

# Challenges for Career Guidance in Small States

Ronald G. Sultana

The background of the cover features a complex 3D abstract design. It consists of numerous rectangular blocks of varying heights and colors, including shades of red, orange, yellow, green, and brown. These blocks are arranged on a light blue and white grid pattern that recedes into the distance, creating a sense of depth and perspective. The overall aesthetic is modern and digital.



**Joint Actions  
Socrates, Leonardo & Youth Programmes**

# **CHALLENGES FOR CAREER GUIDANCE IN SMALL STATES**

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Educational Research  
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# Context and background for this study

Between 2000 and 2005, five key surveys and reviews of career guidance were carried out by the OECD, the World Bank, and the European Commission (through the European Training Foundation, CEDEFOP, and most recently DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities). These comprehensive studies portray the state of provision of guidance services in some 37 countries in Europe and beyond, identifying the main trends, the key challenges, as well as the policy options that are available to meet these challenges. One major theme concerns the fact that while career guidance, as a public service, presumes a high degree of cooperation between different ministries and other stakeholders at a national level, in many cases such cross-sectoral collaboration is either weak or missing. The surveys in fact found little collaboration between and within education and labour market sectors and little stakeholder involvement in policy and systems development. This was seen as a significant obstacle to the development of existing guidance provision, to support lifelong learning policies and strategies.

In response to such findings, and on the advice of the Commission's Expert Group on Lifelong Guidance – which was established in late 2002 to support policy development taking into account the guidance review findings – the Ministers of Education of the

EU passed a Resolution on strengthening guidance throughout life (2004), highlighting the need to reinforce co-ordination and structures for policy and systems development at national level, involving a broad range of stakeholders, and to increase European co-operation in the field.

Projects to develop European networks of national guidance forums were proposed by the Commission to Member States in 2003 in the context of the Joint Actions 2004 programme. These projects would test the value of and prepare foundations for a future thematic network for lifelong guidance (European forum) in the context of the post 2007 EU programmes and initiatives. Two pilot projects were selected. The first was led by the Guidance Council, UK and included Malta, Estonia, Denmark, Slovenia, the United Kingdom and Ireland (hence 'MEDSUI'). The second was led by Steirische Volkswirtschaftliche Gesellschaft, Austria and included Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Finland, Germany and Poland.

The main aim of the MEDSUI project was to develop strategic plans for a national forum in each of the countries participating in the initiative. A number of sub-projects looked at various aspects related to the development of forums, the success factors underpinning the functioning of forums, the challenges they face, the nature of co-operation between partners, and an analysis of case studies of partnership. One of the sub-projects looked specifically at the advantages of 'scale' or country size in

developing cross-sectoral collaboration in service provision. The present study builds on that focus to consider the challenges for career guidance in small states more broadly.

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**Malta**



# CHALLENGES FOR CAREER GUIDANCE IN SMALL STATES

## INTRODUCTION

This monograph sets out to consider the implications of small ‘scale’ for the field of career guidance. By ‘scale’ we are referring to the size of the population of a particular state or territory, and therefore the key question we will be concerned with here is the extent to which small countries or territories *experience similar challenges* in the provision of career guidance services, with these challenges being attributed – or potentially attributable – to scale.

### Goals of the study

While a whole range of issues will be addressed in considering this question, a key focus will be on the extent to which scale has an impact on the *quality* of service provision. In other words, a leading concern here is with the disadvantages – and possibly advantages – that small states have in providing quality career guidance services. One aspect of quality provision is the ability of states to develop cross-sectoral collaboration in the design and delivery of services.

A related concern is with identifying strategies that have been developed in different small state contexts in order to respond to challenges that arise from scale.

In addition, specific attention will be paid to the relevance and applicability of the *Common Reference Tools*<sup>1</sup> which were published by CEDEFOP in collaboration with the European Commission's Lifelong Guidance Expert Group with a view to helping individual countries improve and modernise their national guidance policies and systems, as well as to fostering the development of a shared understanding between Member States that can underpin joint action in the field of guidance. These reference tools were established at a general level in order to have broad relevance across the 25 Member States, but need to be contextualised, tested and refined. As such, the present study represents a further effort to contextualise, test and refine the Common Reference Tools, examining the extent to which they – and in particular the section on the “Principles for Guidance Provision” – are sensitive to small state realities.

### Structure of the study

The monograph is divided into four sections. Section 1 follows the introduction by providing some information about the methodology used in the study. Section 2 looks at the definition of small states, as well as at some of the characteristics of such states. Section 3 synthesises some of the key issues that arise from the burgeoning literature on small states in various fields that are related to career guidance, including economics, labour market studies, education, and human resource development. Finally, Section 4 draws holistically on the insights provided by the small states literature in order to put together

<sup>1</sup> CEDEFOP (2005) *Improving Lifelong Guidance Policies and Systems: Using Common European Reference Tools*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. See: [http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Information\\_resources/Bookshop/result\\_publ.asp?from=1&cedefop\\_nr=4045](http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Information_resources/Bookshop/result_publ.asp?from=1&cedefop_nr=4045)

some conclusions concerning the specificity of the challenges for career guidance in small states.

## 1. METHODOLOGY

The study forms part of a European-Commission funded Joint Actions project that brought together five countries – namely Malta, Estonia, Denmark, Slovenia, United Kingdom, and Ireland (hence the acronym for the project, ‘MEDSUI’) – in order to explore the way cross-sectoral collaboration within national borders could be developed. The MEDSUI group was inspired and motivated by recent thinking on the need to develop guidance systems that have a lifelong orientation, thus ensuring easy and efficient access to services whenever and wherever clients were in need of them. The shift to a lifelong paradigm requires the different sectors providing guidance to work together so that rather than having fragmented services, each with its own separate logic, the system is linked organically in such a way as to ensure that clients experience services as seamless. One of the key ways of developing such a coherent system proposed by the various international guidance surveys<sup>2</sup> is through

**The MEDSUI  
project**

<sup>2</sup> The references to these publications are the following: R.G. Sultana (2003) *Review of Career Guidance Policies in 11 Acceding and Candidate Countries*. Turin: European Training Foundation; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004) *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap*. Paris: Author; R.G. Sultana (2004) *Guidance Policies in the Knowledge Society: Trends, Challenges and Responses across Europe*. Thessaloniki: CEDEFOP; A.G. Watts and D. Fretwell (2004) *Public Policies for Career Development: Case Studies and Emerging Issues for Designing Career Information and Guidance Systems in Developing and Transition Economies*. Washington, DC: World Bank; R.G. Sultana and A.G. Watts (2005) *Career Guidance in Europe's Public Employment Services: Trends and Challenges*. Brussels: DG Employment and Social Services, European Commission. See also E. Hansen (2006) *Career Guidance: A Resource Handbook for Low- and Middle-Income Countries*. Geneva: International Labour Office.

the setting up of National Guidance Forums which bring service providers together on a regular basis in order to better coordinate their offer. One of the key tasks of the MEDSUI group was to analyse the experiences of various countries in setting up National Guidance Forums. A related task was to draw on the aforementioned *Common Reference Tools* in order to have a deeper understanding of how the “Principles for Guidance Provision” could be applied – or have already been applied – in different contexts in the development of lifelong guidance systems and services.

One of the targeted outputs of the project was an enhanced understanding of the specificity of the context of small states. Three of the MEDSUI partner countries (Malta, Estonia and Slovenia) have populations numbering less than two million, while two other partners (Denmark and Ireland) are also considered to be small states in some of the literature that focuses on the relative weight of different countries in the EU (see Section 3 below). While the various career guidance survey reports and resources produced by such international organisations and agencies as the OECD, the World Bank, the European Training Foundation, CEDEFOP, and the International Labour Office were found to be most useful and insightful, there was nevertheless a feeling that many of the concerns, categories of analysis, as well as recommendations were occasionally more embedded in, and suitable to, larger countries than to smaller ones. It was felt that much could be gained by a specific focus on small states, with a view to understanding the specific dynamics, strengths, weak-

nesses, and opportunities for quality guidance services to be developed in such contexts.

This preliminary study involved four steps. First, the literature on small states was trawled with a view to identifying the elements that could contribute to an improved understanding of the challenges for career guidance in such national contexts and territories. Annex 1 provides a select bibliography of the relevant literature, some of which is referred to in Section 2 below. Second, two experts in the study of small states, one in the field of labour market studies and human resource development,<sup>3</sup> the other in public administration,<sup>4</sup> were interviewed at length in order to both supplement the literature review, as well as to reflect with them on the potential application of this knowledge base to the field of career guidance. Third, a draft version of the literature review synthesis, together with the implications of this for career guidance, was prepared and presented to the MEDSUI partners as well as to two international experts<sup>5</sup> specialising in career guidance. This feedback was integrated in the preparation of the final report. Finally, an interview schedule was

**Steps  
involved in  
the study**

<sup>3</sup> Professor Godfrey Baldacchino, University of Prince Edward Island, PEI, Canada. The interview was held on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2006 using Skype telephony. References to Baldacchino not followed by a date present data and insights generated during this interview. I am especially indebted to Professor Baldacchino for providing me with detailed feedback on an earlier draft of this study. Naturally, the responsibility for the limitations of this study are solely mine.

