

Journal of Island Studies: preliminary ideas from 1991, and comments from 2015

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ABSTRACT: Some preliminary thoughts were penned in 1991, on the founding of an academic journal devoted to the study of the world's islands. This collated contribution is an opportunity to look back critically at what was advised then, and what has actually come to pass through *Island Studies Journal*. Russell King's prescient report from 1991 is followed by a series of candid reflections by members of ISJ's International Editorial Board.

Keywords: academic journal, Institute of Island Studies, island studies, multi-disciplinarity, University of Prince Edward Island

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Introduction

At the outset, I should stress that these are preliminary ideas and do not constitute a formal proposal. They are for internal discussion within the Institute of Island Studies [at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada] (IIS) and its co-workers. Although these thoughts have matured over the duration of my brief stay at UPEI, and draw on the ideas of others as well as myself, I want to make it clear that they represent my personal view of the project and are very much open to further debate and discussion. I also raise certain questions that will need to be settled sooner or later.

Format of the Journal

I would recommend that the journal should appear twice a year, in issues of about 100 pages each (each annual "volume" therefore to comprise circa. 200 pages). Each issue might contain the following sections:

- i. Main articles. The key section of the journal where the results of original research and creative thinking on islands are presented. Say 4 – 6 main articles per issue at 10 – 15 pages per article (about 4,000 – 6,000 words, plus illustrations), to comprise 60 pages or thereabouts per issue.
- ii. Island miscellany. A heterogeneous section of the journal where shorter notes, opinions, snippets, even poetry, might appear. Maximum of 4 pages or 1,500 words per item.
- iii. Island notice-board (too old-fashioned? "Island networking" perhaps a better term). Short section of the journal for up-coming conferences, events, workshops etc. could also contain conference reports.
- iv. Book reviews. Perhaps up to 10 or 15 pages of reviews of the latest books and other significant publications on islands.

Scope of the Journal

I see the journal as having three fundamental properties: firstly that it publishes only high-quality rigorously-refereed contributions, secondly that it be wholeheartedly international in scope, and thirdly that it be multidisciplinary in character. I would want to lay great emphasis on each of these properties. Two other key points also can be made. Firstly, articles should be well-written and therefore a pleasure and not a struggle to read. They should not be overly esoteric or jargon-ridden. Second, special attention should be given to making the articles visually attractive by the inclusion of relevant photographs, maps and other graphics.

Perhaps the trickiest of all the above points is the disciplinary scope of the journal's subject matter. I would see the scope as essentially social scientific, but extending towards the ecological dimension at the "scientific" end and to history and possibly language and music at the "humanities" end. This spectrum of disciplines may not be very helpful, however, since many papers will probably be written from a multi- or inter-disciplinary perspective combining, say, geography and ecology, or social anthropology and religion.

Thought needs to be given to the notion of "theme issues". Such issues can focus either on a geographical area such as the Caribbean islands or on a topic such as migration or economic viability. Theme issues are a good idea but carry some perils such as the danger of low-quality or otherwise unsuitable papers which come as part of a "package". I would definitely advise against having the Journal made up entirely of theme issues. This would stultify its spontaneity and choke off the supply of unsolicited papers from all parts of the world which would be one of the most exciting and satisfying aspects of running such a journal. At most I would suggest theme issues alternating with "mixed" issues. Probably the best strategy, at least initially, would be a flexible one whereby theme issues are produced as and when good quality papers surface from a logical source such as a conference. To commit ourselves to one theme issue per year might become too much of a straitjacket. The best issues will probably be those with a good mix of papers, including "something for everybody".

Editorial Board

The international and multi-disciplinary nature of the journal must be reflected in the Editorial Board. This should consist of around 6-8 carefully chosen people representing different disciplines and different parts of the island world. Some of these people clearly exist in UPEI and are already associated with the IIS. However too great a concentration of the editorial team at UPEI would detract from the international flavour of the journal. I have in mind some non-UPEI possible Board members, but don't want to commit them to paper right now!

The role of the Editorial Board will be to assist the Editor (on whom more anon) by actively soliciting and recruiting papers, e.g. at conferences and through personal contacts. Such soliciting must carry no indication that publications is guaranteed, however. Editorial Board members might also "guest edit" theme issues in their chosen field of specialism, and they would also be called upon quite frequently to referee papers for the Journal. All papers should be sent to two referees for evaluation; such referees might include, but not be limited to, Board members. After evaluation, the paper can be accepted, rejected, or returned to the author for changes. In the event of the two referees disagreeing, a further referee might be involved.

