



## Book Review

E. Dommen and P. Hein (eds), *States, Microstates and Islands*, Croom Helm, New Hampshire, USA, 1985, 216pp, \$A73.95

In recent years it has become fashionable for social scientists to consider the special problems and prospects of small states. This book by Dommen and Hein, both of whom have a long association with island states in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, is a useful addition to the literature.

In the opening piece, Dommen seeks to define that enigma, a 'microstate', and concludes that 'population' may well be the chief determinant though he does not assign population as representing the typical microstate. He qualifies this definition by suggesting other determinants of an international character, e.g., political, economic and strategic. Co-editor Hein reviews briefly that now familiar list of constraints to island development and looks at the ways and means whereby some of these may be overcome. He sees little prospect of islands achieving a degree of economic viability and refers to the growing dependence of island states on aid and remittances from citizens who have moved elsewhere. He touches on that often discussed and discarded solution to small states' problems, namely integration, and devotes his closing paragraphs to a useful

discussion of the benefits of the common island characteristic, the surrounding sea and its treasures of marine life and minerals.

It is good to find the piece by the French 'guru' of island matters, Francis Doumenge, who refuses quite rightly to be confined by definitions and goes on to look at the conditions 'that ensure the viability of small islands' (p.74). He ranges widely over such issues as geography, climate and geology and brings in some interesting references to the cultural aspects of islands' characteristics. Doumenge concludes by attempting 'to quantify viability criteria for islands' - both negative and positive. It is an interesting concept which readers can evaluate on the basis of personal experience: this reviewer places more faith in economic and social indicators.

There is an interesting paper by the UNCTAD Secretariat on 'Needs and Problems of Island Developing Countries' which canvasses a whole range of positive and negative issues, mainly economic or with economic associations. The paper concludes that it is impossible to generalize on islands as a distinct

group. Although not explicit, the paper seems to suggest that islands are just small economies and should get on with the job of development using such resources as are available to them, especially human resources. Islands are not unique: the problems they face are there in all needy economies, and should be recognized and overcome.

Despite the often abundant flows of aid and remittances, island states still have to trade to ensure a constant flow of foreign exchange to meet their needs for foreign imports. In their paper 'Foreign Exchange in Goods and Services', Dommen and Hein identify the problem of island states finding a niche for their exports in an increasingly competitive world. They argue for 'value-added' to agricultural products, export processing zones, and tourism, but fail to warn of the many pitfalls in following these paths. They warn against placing too high an emphasis on self-reliance and pursuit of the import substitution road. They also warn against the trap of over-protection of local production (p.176). They refer to the concessional import arrangements offered by former colonial and metropolitan powers and suggest that these, coupled with the well-educated populations of most islands, must be exploited in conjunction with special features of islands - climate, location, and so on - to develop markets for which they can cater with success.

The book concludes with a paper by David Murray on 'Public Administration in Three Microstates of the Pacific'. He is critical of the manner in which departing colonial powers developed administrations more suited for large states than for island countries moving rapidly to independent status. The legacy of these administrative structures has been difficult to dismantle because of vested interests of those employed in the Public Service of the island countries and more recently by the 'Dutch Disease' effect of increasing flows of foreign aid.

This book covers a wide canvas of issues important for those concerned for the welfare and development of small island states. It is short on hard data to underscore the many pronouncements on what is constraining growth and development. Rigorous economic analysis is missing but this is not necessarily a drawback as the authors see the object of their efforts in the highlighting of issues and the stimulation of debate on peculiar problems and advantages of microstates and islands. Of special importance is the very comprehensive bibliography associated with each of the papers. It provides the enthusiastic researcher with access to almost everything worth reading in this specialist subject.

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