<sup>4</sup> Dr Edward Warrington, University of Malta, Malta. The face-to-face interview was held on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2006 at the University of Malta. References to Warrington are culled from data generated during this interview.

<sup>5</sup> These were Professor Anthony G. Watts, Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby, UK, and Dr John McCarthy, Director of the International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy, who was also the external evaluator of the MEDSUI project.

prepared in order to test out some of the hypotheses that had been developed in the earlier stages of the study. Annex 2 provides an outline of the questions asked. The interview schedule was shared with guidance specialists from the following small states: Cyprus (1 response from 1 person), Estonia (1 response prepared by 2 persons), Iceland (1 response prepared by 2 persons), Latvia (1 response prepared by 2 persons), Luxembourg (1 response from 1 person), Malta (2 responses from 2 persons), Slovenia (2 responses from 2 persons). In all but the latter case, the responses were returned via e-mail. For Slovenia, responses were given during a face-to-face interview.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. DEFINING SMALL STATES AND THEIR SPECIFICITY

### Introducing Lilliput

The focus on small states and the specificity of the problems they face due to their scale has been the subject of much research internationally ever since the decolonisation process in the late 1950s and 1960s (Selwyn, 1975). Many of these small nations belong to the Commonwealth: 56% of the 52 members of the Commonwealth have a population of less than 1.5 million, with several of these states being found in the Caribbean and the South Pacific. The World Bank, on its part, counts

<sup>6</sup> The following is a list of the respondents who kindly and generously agreed to respond to the questions which appear in Annex II: for Cyprus: Lefki Hadjitoffi; for Estonia: Margit Rammo and Katrin Mälksoo; for Iceland: Jónína Ólafsdóttir Kárdal and Guðbjörg Vilhjálmsdóttir; for Latvia: Brigita Mikelšone and Aleksandra Joma; for Luxembourg: Patrick Theisen; for Malta: Pauline Bartolo and Stephen Camilleri; and for Slovenia: Saša Niklanovič and Barbara Gogala.

41 small states among its members, while according to the UNDP (2005) 29% of the 177 countries in the world – i.e. 51 nations – can be considered to be ‘small states’. 43% of these have a population of less than half a million, while 10% have a population of more than 2.5 million. Montenegro is the latest to be added to the list of small states, having assumed the status of an independent country in 2006.

The fact that many small states belong to the Commonwealth explains why one of the lead organisations promoting small states studies has been the Commonwealth Secretariat. Other organisations that have followed suit include the World Bank. Research centres focusing specifically on islands and small state issues have also been established in several universities, including those of Bristol (UK), Prince Edward Island (Canada), Malta and Iceland. Such a focus has led to the production of a wealth of literature that examines political, economic, social, cultural and educational issues regarding the characteristics of small states, as well as their relative strengths and weaknesses in a global world order (Abbott, 1975; Bray, 1991).

At the political level, the Commonwealth Secretariat, with its observer status at the UN General Assembly, often puts the concerns of small states on the international agenda, and indeed in 1998 a Joint Task Force on Small States was established with members from the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat to take forward the work of identifying and

reviewing the development problems peculiar to small states.

More recently, small states studies have expanded to also focus on exploring the development strategies and policies in place in those jurisdictions – such as small (often island) provinces of larger states – which share the features associated with small scale.<sup>7</sup> This focus is particularly appropriate given the increasing realization of the limitations of the nation state as the unit of analysis for policy initiative. In this regard, members of the MEDSUI project have pointed out that several characteristics that mark the provision of guidance services in small states seem to also be present in remote, rural areas of larger states, and that the conclusions of an analysis focusing on the challenges for quality guidance provision in small states might have applicability to those remote areas as well.<sup>8</sup>

### The specificity of small states

The key insight that underpins the study of small states is that small countries are not simply ‘scaled down versions’ of larger states. What most small states scholars are keen to point out is that scale creates a ‘micro-climate’ that generates sets of social, economic and cultural relationships that are specific (or at least particularly

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, G. Baldacchino and D. Milne (eds)(2006) ‘Sub-National Island Jurisdictions’ – Special issue, *The Round Table: International Journal of Commonwealth Affairs*, Vol.93(386), pp.487-626.

<sup>8</sup> It is significant, for instance, that a member of Careers Scotland who works from Orkney felt that many of the issues raised in this study resonated with his experience of managing career guidance services on a remote island in the north of Scotland. For a deeper discussion of this issue, see G. Baldacchino, L. Felt and R Greenwood (eds)(2006) *Remote Control: Governance from Islands and Remote Rural Regions*. Memorial University of Newfoundland: ISER Press.

applicable) to small states – and therefore intrinsically different from those to be found in large states. It is this insight that guides the present study.<sup>9</sup>

The cut-off point as to what constitutes ‘smallness’ varies across time and on who does the defining. Cut-off points have to be recognised as largely arbitrary, reflecting particular interests, including, for instance, defining who should have access to specific resources made available by aid agencies and the international community (Hindmarsh, 1996). During the 1960s, for instance, authors proposed 1 to 2.9 million as the limit (Hein 1985, 24-25). By the mid-1980s and 1990s authors appear to have agreed that smallness is indicated by an absolute maximum population of 1.5 million (Bray et al., 1991; Bray and Packer, 1993), most setting the level at 1 million (Clarke and Payne, 1987; Baldacchino, 1993), and some at 0.1 million (Packer, 1991). In this study we have pragmatically adopted a cut-off point of 2.5 million, in order to be able to include 6 European states in the empirical research and analysis.<sup>10</sup> It is important to also point out – as we shall note in greater detail below – that in the literature on small European states, the notion of ‘small’ differs from that found in the literature concerning itself with the development chal-

## Defining ‘smallness’

<sup>9</sup> According to Warrington, an important contributor to the specific ‘micro-climate’ of small states is ‘density’ of population. In other words, many of the characteristics associated with scale, and which we will outline in subsequent sections in this study, are more visible in small states that have a dense concentration of citizens in a small geographical area, rather than in those whose population is thinly dispersed over larger distances. In considerations such as these, ‘proximity’ becomes an operative word.

<sup>10</sup> We are here not taking into account six other European enclave microstates, namely Gibraltar, San Marino, Vatican City, Andorra, Liechtenstein and Monaco.

lenges of small states internationally. In the European studies, 'small states' also refer to countries such as Denmark, Finland and Ireland, whose population, while large when compared to that found in such 'micro-states' as Cyprus, Estonia, Luxembourg and Malta, is nevertheless 'small' when compared to that of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, for instance. In this case, the preoccupation is often with the weight in the Community's decision-making process relative to the weight of the state's population (see Ingebritsen *et al.*, 2006).

### The politics of 'smallness'

Considerations of the way the definition of 'smallness' has fluctuated with time remind us that the conceptualization of small states is a highly political and cultural process. In the case of countries in the geographical and economic 'periphery', such political and cultural processes are often closely linked with issues of colonization, decolonization and neo-colonialism. The political nature of the definition of what constitutes 'smallness', as well as what characterises 'small states', is also clearly evident in the fact that such characterisations tend to generally be based on concepts and models that western social scientists from larger countries tend to take for granted and which often assume the status of the 'referent' for social reality (Watters, 1987), thus hiding the fact that they are, in fact, socially constructed. One of the problems with such conceptualizations is that they tend to be steeped in a 'deficit theory' mindset. In other words, the small state is considered deficient inasmuch as it fails to measure up to the

construct of a good and successful state, as defined by the definer. Economic models that are grounded in the realities of larger states are often taken as a referent for – and equally applicable to – small states.

In addition, as Baldacchino (1993) notes, prevailing ways of conceptualizing small states are often discriminatory in tone, implicitly assuming that large is normal and preferable whereas small, if considered at all, is at best petty and lilliputian (Baldacchino, 1993, p.30). Often, not only is ‘large’ the norm, but so too is the direction of development: the notion of development for small states is generally based on norms related to western economic and cultural criteria (Bertram, 1987; Watters, 1987; Hauofa, 1993). As Baldacchino (1993, p. 33) has argued, micro-state decision makers may very well be unaware that “their perceptions of their own interests, problems and prospects are significantly shaped and determined by externally constructed, western-biased theories and models of what should be”.

