

Randall, J. E. (2021). *An introduction to island studies*. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield International, in cooperation with Island Studies Press at UPEI. 291pp, pbk, ISBN: 978-1-7866-1546-6. US\$32.50 (£25.00).

An economic geographer by training, James Randall arrived rather late to island studies; but he has quickly established himself as a leading expert in the field. Since 2012, he has served as the coordinator of the Master of Arts (Island Studies) program at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) in Canada, and was appointed in 2016 as UNESCO co-chair (with Godfrey Baldacchino) in Island Studies and Sustainability at the same university (renewed, for Randall only, for another four years in 2020). His academic textbook, *An introduction to island studies*, provides a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of island studies. Even if the main targeted audience are undergraduate students and instructors engaging in this interdisciplinary field, others who undertake research on islands, islanders and other island curious will all get a firsthand portrait of island studies and its many dimensions thanks to this timely publication.

The textbook includes 11 chapters, each containing many relevant figures, tables, photos and text boxes. Factual and conceptual information as well as data are precise and up to date, and most importantly supported by a very rich and comprehensive set of references. The references section itself is a very valuable part of the book and presents just over one thousand bibliographic entries. In terms of format, a few maps are a bit small and therefore difficult to read; but otherwise all maps are well drafted. In terms of data and tables, one could wish for more, but all the fundamental themes are covered. Considering the number and variety of islands in the world, as well as the many dimensions to consider, this textbook represents a formidable starting point for those interested in our 'world of islands' and in island studies. It is written in a very accessible language, with easy-to-understand explanations and includes an incredible number of examples; all of these being sought-after qualities for a good and useful textbook.

Randall's academic proposition on island studies is based on the three general themes of: vulnerability and resilience, isolation and connectedness, and diversity and cohesion. These triple binaries are, in turn, supported and enriched by a raft of relevant and fundamental, environmental, cultural, social, economic and political concepts. With a global approach, both geographically and conceptually, we are introduced to these themes and concepts in a well thought out succession of chapters, namely: (1) definitions and classifications of islands; (2) physical processes and islands; (3) images of islands from literature and the popular media; (4) the setting of islands and indigenous-outsider interactions; (5) islands, islandness and culture; (6) geopolitics and island governance; (7) islands, population and the movement of people; (8) island health and epidemiology; (9) economic change, development and islands; (10) island tourism; and (11) islands in the age of sustainability and sustainable development.

Given the immense scope of the subject matter, the number of islands, and the multiplicity of local settings, one could not talk of every island and every single detailed issue. However, Randall's knowledge and experience are mobilised to portrait islands and island studies in a very comprehensive and insightful manner. Overall, the balance between breath and depth is superbly achieved. As a geographer myself, I would also say that this is a great geography book, and perhaps after reading Randall's work, that there is no better geographical object than islands for a thorough geography lesson. That said, as demonstrated in the text, specialists of all disciplines can find something relevant to study on islands. Islands have been important to the development of many disciplines such as biogeography and epidemiology or

in research on multidisciplinary topics such as tourism and migration. Today, this remains true as island states and territories are at the forefront of the global debates on climate change and sea-level rise, biodiversity and blue economy. In this context, we can safely forecast that islands will continue to be looked upon as laboratories and microcosms, and more generally, they are bound to continue to contribute significantly to the human experience on Earth.

From my own perspective, and recognizing my own professional bias and limits in regard to fully appreciate islands and islandness – I was not born on an island and I do not currently live on an island – the book could have included a specific chapter on the ‘islands and oceans’ relationship, especially given the new significance of small island states with large maritime domains in the context of the UN Conference of the Law of the Sea. However, to Randall’s credit, the basic aspects of this relation are discussed throughout the book and the reframing of small island states as large oceanic states is addressed. Also, it can be noted that the islands of the Indian Ocean are less discussed than the Pacific, Caribbean and European islands. This is possibly due to Randall’s personal experience, but also perhaps to a less developed (or less globally communicated) body of research and knowledge on these islands. In no case does this comment diminish the quality of the introductory work presented here, especially since all, most or some of the themes and concepts discussed throughout the book find an echo in all the islands of the world.

Finally, the book achieves two purposes: it serves as an introduction to island studies, but also represents a thorough and critical review of island studies as a discipline. It clearly demonstrates the multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature of island studies, where there is a constant back and forth from one place (and space) to another, from local to global contexts, from islanders to outsiders’ perspectives, from vulnerability to resilience, from isolation to connectedness, from diversity to cohesion, from success stories to dramatic failures, from history to the present and even to the future. As noted by Randall, “island-centric academics initiatives” are developing, but island studies have yet to emerge in the disciplinary mainstream. He concludes by proposing that a heightening interest in island studies may be favoured by “the rising geopolitical importance of islands, their sustainable development challenges, and the recognition of the critical importance of islands as real and metaphorical symbols of the human-nature conflict in the age of the Anthropocene” (p. 232).

In any case, any self-respecting discipline deserves a textbook: Randall’s book does the job, and serves as a strong testimony to the growing influence and development of island studies.

Christian Bouchard
Laurentian University
Sudbury, Ontario
Canada
cbouchard@laurentian.ca