The key figure in the academic process of producing the journal is of course the Editor. This is best done by a single person rather than a duo, in my view. However this is not to deny all crucial importance of the Assistant Editor, who is responsible for checking, layout, proofing, and seeing the journal through to its final stage of printing. Such a person is vital, and in my view indispensable for this whole project.

One or two sections of the Journal might be “sublet” to other members of the Editorial Board. The most obvious section is the book reviews: hence there could be a Book Review Editor whose job it would be to commission book reviews and monitor the latest literature.

The Editorial Board can be expanded and changed through time as potentially useful people are “discovered”. The post of Editor should, perhaps, be fixed for a limited period: say three years initially with the option of reappointment for further periods if s/he wishes to continue and the rest of the people involved in the journal are satisfied.

Production, launching, pricing

It is my view that sufficient in-house expertise exists at IIS to produce the journal there, although a good deal of further work will need to be done to ensure that the production process can be set up and run smoothly. Submission of as much journal material on disk as possible will obviously help. The main problem is to get an Editorial Assistant familiar with both editorial processing and publishing, layout, etc. “in post”: this has both financial and contractual implications which the IIS will have to solve.

A good time to launch the journal would be 1993. Vol. 1, No. 1 would carry commissioned papers, some by the editorial panel, and be a miscellany issue. Vol. 1, No. 2 could contain the best papers from the Demography Conference, held in September 1993, so that there is a healthy supply of papers for the 1994 issues.

Pricing the Journal will be a key decision. Should the journal aim to attract lots of individual subscribers and, if so, should there be a dual price structure with institutions paying a higher subscription? Linked to this is the issue of the print run – how many copies of each issue should be produced.

Conclusion

It is my view, based, I must admit, more on intuition than anything else, that there is a market for such a journal, and that the journal will be an attractive and exciting venture. This is not to say that it will be a financially successful venture, however! Like much of the work and future plans of the IIS, the Journal will interlock with a series of other initiatives. Conferences and public lectures will provide potential papers. The Information Network currently being discussed will aid circulation and also help to solicit articles. The results of both local and comparative research done at IIS can also be fed selectively into the Journal. The possible launch of a Master’s program in Island Studies will also interact positively with the Journal. In short, my recommendation is: go for it!

September 1991

From the *Journal of Island Studies* to *Island Studies Journal*

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Looking back over the space of nearly 25 years, I find that what I wrote on that summer 1991 visit to UPEI has more or less stood the test of time, even if it was to take another 15 years before the first issue appeared. I am very pleased that ISJ has amply fulfilled the three fundamental criteria that I specified: high quality and rigorously refereed papers, international scope, and a multidisciplinary approach. No doubt, considerable thought went into the slight change of name from that originally proposed. Scanning back through the contents of the 18 issues of ISJ to date, I am very impressed by the sheer variety of island themes and topics covered, including several landmark special issues or part-issues. The book review section – also part of the original proposal – has been a solid feature of the journal, too. High editorial and publishing standards have been maintained throughout the decade-long history of ISJ.

My thanks to Harry Baglole for inviting me to come to UPEI all those years ago to give some lectures and to write the prospectus for the journal, and congratulations to Godfrey Baldacchino for taking forward this unique venture. I look forward to reading many more great papers in the future. Here's to the next ten years!

March 2015

A toast to the king

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As with many prescient documents, Russ King's prospectus for an *Island Studies Journal* is very much a product of its time – the dawn of a self-conscious new discipline – and yet, it transcends the moment. His original concept envisaged a hybrid blend of traditional academic journal and newsletter, no doubt to achieve the broadest possible audience among the emerging community of interest in island studies, that is, researchers and policymakers, theorists and practitioners, artists and social scientists. But the appeal to avoid jargon and to promote readability – both observed in the breach! – was also an attempt to find a *lingua franca* among scholars in different disciplines.

Technology, as much as nissology, has shaped what has happened since. Choosing an e-journal format overcomes the logistical and economic challenge of reaching a far-flung readership. Equally, the internet allows a level of communication that has made the newsletter dimension of King's prospective journal irrelevant, leaving us with a journal that is overtly academic. (And where is the poetry?) One thing has not changed: King's emphatic commitment to three defining, essential characteristics has been faithfully lived in *ISJ*. King "talked the talk." *ISJ* has "walked the walk." Bravo!