There have been several attempts to synthesise the key findings of the relevant literature in order to identify the key common characteristics of small states. One useful synthesis – even if it does not quite succeed in avoiding the deficit approach referred to earlier, and even if it is mainly concerned with the less economically developed territories – is provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat.<sup>11</sup> These characteristics include:

**Key  
characteristics  
of small states**

<sup>11</sup> Reproduced, with some modifications, from [www.commonwealthsmallstates.org/Default.aspx?page=3](http://www.commonwealthsmallstates.org/Default.aspx?page=3)

*[a] Remoteness and insularity:* The remoteness and isolation of many small states – several of which are islands – has significant economic and administrative implications. Isolation from major centres of trade and commerce makes it difficult for them to turn to world markets. Transportation costs are high because of the distance of these countries from principal export markets and suppliers. In cases where small states are made up of dispersed groups of islands, such constraints affect the development of even a small domestic market.

*[b] Susceptibility to natural disasters:* Many small states are in regions frequently affected by adverse climatic and other natural events which can impact on the entire population and the economy. Many are also susceptible to severe environmental and ecological threats. Given the reliance of small states on a narrow, less diversified economic base (see point [d] below), the impact of a natural or ecological disaster on one of these sectors (e.g. tourism) can be extensive.

*[c] Limited institutional capacity:* Weaknesses in both public and private sector capacity are a key problem for most developing countries. Smallness of size adds a further dimension. This is compounded in states where internal distances are large and the population is scattered. As they face the challenges and opportunities of globalisation, small states are finding that they do not have sufficient institutional capacity to participate fully in international finance and trade negotiations.

*[d] Limited diversification:* Many small states, because of their small domestic markets, are relatively undiversified in their production and exports. If one dominant activity declines, it must be replaced with another. This makes small states vulnerable to changes in the external market.

*[e] Openness:* A high degree of openness to the rest of the world brings benefits. Small economies tend to rely heavily on external trade and foreign investment to overcome their inherent scale and resource limitations. While this can prove beneficial in exposing them to outside competition and ideas, it leaves them vulnerable to external economic and environmental shocks, particularly where the domestic economy is undiversified.

*[f] Access to external capital:* Access to global capital markets is important for small states and is one way to compensate for adverse shocks and income volatility. But the evidence is that private markets tend to see small states as more risky than larger ones, so that spreads are higher and market access more difficult.

*[g] Income volatility:* Residents of small states experience higher volatility in their incomes than those in larger states. The standard deviation of annual real per capita growth is around 25 per cent higher. There are three causes of this year-to-year volatility: (i) the economies are more open to fluctuations in world market prices because in small states a much larger share of domestic economic activity is accounted for by exports and imports

than in larger economies; (ii) small states by their nature have relatively undiversified production and exports; and (iii) many of the small states are particularly prone to natural disasters which, because of small size, affect the whole community. For most of the poorer small states, small size is associated with relatively high specialisation in production and trade. Some states however – such as Cyprus, Iceland and Malta – are both very open to trade and have relatively more diversified economies.<sup>12</sup>

These characteristics are a useful template to keep in mind as we consider the specificity of small states in a European context, even if not all the issues identified are equally applicable or relevant.

### 3. SMALL STATES RESEARCH

#### Strands in small states research

The field of small state studies has little visible coherence. However, for the sake of this study, we will highlight five main strands, i.e. research that has focused (a) on *the politics and the process of policy-making in small states*; (b) on *the economic development of small states, and on the character-*

<sup>12</sup> The Secretariat typology includes “poverty” as a key characteristic of small states, suggesting that poverty levels tend to be higher and income distribution more uneven in smaller than in larger states. In such cases, income volatility can create additional hardship as the poor are less able to weather negative shocks to their incomes. Baldacchino notes (personal communication) that recent evidence does not support the Commonwealth Secretariat’s association of scale with poverty. Small, often island states are in fact typically more affluent than larger neighbours, and the importance of the public sector and associated public employment tends to level off inequalities. Baldacchino, drawing on the work of Armstrong and Read (1998, 2002, 2005), suggests that aspects of topography (e.g. mountainous and land-locked regions) are more serious obstacles to development than scale.

*istics of their labour market; (c) on education and human resource development* in small states; (d) on *administration* issues, and (e) on *socio-cultural characteristics* of small states. It needs to be pointed out that these aspects are inter-related, and are only differentiated here for heuristic reasons. All five aspects can contribute insights in furthering our understanding of the specificity of the challenges for career guidance in small states.

A large part of what may be called the small-state literature deals with the basic foreign policy options of small states, i.e. how small states manage their relationships to other powers in the prevailing world order. Small states therefore have to make decisions regarding the extent to which they remain neutral, and the extent to which they make alliances, and with whom (Ørvik, 1953; Fox, 1959; Rothstein, 1968; Höll, 1984). The assumption here is that small states do indeed have a margin of power to exercise in making such decisions.

**(a) Politics and policy-making in small states**

A second stream of the literature is the comparative study of politics and policy formation in small states (Katzenstein, 1984; 1985; Alapuro, 1985; Jackson, 1990). This is particularly important to the consideration of career guidance, both in terms of the internal processes that are involved in policy-making, as well as in understanding the extent to which small states tend to be policy-takers rather than policy-makers.

A third tradition is concerned with issues of recognition, self-determination, minorities, secession

and irredentism, and with justifying the existence of small states and their rights vis-à-vis great powers (Chazan, 1991; Heraclides, 1991; Lehning, 1998; Bartkus, 1999).

### **Small states in the EU**

The issue of neutrality or alliance has been a major consideration in the decisions made by small states to become members of the EU, or to stay out of the Union. There are several studies that consider the motives and repercussions of joining the EU, and the tension that results between large and small countries, even if, as noted earlier, ‘smallness’ in EU studies has tended to be defined differently than in Commonwealth and World Bank research.<sup>13</sup>

### **The power of small states: the case of the European Union**

Some of the tensions between large and small states that arise within supra-national, federal entities is attributable to the fact that small states have power that is not commensurate to their size. This is particularly the case when both large and small nations have one vote, and the same power to veto decisions. In some cases, as Ingebritsen (2004) has noted, small states may have an unexpected degree of influence on the agenda in world politics. In relation to the EU, for instance, small states have played a more critical role in the evolution of European integration than is commonly understood. Although small states do not define the rules

<sup>13</sup> In his discussion of small states in the EU, Lee (2004) categorizes as ‘small’ any state with four or three votes in the Council of Ministers and a population of less than ten millions and ‘mini’ any states with two votes and a population of less than one million. Within this definition, five of the older member states are small states (Denmark – 5.3 million, Ireland – 3.7, Austria – 8.1, Sweden – 8.9, and Finland – 5.1), while one country (Luxembourg – 0.4) is a mini-state. Of the new member states, five are small: Latvia – 2.4, Lithuania – 3.7, Estonia – 1.4, Slovenia – 2, and Slovakia – 5.4, and two are mini (Cyprus – 0.8, and Malta – 0.4).

of the game in European institutions – and are often ‘policy takers’ rather than ‘policy makers’ – they have had an impact on the agenda in the definition of the European Union and its institutions. Two examples of these are Denmark’s veto of the Maastricht Treaty, and Ireland’s initial rejection of the Treaty of Nice.

Supra-national organisations have developed a number of strategies to temper the power that small states may wield in setting agendas internationally. The EU, for instance, has established three mechanisms in order to help reduce the intensity of potential conflicts between the interests of larger and smaller states. These include the system of weighted votes in the Council, the role and representativity of the Commission, and the rotating presidency. All three mechanisms have preserved the basic principle of equality among member states, while giving to the larger ones a preponderant role. Later enlargements have raised questions regarding the effectiveness of these mechanisms in ensuring a smooth functioning of the Union. One only needs to recall the fact that 9 out of the 10 member states joining the Union in May 2004 are small or medium-sized. The concern was that the voting powers of the smaller states could easily outweigh those of the large ones, to the detriment of the overall interests of the EU. A key agenda in the Treaty of Nice prior to enlargement was the reallocation of the number of votes, with a double majority system being adopted in an attempt to correct the likely power imbalance resulting from the disproportionate increase of small states.

**Mechanisms  
to regulate  
the power of  
small states**

**Small states  
as 'norm  
entrepreneurs'**

Such considerations suggest that those accounts which highlight only the vulnerability of small states are sociologically incorrect. In addition, small states have a lengthy experience in making the most of a system where they do not structure the rules of the game. As Ingebritsen (2004) has perceptively noted, as power moved from the military sphere to the moral sphere after 1989, some small states found a new authority in world politics and have emerged as 'norm entrepreneurs'. In addition, small states are aware that their bargaining leverage is often weaker than that of larger ones. In order to overcome this, small states tend to act in coalition rather than in isolation at intergovernmental bargaining tables.

