic. It is far from clear whether the policies adopted by either Singapore or Switzerland could be successfully implemented by other small states or territories, or indeed even by either of the studied states if they were to copy each other's approaches. It appears that the authors' analysis might be more applicable to a discussion on *relatively* small *powers* and their behaviour in the international system, than that of small states and territories. The two categories often overlap, but are not identical.

If a polity's size and geography matter (as hinted at by the volume's contributors), then it would have made sense for the authors to attempt to ponder such questions as: to what degree does the two countries' small size determine or contour the shape and performance of their institutions? Does not Singapore's status as a sovereign island city-state alone make it qualitatively different from other countries with a similar population size, but different geographic conditions? What has been the impact of modern technology on the geographic and demographic challenges experienced by diminutive political units? To what extent is the position of both states in the international system linked to their size and scale? Are the solutions adopted in either of the two states transferable to other (smaller or larger) countries?

The volume fails to engage meaningfully with such questions. However, the book is a timely and accessible introduction to the functioning of two of the world's most successful states. As such, it will appeal to those who want to learn more about the Singaporean and Swiss models, as well as those who might be interested in innovative political solutions to some of the world's most discussed issues.

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