Island studies journals

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I first visited Prince Edward Island (PEI), the University of PEI (UPEI) and its Institute of Island Studies (IIS) in 1988 when on a study tour of the Maritime Provinces funded by what became the Understanding Canada Programme, since axed by the Harper government. The director of the IIS was then Harry Baglolle and I remember details from our conversations. Harry was keen to move the Institute on from the study of 'the Island' (i.e. PEI) to the study of islands: there was mention of teaching, research and, maybe, a dedicated journal. Three years later, I was employed at the Institute to give, in a summer school, what may have been the first course in island studies. That year, too, Harry commissioned, or just asked, Russell King to give thought towards what he then visualized as the *Journal of Island Studies*, King also having visited the IIS. It was a hard copy of Russell King's report that I found 23 years later when clearing out a filing cabinet in my office. I sent it on to Godfrey Baldacchino, which has resulted in this set of reflections in what is rather *Island Studies Journal*, a different but obviously related venture commencing in 2006, from the same IIS stable.

Time and technology have overtaken some of King's concerns: pricing, print run, circulation, an 'island notice-board' section. Who could have foreseen what the then nascent internet would do to journal publishing, never mind notice boards. However, the basic format of the present *Island Studies Journal* is seen in his report: multi-disciplinarity; publication twice a year with refereed articles and book reviews, all under the control of a single editor. Most prescient of all is King's forecast that 'there is a market for such a journal', which 'will be an attractive and exciting venture'.

Island (literary) studies

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From the perspective of literary studies, Russell King's preliminary ideas for a journal of island studies are fascinating reading. He proposes a "multidisciplinary" character as one of the journal's fundamental properties, but envisions that it would be "essentially social scientific", while including a spectrum of disciplines from the sciences to the humanities – possibly "language and music" – as well as papers from a variety of multi- or inter-disciplinary perspectives. Most pertinently for me, he anticipates that the "trickiest" part of establishing a journal of island studies would be "the disciplinary scope of the journal's subject matter."

For those of us thinking about islands in the humanities, the question of the disciplinary status and reach of island studies and its flagship journal remains a tricky (and very important) one. My own research focuses on the intersections between literature and

geography, with a special interest in islands, or in what I have sometimes termed “island literary studies.” Reading King’s vision for the journal prompts me to ask:

What contribution have literary scholars made to *Island Studies Journal*, and its focus on the “interdisciplinary study of our ‘world of islands’”?

On my count, only eight of the articles published in the journal’s first nine volumes can be neatly classified as literary studies, and five of these appeared in the first five volumes. Notably, half of the articles focused on literature are by researchers based in the English program at the University of Tasmania: my own essay about Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* and Ralph Crane’s study of the colonial club as metaphorical island, both in 6(1); Elizabeth Leane’s study of early 20th century expeditions to Antarctic islands in 2(1); and Danielle Wood’s article about literature set on Tasmanian islands in 3(2).

Of course, in the first instance, the representation of literary studies - or indeed of related disciplines - in *Island Studies Journal* is dependent on the quality and volume of submissions; and clearly, there is significant critical mass in Tasmania around the significance of literature for thinking about islands and vice versa. I would, however, be excited to see a larger and more diverse range of papers touching on issues pertaining to literary studies of islands or, indeed, island studies of literature. The recent announcements of the forthcoming journals *GeoHumanities* and *Literary Geographies* suggest that the kinds of questions such essays would address are gaining traction at the meeting zone of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, and I look forward to seeing how *Island Studies Journal* continues to tackle the tricky question of disciplinarity.

Island networking in the internet age

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What Dr King could not have foreseen was the rise of the internet and the emergence of new technologies and traditions of academic publishing. *Island Studies Journal*’s open-access digital format grants it a global reach – across national and social divides, across oceans – that would have been impossible with the offset printing methods envisioned for the journal in 1991. *Island Studies Journal* today represents the best of online academic publishing: its speed, flexibility, low cost, opportunities for exploring inter-textual relationships, and egalitarian promise. Significantly, *Island Studies Journal* set the standard in its multidisciplinary field, making ‘gold’ open access the rule and the expectation rather than the exception. Open-access publishing is still regarded with suspicion across large swaths of academia, but *Island Studies Journal* holds out hope for a future in which quality, peer-reviewed independent journals can challenge the mainstream publishing industry, with its stifling financial constraints and embeddedness in a geopolitics of North-South, East-West scholarly division.