**(b) The  
economy  
and labour  
market of  
small states**

A perusal of the relevant literature suggests that there are some important characteristics identifying small state economies. These, together with the challenges that arise from them, are culled from a range of sources and listed below. As we will note in the relevant sections later on, most of these characteristics have important direct or indirect implications for the career guidance field in small states.

Economies of small developing states are often referred to as '*MIRAB*-economies', where '*MIRAB*' refers to their characteristics of *m*igration, *r*emittances, *o*verseas *a*id and *b*ureaucracies (Watters 1987). Bertram (1986) in fact points out the extent to which remittances, aid, and employment in the public sector are prevalent and constitute a default development strategy for many small states, especially small island states.

Traditionally, small states have tended to concentrate their production for export on a single or a very limited range of commodities. This has had the effect of rendering their economies even more susceptible to fluctuations on the world market prices. An important result of this is that small states tend not to benefit from the effects of competition, which could improve their efficiency, lower their costs and enhance innovations.

The limited economic output of small states due partly to their restricted domestic market, their remoteness and isolation and their dependency on world markets have also continued to contribute to their economic vulnerability.

Other economic challenges for small states arise from the high degree of the 'openness' of their market – largely due to the fact that their imports, as a percentage of their GNP, are often substantially higher than their exports. Thus, for instance, of the 42 small states for which 2002 data was available, the imports of 30 of them (over 71%), as a percentage of their GNP were much greater than their exports. In 22 of them (over 50%) their imports were higher than 10% of their GNP as compared to their exports (Bacchus, 2005).

Small states have tended to rely more heavily on taxes from their imports as a major source of their revenues. The pressure to reduce tariffs in a globalised world market will, however, have a major impact on the ability of the government to continue imposing such taxes, thereby dramatically reducing income that would have normally paid for govern-

ment services. Some of these services are consequently more likely to be considered as frills, among them guidance services.

In their desire to achieve greater economic growth, some small states have developed strong external economic links with a few economically more developed countries. Often such links are with former colonial powers, to whom they have preferential access when it comes to the supply of exports. They also provide tourist and financial services and even cheap labour for the countries. While such links might increase the number of jobs available in these small states, the returns tend to benefit mainly the economically better-off groups in these societies. These often have the resources to invest in the production of the goods or services demanded by their foreign associates. As a result, existing inequalities in income distribution are deepened further. It needs to be said, however, that such preferential trading arrangements are increasingly challenged under the WTO rules. Small states will eventually be compelled to abandon such practices, and to rely on improving the quality of their human resources in areas in which they have a comparative cost advantage, to develop new industries, and to become more competitive in their production costs. The implications this has for career guidance are obvious.

The home markets of small states tend to be small and with low levels of GDP (Lee, 2004), thus providing neither a wide range of employment opportunities, nor competitive wage levels.

As a result, such small markets are unlikely to prove very attractive for small state dwellers. This is likely to lead to emigration from these small and unattractive economies to adjacent states, and here again, there are important implications for career guidance, as we will note in more detail in the next section of this study.

We have already referred to the fact that globalisation is having several impacts on small states, and specifically on their economy and labour markets. Here are some of these impacts:

Theoretically, globalisation can increase the markets to which small states can sell their products. These enhanced opportunities, however, need to be seen in the context of growing competition from other countries. How to benefit from the new export opportunities in the context of globalised markets is a key challenge for small states, where the stakes are often stacked against them. Smallness, however, can be associated with flexibility in the deployment of human resources and in the alacrity with which emerging niche markets are targeted. In that sense, small states may have an advantage over larger, more unwieldy economies. Guidance can greatly help in improving labour market outcomes and efficiency when it comes to quickly responding to changes in the economic environment.

As has already been noted, globalisation is associated with the dismantling of trade barriers including the elimination of national tariffs. As a result, public subsidies that were traditionally

given to enhance the development of local infant industries are discontinued, while public enterprises, especially those subsidized by public funds, are steadily privatized. The sizing down of the public sector, in a context where national bureaucracies have traditionally offered many employment opportunities, can have a dramatic impact on the ability of the formally educated to find jobs locally. Additionally, due to their limited population, small states are unlikely to be able to offset the shrinkage of public sector opportunities by an increase in private sector jobs.

In the context of globalisation, the power of the state is increasingly circumscribed by that of supra-national organisations, with important decisions being made not by national governments, but by such organisations as the World Trade Organisation, or, in the European context, by such entities as the EU. While this trend is pertinent to all states, for smaller states the issue of self-determination is further exacerbated by the fact that they often lack the institutional capacity to participate effectively in bargaining with international trade and financial institutions.

With the tighter linkages between economies in a globalised environment, small states find themselves even more vulnerable to external events, especially economic changes. Such vulnerability arises not only from the limited economic diversification we have already referred to, but also to their increasing openness and exposure to world markets over which, due to their size, they have little if any control over.

The relevant literature also suggests that the educational and human resource sectors of small states exhibit a number of common characteristics, some of which have a direct relevance to our analysis of career guidance in these contexts. Some of these key characteristics, as well as the challenges that arise from them, are listed below:

Given their often limited natural resources, most small states end up relying on their human resources for the generation of wealth. If all countries are increasingly called to promote a knowledge society that has the skills and attitudes needed by a knowledge economy, that call is even more strident in small states, where the challenge of preparing high quality resources is a key to economic growth.

The relevance and utility of educational and career guidance to this effort is self-evident. In addition, the knowledge economy compels states to develop more of their own human resources in such fields as science and technology. The research capacity in small states is often, however, quite limited, leading to over-reliance on the technological innovations made in the larger countries. Even where special efforts have been made to offer opportunities for improved education and training, small states often fail to follow this up by offering clear career opportunities. This leads to an intensification of the 'brain drain' phenomenon, with small states spending beyond their means to train human resources to a very high level, only to see this investment being absorbed by surrounding larger countries.

In many cases, small states do not have an economy of scale that makes it cost-effective for them to either provide higher education, or to do so in the whole range of areas that are needed by the economy. Most of the higher education students in Luxembourg, for instance, go to neighbouring countries to get their degrees, while Cyprus' only university opened its doors to students as recently as 1992. Not only do students from small states end up following curricula that may have little relevance to the realities of their own countries, but many often do not return home, attracted by better career prospects. The latter problem may be somewhat attenuated by globalisation, given the fact that multi-national companies are increasingly internationalizing their production and recruitment practices, thus potentially enhancing career advancement prospects, even if the more competent employees are likely to be transferred to operations abroad, thereby creating another form of international brain drain from these countries.

The lack of an economy of scale due to a limited population usually means that small states have restricted internal markets for their own products. It becomes unfeasible and not cost-effective, for instance, for small states to produce their own educational materials and resources, or, as importantly, to keep them up-to-date. This is true for textbooks, for instance, as well as for such resources as occupational information and other career education manuals that are often associated with the guidance field.

Small states also tend to suffer from a restricted number of highly trained personnel. This has several implications, some of which will be explored in more detail in the next section. Suffice it to mention the fact that new educational or training projects are difficult to implement given the limited pool of local staff. One way around this problem is the use of expatriates, but while this may appear to solve problems in the short term, it in fact creates new difficulties in the long term. Not only can the strategy prove to be very expensive, but it also tends to distort the wage levels of the local labour market, besides giving a lot of discretionary power to foreign staff who generally lack a deep understanding of the social and cultural context they are working in. In addition, small states often find it difficult to release their own qualified to serve as counterparts to the expatriate personnel.

Some of the key characteristics related to administration in small states, and the challenges that arise from them, are listed below:

Small populations often lead to management deficits and to limited administrative capacity, which become more visible as globalisation pushes small states to interact even more closely with larger ones. This has become acutely visible in relation to the process of accession of the small states to the EU, for instance, where the capacity to deal with the administrative demands of the Commission has proved to be particularly challenging.

(d)  
**Administrative  
issues**

Several authors contributing to the small state literature note that the bureaucratic models bequeathed to small states were designed for larger contexts. Such models reflect the logic and needs associated with the context that gave rise to them, and do not always work well in other contexts. As a result, small states often find themselves working with burdensome bureaucracies that do not help exploit the advantages of small scale.

