



# Innovative Development Strategies from Non-Sovereign Island Jurisdictions? A Global Review of Economic Policy and Governance practices

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**Summary.** — The world's sub-national, island (or mainly island) jurisdictions constitute a timely, valid, and valuable category of political and economic analysis. On the basis of a global, largely inductive, and discriminant analysis, five economic and four political capacities are suggested as being characteristic of the innovative development strategies practised today by various island "autonomies." Extant "mainland-island relations" can provide insights to other smaller, non-island as well as larger players, beyond the strictures of both economic vulnerability and sovereignty.  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

"Linked to self-determination, [autonomy] achieves that without the disruption or break up of sovereignty. It defuses political conflict by providing alternative sites of power and patronage. It helps to accommodate sub-national identities, within a national identity, providing a basis for protection of regional cultures and languages. It can lay the foundations for a more pluralistic and democratic order, the development of regional political parties, and a new set of checks and balances. It provides a framework for inter-ethnic bargaining and so converts conflicts into disputes that are susceptible to formal processes. In some ways, it gives political weight to a community which it would not otherwise enjoy. . . . Autonomy is both a way to recognize diversity and to involve all groups in the central state mechanism. . . . [I]t is an extremely flexible instrument, capable of responding to different configurations of ethnic relations." (Ghai, 2002, pp. 44–45)

"Sovereignty rules can be violated in inventive ways." (Krasner, 2001)

The "development" agenda of small island states continues to be gripped by a paradigm of vulnerability, though a recognition of resilience now seems to be sneaking in (e.g., Briguglio & Cordina, 2004; Briguglio & Kisanga, 2004). Such disarming discourse vindicates the concerns of many observers and scholars about the presumed non-viability of small island

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politics and economies, expressed both before and after the wave of small state sovereignty took off in the 1960s (Cyprus-1960; Samoa-1962; Malta-1964; Maldives-1965), also propelled by the collapse of the West Indies Federation (starting with the independence of Jamaica in 1962). Independence for the small island territory was deemed extravagant or dangerous (Commonwealth Consultative Group, 1985; Diggines, 1985; Guillebaud, 1976; Harden, 1985; Plischke, 1977; Wainhouse, 1966) and, more recently, even a recipe for a “failed state” (Kabutaulaka, 2004) or a “security threat” (OAS, 2002). An “aid with dignity” scenario (*after* Connell, 1988a) has gained ascendancy in the literature, perhaps best represented by the MIRAB acronym—standing for a reactive, sluggish economy totally dependent on four sources of in/direct income: **M**igration, which fuels **R**emittances; and **A**id, which maintains a relatively large **B**ureaucracy (Bertram, 2006; Bertram & Watters, 1985).

Meanwhile, key players in (usually large) federal states debate nervously why and to what extent obvious differences (or asymmetry) in the size, geography, economic wealth, cultural fabric, or population of their constituent units (regions, states, and provinces) should be translated into asymmetric power, in practice or at law (e.g., in the case of Canada: Dunn, 2005; Milne, 2005; see Ankar, 2003 for very small federal jurisdictions). Treating the constituent members of the same state differently is often heralded as an incentive for spiraling devolution, fuelling secession, and catalyzing the eventual implosion of the state. Is not this a main explanation behind the heavy handed measures of states which see themselves thus threatened, like Indonesia, Russia or Spain today, or the USA in the early 1860s (e.g., Anderson, 2004, pp. 101–104)? In any case, any resorts to “autonomy,” often by small communities, were looked upon as “...anomalous, annoying or even amusing exceptions” to the sovereignty rule (Stevens, 1977, p. 178).

There is, however, a different story to tell, although it has not been as well publicized as the previous two. When wealth is defined in GNP or GDP (at PPP) standards, and in spite of how such statistical tools badly serve islands (EurIsles, 2000), a number of small island territories score exceptionally well. In their analytic critiques, Armstrong, De Kervenoael, Li, and Read (1998, p. 644), Easterly and Kraay (2000, p. 2015) and Armstrong and Read

(2002) agree that small (and mainly island) jurisdictions actually perform economically *better* than larger (mainly continental) states. Comparative research has shown that, on average, non-sovereign island territories tend to be richer *per capita* than sovereign ones (Bertram, 2004; Poirine, 1998). The island citizens of Aruba, Bermuda, French Polynesia and Iceland have been counted amongst the world’s top 10 richest people (The Economist, 2003). Notably, three of the above four territories are non-sovereign island jurisdictions. Other sub-national island jurisdictions like Åland, Falklands, Jersey, and the Isle of Man seem to be doing equally well. Moreover, most such territories partake of some form of stable *asymmetrical federalism* (*after* Stevens, 1977) with(in) a typically larger state. Is the (unexpectedly above average) economic performance of such territories related to their jurisdictional status?

## 2. PROPOSITION

This paper is suggesting that “autonomies” need to be recognized as viable politico-economic units in their own right, rather than insignificant relics from a bygone age, or messy examples of territories whose transition to sovereignty is taking longer than most. An autonomy should not, in most cases, be seen naively as a case “in transit” toward full sovereignty. A comparative “island studies” approach would identify close to 110 sub-national jurisdictions in the world today—see Appendix A—which have a permanent civilian population, most (if not all *de facto*) existing in conditions of asymmetric federalism, and varying in population size from Taiwan (21.5 million) and Puerto Rico (3.6 million) to miniscule Pitcairn which, in spite of its 47 citizens, has been protesting external interference in widely reported child sex abuse trials (e.g., Middleton, 2005). Such an experience of asymmetry can go back many years, to 1204 AD in the case of Jersey (Everard & Holt, 2004). These autonomies may benefit by sharing knowledge, lessons, and insights concerning strategies for both international economic competitiveness and dyadic political stability, emerging from what appears to be an idiosyncratic political economy. Perhaps more importantly for a wider audience, extant “mainland–island relations” can serve as lessons and provide insights to larger and other smaller players, beyond the strictures of both vulnerability and sovereignty. Armstrong

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