Despite the fact that, as noted earlier, small states tend to have a restricted number of highly trained personnel, the onus of governance and administration of the public bureaucracy requires that that limited pool of staff nevertheless fulfils the whole range of roles that one finds in larger, better resourced states. As a result, those who have leadership positions often find themselves having to wear several hats at the same time – a phenomenon that has been termed ‘multi-functionality’ (see Farrugia and Attard, 1989). Multi-functionality is not to be equated with overwork, confusion or inefficiency. It is a way of life in small states. Careful analysis of multi-functionality has revealed its virtues particularly in small states, but perhaps also in larger nations.

Proximity of people creates specific opportunities and challenges for administration. It may allow for more participative leadership and responsiveness to local needs. On the other hand, much of modern bureaucracy is predicated on the Weberian notion of impersonality and impartiality of services. Proximity makes both features difficult to maintain in small states. Administrators are constantly pres-

sured to deal informally and flexibly, to bend the rules in order to accommodate personal demands by people they know and they meet daily in a non-official capacity. Employment opportunities as well as career prospects, for instance, are often caught up in these processes, to the extent that the notion of career guidance can lose some of its legitimacy and relevance.

Some of the key characteristics related to socio-cultural issues in small states, and the challenges that arise from them, are listed below:

**(e) Socio-cultural issues**

The relationships between individuals in small-scale societies tend to be communal rather than associational in character. As Farrugia and Attard (1989) note, a characteristic of the ‘social ecology’ of small-scale societies is their “closely knit, integrated but open communities with highly personalized relationships.” This makes it very difficult for those whose role it is to monitor and evaluate others, for instance, and the ‘management of intimacy’ and conflict avoidance become part of a necessary and vital set of skills needed to survive in a small state community context.

The strong, communal rather than associational bonds of relationships that exist among community members in small states exert a lot of pressure on administrators when it comes to filling vacancies. Other criteria than those linked to ability, proven competence, and formal qualifications may come into play. Here, the pressures that are exerted due to close-knit interpersonal and family networks may prevail over the adoption of

more transparent, meritocratic and objective systems of staff selection and performance management.<sup>14</sup> Of course, similar problems do arise in larger societies. However, they tend to be more common in small states because of the relatively fewer jobs that are available. Such instances when particularistic rather than universalistic criteria are applied in appointing individuals to jobs are moreover often much more visible in small states. This leads to a tension between making use of the ‘guilty knowledge’ that administrators have of individuals due to the fact that in small states ‘everybody knows everybody else’, and visible and transparent decision-making can easily lead to accusations of favouritism.

#### 4. IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREER GUIDANCE IN SMALL STATES

##### Considering some implications for career guidance

The specificity of small states in a variety of areas directly or indirectly related to the field of career guidance has been established in the previous section. What we will attempt to do in the next section is to tease out the implications of this specificity in order to propose a series of issues for career guidance that have particular relevance to small state contexts. In doing so, we will focus on two main areas, namely:

<sup>14</sup> It is important to point out here that while the ‘social ecology’ of small states is generally portrayed as a problem, close personal networks can in fact be an important resource for multifunctional officials in a small state (see Baldacchino and Farrugia, 2002). As we will note in the next section, they are more likely to know the worth of a particular person, for instance, over, above and beyond what is signalled by formal credentials.

- (a) the notion of ‘career’ as it works itself out in small states; and
- (c) socio-cultural issues that impact on career guidance in small states.

The considerations are closely inter-related, of course, and indeed some overlap in the discussion is unavoidable.

As noted in the introductory section, specific attention will be paid to the relevance and applicability of the Common Reference Tools to small state contexts, particularly in relation to the principles underpinning the delivery of quality guidance services.

While the previous section has indicated that there is a credible research tradition which gives legitimacy to the claim that scale creates a ‘micro-climate’ that generates sets of social, economic and cultural relationships that are intrinsically different from those to be found in large states, it is important to treat the following propositions with some caution. While, as indicated in the methodology section, they are grounded in insights generated by the relevant literature, as well as in the responses obtained by a small but representative group of guidance experts, the propositions remain tentative and exploratory in nature. Further empirical research is required in order to put the claims made on firmer ground, and to disentangle other variables – such as remoteness, rurality, or economic underdevelopment – that have an impact on the way career guidance is designed and practiced from those that are specifically related to scale.

**The notion of 'career'**

One of the implications of the insights provided by small states literature is that the very notion of 'career' as it is usually used in guidance may need to be considered somewhat differently in a small state context. As the literature suggests, occupational opportunities can be somewhat rare in a restricted and limited labour market. In an evocative and apt image, Baldacchino refers to such opportunities as ships that come to harbour from time to time, and will not stay long: for them this is only a port of call. It behoves the small state citizen to board the ship and exploit the situation as long as it lasts, before the ship moves on. The principle: 'Make hay while the sun shines' has particular relevance to citizens of small states, and influences the approach to occupational choice as well as to career management throughout the life span. It can also be hypothesised that it has an impact on how the 'self' is defined. Given the ephemeral nature of opportunities, one's occupational identity, paradoxically, cannot afford to be as fixed and set as it is in other contexts, where the labour market is more differentiated, stable and hence subject to more formal regulation. Baldacchino suggests that in relation to occupational identity, one can speak of the self as having a 'hard core' and a 'flexible periphery'. He argues that in a small state, the core will tend to be 'smaller', and the periphery larger. The construction of an occupational identity thus more readily shifts and fluctuates in response to fleeting opportunities.

**The shifting notion of 'expertise' in small states**

One reflection of such a process in the construction of occupational identity can be seen in relation to the way 'expertise' tends to be defined and claimed in small states. A person in a small state quickly puts on

the hat of ‘expertise’ in a particular area in response to necessity and when opportunities arise in it, and changes that hat and puts on another when different opportunities arise. Here we have the notion of ‘flexible specialisation’, with individuals making strategic choices as to how to represent and market themselves. As one of the respondents from the six small states involved in this study noted: “...Today you may be an expert on this and tomorrow on something else, and sometimes quality is suffering from this... because the real expertise is too expensive or simply missing sometimes. The pressure is there for sure. Because we do not have an expert for every department, we have often to inform ourselves in reading about different themes. The problem with this is that once you have read three books about a theme you are ‘an expert’, and this is not correct.”

While what one could call ‘chameleon expertise’ has its downside, we will also note below that it is not a totally or necessarily negative phenomenon. In this context, and with reference to the Common Reference Tools developed by CEDEFOP and the Commission’s Expert Group, it nevertheless needs to be pointed out that such everyday realities and constraints in small states have implications for quality in service provision, and that other considerations need to be factored in when it comes to quality auditing, and the development of appropriate guidance methods.

Such shifting notions of expertise, particularly in contexts where salary scales cannot keep up with consumption lifestyles, lead to another phenomenon that is common in small states, and which

also has an impact on notions of a ‘career’ and a fixed occupational identity. We are here referring to ‘occupational multiplicity’ where, at any point in time, a person in a small state can be found to be wearing different occupational hats, with a day and evening job which could be very different one from the other. This is particularly the case in those small states where the informal, ‘underground’ economy is highly developed. The implications for career guidance are evident: in such contexts, it is not uncommon for persons to approach career choice in complex and strategic ways, choosing a regular day job that provides them with a steady income (often in the public sector), but which also leaves them with enough spare capacity (time and energy) to hold down a second job after normal working hours. Indeed, this second employment might provide even more occupational satisfaction than the first one does. Such considerations may need to be factored in when developing guidance systems and practices that are sensitive to small state contexts.

**Multi-  
functionality  
in small  
states**

The shifts in occupational identity for citizens in small states are not only sequential – in other words, as they move from one fleeting opportunity to another, or from day to evening jobs. The shifts also take place in the course of playing out the same occupational role, to the extent that whole research programmes have been developed around the notion of ‘multi-functionality’. Such multi-functionality is a direct result of the nature of labour markets in small states, where some of the sectors have to perform the whole range of tasks that their counterparts do in larger states. A case in

point is the public service, where the need to ensure good governance has implications for the posts that have to be created and filled.

As Warrington notes, one way of dealing with this is for small states to reorganise administrative responsibilities in ways that concentrate a larger repertoire of tasks in the hands of one person or one office, which in larger states would be catered for by staff with more specialised work roles. The strategy of clustering capacities which, in larger states, would have been differentiated, can be a smart strategy in a situation marked by a narrow pool of expertise, and the lack of an economy of scale.<sup>15</sup>

Given a scarce pool of expertise, persons with responsibility end up having to fulfil several different functions. Warrington's study of public administrators in small states has led him to argue that, given the multiple tasks they have to handle, lead civil servants end up becoming 'gifted generalists', able to 'speak' several different technical languages. They are adaptable, cover a lot of ground, and are constantly stretched. As one respondent to the survey noted, however, while such demands make the work more interested and challenging, there remains "a continuous nagging feeling that you know a lot but you are not a real, specialist expert in any one particular aspect."

<sup>15</sup> Warrington illustrates this point with reference to the heavy administrative demands made on small states in the process of acceding to the European Union. Malta, for instance, set up a 'communications authority' in the lead up to EU elections, with a job title that covers different sectors due to lack of administrative capacity.

While multi-functionality is sometimes associated with increasing the risk of exhaustion, burn-out, and superficiality, it need not necessarily represent a disadvantage, nor need it necessarily lead to a situation where one ends up ‘a Jack or Jill of all trades’ (see Bennell and Oxenham, 1983). Gifted generalists may indeed have an advantage over the narrow specialisation in the occupational roles that larger states can afford, in that they often have a better grasp of how the different parts fit in and contribute to the whole. But it does mean, for instance, that at least in a number of cases, occupational classifications and career information material produced by large states cannot be simply imported and adopted by small states, as the same work categories may not have the same content in the different contexts.

Multi-functionality has an impact on the life of guidance service providers themselves. The Latvian respondents to the survey noted that, in their case, they had to be “advisers to policy-makers, to process and organise information, to train, to provide services, to do small scale research, and so on and so forth.” Over and above this, however, multi-functionality can have a deleterious impact on guidance service provision in that, given what we said earlier about the propensity for several roles to be clustered in one person or department, guidance can be just one of the broad range of roles (e.g. encapsulating something as general as ‘Student Services’), and as a consequence there is no specific focus on guidance itself. This also applies at the chalk face of service provision, where, in many small states, the personal

counselling and career guidance roles tend to be fulfilled by one and the same individual, and as a result the former aspect of the task may end up elbowing out the latter.

An important aspect of the labour market in small states which has implications for the notion of 'career' and for career guidance more generally is that it tends to be extremely vulnerable to external economic developments over which the state has little if any control. Due to globalisation, larger states are also increasingly vulnerable to economic decisions made beyond their borders, of course, but we are here referring to a difference in the *scale* of the challenge. What is being proposed here is that, as in the case noted earlier of the employment prospects at the individual level, where opportunities may be here today but gone tomorrow, so too at the national level. Indeed, the history of small state economies is often made up of 'boom and bust' scenarios.

## Vulnerability

Given such openness and vulnerability, it is difficult to predict labour market requirements, and while scale structurally shepherds the economy into a narrow range of activities, it is unwise for small states to place all their eggs in the one or two baskets that are available at a given point in time. The implications for career choice and career development (and consequently for career guidance) in a small state context are clear: over-specialisation in a small island state is an unwise strategy, and while mainstream career guidance, as understood in larger countries, may encourage the identification and development of what we have

referred to as the ‘core’ in one’s occupational identity, in a small state context it makes eminent sense to maintain a degree of detachment from that ‘core’, and to sustain the ‘peripheral’ components of one’s work identity by ensuring that one has more than one string to one’s bow. Here again, the concept of a ‘chameleon career’ is particularly relevant and useful, in that for the citizens of small states, the flexible editing of oneself in relation to what is available, and the changing of colours according to signals from the surrounding environment, is nothing short of a way of life. For this reason, and as one of the Maltese respondents noted, the career education curriculum of small states needs to emphasise career management skills throughout the lifespan, and the ability to make work-related decisions swiftly and wisely.

One other aspect of vulnerability in relation to service provision is related to the restricted pool of expertise in small states. As the Slovene response reminds us, “There are so few people who understand the field in our country that if one expert leaves for some reason, this can have a rather negative impact on guidance services.” Similarly, as one of the Estonian experts noted, when a person leaves his or her job, “it can easily happen that the new person has to start from zero.”

### **Transnational identities**

Heightened economic vulnerability as well as ‘boom and bust’ scenarios in small states means that the anchorage of individuals to their country is of a different quality than their counterparts in large states. According to Baldacchino, individuals in small states – especially small *island* states – are

more likely to develop ‘transnational identities’: the editing of the self referred to earlier relates not only to home-grown opportunities for self and career development, but for other opportunities that become available elsewhere. Small states often have a long history of emigration, with the option of cutting adrift and maintaining tenuous links with ‘home’ being a pragmatic solution to survival and progress. Many citizens grow up having relatives overseas, so that the option of leaving one’s home country is a very real one. In addition, as noted earlier, many small states cannot afford to provide the whole range of educational and training facilities that are needed by a modern economy, and students have to go to higher education institutions abroad in order to specialise. Student mobility often leads to worker mobility as well, with employment opportunities opening up at the end of one’s studies.

All this has specific implications for career guidance in small states, which needs to be especially open to the fact that educational and career guidance services need to provide information about study and work opportunities not just in the client’s country of residence, but elsewhere. The response from Luxembourg, for instance, noted the extent to which guiding students and parents about opportunities for further study in neighbouring countries represented a major challenge. On the other hand, an important issue arises here, one that is linked to the Principles for Guidance Provision in the Common Reference Tools. One of the principles here is ‘impartiality’, by which it is meant that guidance services are provided in accordance with

the citizen's interests only. This raises issues as to the way guidance staff should deal with the tension of providing information that may help young people and adults find employment abroad, when the country may be trying very hard to stem a brain drain.

### Socio-cultural issues

The human ecology of small states is a very specific one, where two factors related to population – namely small numbers and density – come together in specific ways that impact on one's experience of life. Such experiences, it is here being argued, have direct and indirect implications for our understanding of the specificity of career guidance in small states.

### Familiarity

One of the most oft-reported experiences of those living in small states refers to the fact that 'everybody knows everybody else'. Small communities tend to develop a strong sense of identity and belonging: this can be a rich source of support, but it also represents a burden in terms of the loyalty that is expected to an often rigid set of values, and in terms of the surveillance that the community is capable of exercising so that such loyalty is not transgressed.<sup>16</sup> The literature of small states is replete with images of imprisonment, and of a sense in which the individual is stifled, and where personal desires have to be suppressed for the sake of the community.<sup>17</sup> Young people in small states are taught that nothing is really ever truly private, that 'things ultimately get known', and that, as a

<sup>16</sup> As MEDSUI members noted in their feedback to drafts of this monograph, this feeling can be shared by those living in small, often rural and remote communities in larger states.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, F. Sammut's (1971) psychological novel about coming of age in Malta, tellingly titled *Il-Gaġġa* ("The Cage", published by Klabb Kotba Maltin).

Maltese proverb warns, ‘the air has eyes and the walls have ears’. Anthropologists who have studied small state contexts – most notably the Dutch scholar Jeremy Boissevain<sup>18</sup> – have noted that honour, family pride and shame exert important motivational pressures and condition behaviour in small state contexts. Baldacchino also notes that such ‘forced intimacy’ or familiarity often results in a keen fear of failure, which could have an impact on the standing of one’s family in the community. When a person from a small state goes to study abroad, for instance, the stakes are high, both in the case of success or failure. The lack of anonymity means that outcomes of efforts are known, and socially and publicly approved or sanctioned. As one of the respondents to the survey noted, “In small states, if you do something wrong, you cannot escape to another place... You are known, and your reputation remains with you.”

Such dynamics have several implications for career guidance, and throw a new light on the Principles of Guidance Provision as proposed in the Common Reference Tools. For one thing, the principle of the ‘centrality of the citizen’, which assumes an individual relatively free from family and community influence, is somewhat more difficult to defend and uphold in a small state context, where educational and occupational decisions tend to be subject to a converging set of pressures having to do with family identity in the community, expectations, honour, and

<sup>18</sup> See, among others, such works by Boissevain as *Saints and Fireworks: Religion and Politics in Rural Malta* (1965, London: Athlone Press) and *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulations and Coalitions* (1974, Oxford: Blackwell).

status. Such pressures tend to be even keener in small state contexts because scale means that you cannot be far from the family, and the latter remains influential in shaping educational and occupational aspirations and paths. There is little need to leave the family home, and to strike off on one's own, as one often remains studying or working within easy travelling distance of one's parental home. As Baldacchino notes, this maintains dependence in many ways, and does not correspond to notions of personality and career development as these tend to be defined in larger states and in mainstream literature.

The Principles for Guidance Provision highlight the importance of confidentiality in service delivery. This principle too represents a major challenge for guidance professionals in small states. As Warrington perceptively notes, and as we have indicated earlier, proximity and familiarity have a tendency to 'fudge boundaries' between what is private and public knowledge in small communities. This does not mean that confidentiality is not respected as a principle. It just means that it is much more difficult to guarantee. Indeed, intensified interaction on a personal, daily basis in the context of small communities means that data protection needs to be even more strictly enforced.

Responses by experts and practitioners from the field suggest, however, that there are some advantages related to the intersection of 'smallness' and 'familiarity' when it comes to providing guidance services. As one of the Maltese respondents to the survey noted, "the smallness of the island makes it easier for students and other individuals to seek

help, making the service more humane and personalised, because you can get to know the individual person better... his attitudes, his aspirations, his fears, and so on.... So your intervention is specifically adapted for that individual person.”

The issue of familiarity has other implications for the field of career guidance. Given that people know each other, there is a tendency for vacancies to be created in a tailor-made fashion, with the job description designed to fit the person for whom it is targeted. Here it is not c.v.'s that count, but networks. As Baldacchino notes, job advertising can become a largely ceremonial, perfunctory affair.

**Jobs for the  
boys...**

This is not necessarily crass corruption and favouritism – though of course it can be, and often is. It merely reflects a fact of life in small states, where persons often have what in larger, more impersonal and anonymous states is often referred to as ‘guilty knowledge’ about the qualities of persons on the job market. In small states, it is almost inevitable that profiles are known, and that one associates tasks that need to be done with the person or persons who are most likely to perform the job at hand efficiently. Writing up a vacancy in such a way as to ensure that, according to one’s best knowledge, the most appropriate person gets the post, is thus considered the best way of serving the public good.

In some cases, the right connections can mean that individuals get to know about an up-coming

vacancy for a job or for a promotion before a public call for applications is even made, thus giving them the possibility of positioning themselves advantageously in a restricted and limited market.

**'It's who  
you know...'**

The dynamics related to 'familiarity' are closely associated with the issue of networks and network formation in small states. Indeed, the dictum 'It's who you know, not what you know'<sup>19</sup> is particularly relevant to a small island state context. Networks – which can be based on family groups, political parties, old school acquaintances, club membership, and so on – are vitally important in opening up opportunities, and may wield a great deal more importance than formal career guidance.<sup>20</sup> One of the survey respondents referred to this phenomenon as 'the vitamin-B complex'. He explained this by saying that "Even if you are good and have a lot of diplomas, you are not sure to find a job without

<sup>19</sup> For an account of the use of networks in gaining employment, see R.G. Sultana (1989) "It's who you know, not what you know: Penetrating the credentialing ideology," *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 18(1), pp.51-65.

<sup>20</sup> Such processes are not unique to small state contexts, and need not necessarily characterise small states. What we are arguing here is that concentration of people in a context marked by 'intimacy' rather than 'anonymity' encourages a propensity to rely on personal networking to access material and symbolic resources in the community. The response by Iceland to the survey questionnaire is helpful in this regard. The respondents noted that close-knit personal networks may have an important part in the job-getting process in the past. They add, however, that "in the light of the rising levels of education and more formal channels of job hiring, this is not as significant. There is more significance put into skills, knowledge and experience when hiring rather than letting the personal network decide. It can nevertheless be acknowledged that personal networks may assist in the job-getting process, but are not necessarily the catalyst in the decision of who to hire." Latvia too notes that the recruitment processes have become more formalised in both the state and the private sector, with legislation being put into place to ensure transparency of recruitment, equality of opportunity, and fairness in the selection process.

knowing someone ‘important’... It is nearly impossible to find a job if you don’t have a good working network. The process works like this: if one member of your family knows a boss of a firm you get a job, independent of your diplomas or your competence.” Another explained how important family networks were to obtain jobs, and how if you were unlucky enough not to have good parental networks, you have to “find someone who knows someone who is involved in the hiring process.”<sup>21</sup>

Again, with reference to the Principles of Guidance Provision, the issue of ‘equality of opportunities’ takes on a new meaning, over and beyond the association of equality with the rights of groups marked by their social and gender affiliations, or by the fact that have special needs. Indeed, the principle of ‘enabling’ and ‘empowering’ citizens through the guidance process takes on an additional meaning in small states. Here, as one of the respondents noted, career guidance services empower and enable clients who are at a disadvantage on the labour market since they do not have effective personal networks that sustain them in the job-getting process. The guidance service compensates for this deficit by making available its own network, so that “the biggest challenge for our guidance centre is to build up personal networks, and to know as many people as possible in order to help someone find work.”

<sup>21</sup> The Slovene respondents provided another, contrasting insight on nepotism in recruitment practices. They suggested that employers frequently resist employing people they know or who are related to them because it then becomes difficult and awkward to fire them if they do not prove their worth.

### **Personalised hierarchies**

Familiarity with members of the community also means that, in a small state context, individuals are more likely to know about choice career vacancies in an informal but direct manner. Career structures, hierarchies, and progression routes are not anonymous but rather personalised and individualised. In other words, in small states one is more likely to personally know the incumbent of a post of responsibility in a particular department, how old he or she is, and when they are likely to leave, thus creating a vacancy. This has a number of implications for career planning, in the sense that individuals can be purposeful and strategic in scanning career development opportunities, having more knowledge that their counterparts would normally have in larger states where impersonal hierarchies prevail. In small states, individuals are quicker to learn when a key person is about to be promoted or to vacate a post for some other reason, and to therefore position themselves in such a way as to exploit the opportunities that become available. They are also more likely to know the extent to which they can get on with those who they will work with or for, and to thus covet a position or avoid it on the basis of that knowledge. Baldacchino aptly refers to such processes when he comments about the way “personal relationships ‘freeze themselves’ in the organisation” – in other words, in small states, the personal becomes the organisational. Clearly, formal career guidance services are unlikely to consider such complex inter-personal dynamics when it comes to respond to client needs. But awareness of such realities can make

career education programmes as well as career coaching and mentoring schemes more relevant and apposite in a small state context.

The enforced familiarity of small states also has implications for other aspects of the relations that develop between community members. Thus, it is often wrongly assumed that co-operation between different actors in a small state is easier to foster and manage. In small states, it is relatively easy to call a meeting at which the key people are gathered together in a hall. Distances are often not great, and the number of people involved in any occupational category can easily be physically accommodated in one place. People will know each other, will tend to have a relatively homogenous social and linguistic background, and in principle not encounter insurmountable obstacles in their attempt to communicate with each other. More importantly, people from different occupational sectors are more likely to know each other, and to have some familiarity with the occupational contexts in which their counterparts work. This is of direct relevance to one of the main focuses of the MEDSUI project, which set out to examine the conditions that facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration in the provision of guidance services. Not only is it much easier to call guidance staff from both the educational and employment sector together for joint meetings and projects, but it is also more likely that they are aware of what each group is involved in doing at work.

Respondents to the survey suggested that there are some advantages intrinsic to small states that facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration. As the

**Face-to-face  
societies  
with back-  
to-back  
relations**

respondents from Iceland noted, “In small states, one can say that the fact that a person wears many hats can lead to more efficient personal networks. This is helpful when considering cross-sectoral collaboration, as it can be an asset to have contacts with people in various sectors and to know their backgrounds. The establishment of an information network can readily be made so that information can flow.” The same respondents however note that that same familiarity can be the source of problems, given that conflict is more difficult to overcome when it is based on personal knowledge and relationships rather than on more impersonal work roles.

The available literature in fact supports the view that co-operation and collaboration is not necessarily or automatically easier in a small state context. What the literature does tell us is that small states can often be characterised as ‘face-to-face societies with back-to-back relations’.<sup>22</sup> Knowing each other well, warts and all, does not necessarily lead to respect: familiarity breeds contempt, it is said.

But there is more to it than that, and the dynamics are even more complex. A key principle for organising one’s life in a small state, where privacy is at a premium, is the ‘management of intimacy’ (Lowenthal, 1987). This is a skill and a strategy

<sup>22</sup> Much of this antagonism can be organised around and through partisan politics, to the extent that despite the fact that, as noted earlier, the pool of expertise is limited, highly trained personnel are sometimes marginalised due to political views which do not support the government of the day. This, of course, happens in many national contexts. In small states, the propensity for this to happen, as well as its visibility and impact, assume a different scale.

that inhabitants of small states learn at an early age by having a public and private persona, and by making sure that the two realms do not mix. This means that public intercourse, while apparently marked by informality and openness, is in fact highly ritualised and ultimately anything but frank. It is rare for a person in a small state to tell a colleague what s/he really thinks of him or her: experience and communal wisdom has taught the small state citizen that conflict and tension are very difficult to manage in a situation where scale continually throws people together in the same street, if not the same room. In a small state context, it is also more likely than in other contexts that the person one sanctions today will tomorrow be in a position of authority, rendering one vulnerable. As the Latvian response to the survey indicated, collaboration in small states “cannot be so efficient due to personal relationships.”

Another pragmatic reason which militates against collaboration in a small state context is that resources are often limited, and that when they do appear, opportunities are often ephemeral and, as suggested earlier, here today and gone tomorrow. In such a context, individuals and groups are more likely to keep quiet about projects and potential sources of funding for such projects, and the main goal becomes that of guarding one’s own turf, and to keep potential usurpers from jumping on one’s bandwagon – especially if such usurpers tend to claim ‘expertise’ not on the basis of real knowledge and skills, but in response to opportunities as they arise. Some of the respondents noted that even Ministers are very territorial in carrying out

their duties, and are often loathe to share information about their ministry with colleagues in cabinet. Needless to say, such personal and inter-personal dynamics, deeply rooted as they are in the conditions of existence offered by small scale, are hardly likely to sustain the elaboration of joint projects.

**The challenge of scale for quality assurance**

The notion of the ‘management of intimacy’ and the avoidance of conflict given that one’s personal and occupational destinies are unavoidably and visibly intertwined has other implications for the career guidance field. Quality assurance becomes particularly difficult to manage in a small state context. In large states, inspections and sanctions are easier to manage because they are bureaucratized, with processes often rendered impersonal and based on distinct roles. Processes and dynamics are quite different in small states, where inspector and inspected are likely to know each other, meet each other regularly socially, attend the same clubs, and even be related to each other. While small states are therefore likely to agree to the Principles in the Common Reference Points regarding quality assurance, the way the principles can be implemented in the contexts we are concerned with in this study have to be sensitive to the issues we are raising.

**Resourcing career guidance in small states**

Much of what has been tentatively outlined above in relation to the specificity of career guidance in small states has important implications for resourcing. If one accepts the fundamental premise that small states are not simply scaled down versions of larger states, and services such as guidance need to develop a keen sensitivity to the

particular realities that are to be found in this micro environment, then this raises some fundamental questions regarding the resources that can or should be used in delivering the services. Most small states – including the wealthier ones such as Luxembourg and Iceland – find it difficult to produce guidance tools, tests, interest inventories, career guidance textbooks, occupational information, and so on. As the Latvian respondents to the survey noted, “Publications for career guidance purposes are scarce and are mostly supported by the state because, due to the number of possible users, the volume of publications is not profitable for the private sector.” The Slovene respondents on their part said that the only way that such resources could be developed was by having external funding, largely by participating in European projects. Not only is the production of resources more expensive per capita because of the lack of an economy of scale, but also because most often small states simply do not have the necessary pool of expertise available, and buying foreign expertise is often too expensive to be a realistic option. Many small states resort to importing, translating, adapting or adopting resources from overseas, often from countries they have a historical, cultural and/or linguistic affinity with (e.g. Cyprus turns to Greece, Malta to the UK, and Luxembourg to Belgium, France and Germany). Such countries are often large states, and the material and resources they have produced naturally speak to those contexts, failing to take into account the kinds of issues raised in this monograph. This too has implications for quality provision, and it might very well be a

smart and strategic option for small states to collaborate in order to jointly develop guidance resources that are more sensitive to the economic, labour market and socio-cultural issues that frame the conceptualisation, organisation and delivery of career guidance services.

**Small can  
be beautiful**

Finally, while this study has highlighted the specific challenges for guidance in small states, one must not conclude that there are only disadvantages associated with scale. The Iceland response to the survey noted some of these advantages: “There lie great opportunities within small states for the development of career guidance...opportunities such as trying out new programmes, putting together research and exporting the knowledge generated. In small states research can be carried out quickly and the results reported sooner. The body of counsellors is small, and staff have a common cultural background, which means that things can change swiftly and professional development is easier to bring about... When the body of counsellors is small, there is a positive atmosphere to which each member contributes.”

Similarly, the Latvian response noted that while the scale of the country meant that the pool of expertise and of staff was small, it was “easier to establish collaboration between individuals and institutions, and easier to have faster and more efficient exchange of information between individuals and institutions.” Labour market opportunities can also be more transparent in small states, while the Cypriot respondent felt that a small state context

made it somewhat easier “to formulate or change policies, strategies, rules and regulations, and to develop a new system. Moreover, it is easier to communicate information about changes or new policies, and to achieve a better coordination overall.” The Slovene respondents similarly felt that in small states, an instance of successful practice was easy to promote, and initiatives could more easily and quickly be taken to scale at a national level.

It seems to be easier too for guidance experts in small states to be more effective in influencing decision-makers in relation to the development of the field. As a number of respondents noted, the distance from policy-makers is not as great as in larger countries. Practitioners and department officials, for instance, may have been class- or school-mates with members of parliament, or they may know them socially or even be related to them. Small scale makes the direct representation of views possible, very much as in the city states of classical Greece, where direct rather than representative democracy first flourished.

It is in building on advantages such as these, and in tailoring provision to take into account the specificity of small state contexts, that guidance services can hope to make further progress in catering for the needs of their citizens. Clearly, much work remains to be done in providing a comprehensive analysis of the challenges for guidance in small states, and in articulating a policy response to them. Our hope is that this study has made a start in that direction, and that it will serve to stimulate further research and policy debate.



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## CHALLENGES FOR CAREER GUIDANCE IN SMALL STATES

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

What are some of the most pressing issues and challenges for guidance in your country? Would you see any relationship between these issues/challenges and the fact that your country is small?

*Your response:*

Does the fact that you work in a small state represent any specific challenge for providing career guidance services? How? Any specific advantages? Which?

*Your response:*

Is career guidance seen to be an important service in your country? What other actors and social dynamics compete with formal guidance services? What aspects of scale impact on the career decision-making process, if at all?

*Your response:*

Small states are often characterised by close-knit personal networks. Does this have any impact on the job-getting process? Please give details of the processes involved.

*Your response:*

It is commonly assumed that cross-sectoral collaboration is easier in small states. To what extent

would you agree or disagree with this assumption?

***Your response:***

Much of small state literature suggests that service providers often end up having to wear several hats at the same time. To what extent do you feel the pressure to be a multi-functional professional? What impact does this have on you? On your services? On quality provision?

***Your response:***

Are there problems with capacity building and with ensuring availability of expertise?

***Your response:***

Has your country developed an occupational information system? If no, what are the specific challenges here?

***Your response:***

Which of the following are of special relevance and/or concern to guidance services in your country?

- brain drain/gain
- informal job-getting strategies
- patronage/nepotism
- family influence
- territorialism
- flexible specialisation
- gifted generalists
- labour market forecasting
- informal labour market

***Your response:***

Has there been an attempt to introduce quality

assurance systems in the guidance services in your country? How successful were these? What problems were encountered? How do you account for these successes and difficulties?

***Your response:***

Any other insights that you would like to share on the relationship between guidance and small states?

***Your response:***

**Ronald G. Sultana** is Professor of Educational Sociology and Comparative Education, and Director of the *Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research* at the University of Malta. He is the author or editor of 17 volumes, and has published over 90 articles and chapters in refereed journals and books. He received his training in guidance and transition-to-work issues at Reading University (UK), Waikato University (NZ) and Stanford University (USA), where he was Fulbright Fellow. He practiced as a guidance counsellor in Maltese schools, and led post-graduate courses in guidance in universities in New Zealand and Malta. He has authored the European Training Foundation report on career guidance in the new EU member states (2003), the Cedefop report on guidance in Europe (2004), and, together with Anthony G. Watts, the EU/OECD Career Guidance Policy Handbook (on behalf of the Commission Lifelong Guidance Expert Group, in 2004), and the DG Employment review of career guidance in Europe's Public Employment Services (2005). He is presently working with Professor Watts on a ETF project looking at career guidance in the MEDA region.

**"This study, carried out within the context of the 'MEDSUI' Joint Actions project, challenges the view that small states are simply scaled down versions of larger ones. The study indeed goes further by proposing that the whole notion of career may need to be considered differently in a small state context, suggesting different strategic approaches. However this work is not just for those developing policy in smaller states. Partners from larger states will immediately appreciate the relevance of the study to rural, isolated areas."**

***Dr. Judy Alloway, Vice Chair of the UK Guidance Council and Chair MEDSUI Project***

**"It takes insight, and some courage, to consider and appraise the issue of 'scale' in developing effective career guidance services. This study acknowledges this 'elephant in the room'. In so doing, the text emerges as a powerful primer that proposes 'good sense' ideas about the principles and practices of career guidance in small states."**

***Professor Godfrey Baldacchino, Canada Research Chair (Island Studies), University of Prince Edward Island, Canada***

**"This is, to my knowledge, the first analysis of the distinctive issues relating to career guidance in small states. It merits a wide international audience."**

***Professor Anthony G. Watts, Founding Fellow of the National Institute of Careers Education and Counselling (U.K.)***

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