Now firmly ensconced in the mainstream

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Islands, of course, are fascinating. Some of us probably started with Enid Blyton's Famous Five on Kirrin Island. When Russell put his proposal for a *Journal of Island Studies* together in 1991, islands seemed a joyous alternative to dour and austere metropolitan times: nothing like some fashionable and enjoyable escapism. And what a proposal it was – for a journal with a marginally different title but one that has done exactly what Russell foresaw that it could and should do – high quality, well respected – of course – because it was multidisciplinary and international, and perhaps above all it resonated with articles that people wanted to read. If not Kirrin Island or Treasure Island what could be more intriguing and fascinating than shifting from Greenland to Barbuda, or from the Canary Islands to Svalbard? The only mystery was why it took so long? The proposal was set out in 1991 – the Journal came in 2006. At least, the wait was worthwhile. Last week I was offered a new journal, but was the world really waiting for the *Journal of Frugal Innovation*? By contrast, ISJ is now firmly ensconced in the mainstream. Thanks to Russell and Godfrey it got there, and long may it stay there. Much like Russell no doubt, I'm only sad that I don't have a nice row of hard copies on my bookshelves.

At the cusp of key areas of transdisciplinarity

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Reaching the ten-year milestone is an achievement worth celebrating for any journal, but especially so for one that is considered to be catering to a niche area of research and study like that of Island Studies. However, at the same time that Island Studies can be considered a niche, it also represents a critical face of globality, as illustrated through the use of terms like “island worlds” and “world of islands”.

“Island Worlds” are ecological hotspots due to the high level of endemism or unique species. From this view, islands are laboratories for assessing the virtues of research from sustainability studies and climate change adaptation to the green economy. The “World of Islands” also consists of socio-cultural and economic hotspots given that they have long been at the crossroads of human cultural interaction and operate as hybrid sites for identity formation, intangible heritage and global inter-connectivity. This is exemplified by the high penetration levels of global trade, global diasporas, global tourism and global media.

These themes and more are captured in the articles and book reviews that have been published by *Island Studies Journal* over the years and as such it can be argued that the journal is at the cusp of key areas of transdisciplinarity. This is its strength and it needs to play more from this standpoint. The Journal also needs to reach out to more scholars from the developing

world to widen the pool of articles and deepen the diversity of voices. This is increasingly achievable given modern communication technologies and the globalization of higher education. Part of the challenge, quite ironically, is to convince scholars from “developing” island states that Island Studies is of increasing global relevance.

Candid reflections on the Journal of Island Studies

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It is a great pleasure for me to see how most of Prof. Russell King's advice and suggestions were taken up and put into practice, even if somewhat later than he had hoped. But the 15-year-or-so delay in starting *Island Studies Journal* may have unintended benefits: by 2006, open access publishing had become a realistic possibility. Now, ten years later, open access is mainstream, reputable, the preferred medium of publication for many scholars, including those obliged to make results accessible to a general public by their own funding agencies.

Looking forward, I sense two main challenges for *Island Studies Journal*. As a scholar from Taiwan, I realize that the Journal has yet to develop a strong contributor base from East Asia, the location of the world's most heavily populated island archipelagos. I do not know how many manuscripts from Indonesia, Japan, Philippines and the rest of that island region, have been received by the *ISJ* Editor. Even so, few if any have been published. There are many challenges here: writing critically and professionally in the English language may not be easy for scholars in these and neighbouring countries. Non-English speaking island regions could be encouraged to submit more articles to *ISJ*, to share island research, and better meet the Journal's goal of being “wholeheartedly international in scope”..

The second challenge is succession; this was mentioned in Prof. King's proposal. The Journal's success may owe much to its founding editor, who is now indicating that he is looking for a suitable successor. Continuing the good work of *ISJ* will depend on a dedicated editorial team who does the work, well and on time. I do hope that such a team of devoted scholars will come forward, to maintain and enhance the prestige that *ISJ* already enjoys.

Moreover, I much appreciate what Prof. King had envisioned in terms of the basic character of a journal of island studies 24 years ago. He argued for three basic properties: to only publish high-quality, rigorously-refereed work; to be wholeheartedly international in scope; and to be multidisciplinary in character. I would venture adding two more attributes. First, that articles should be well-written and therefore a pleasure and not a struggle to read; they should be scholarly, but not overly esoteric or jargon-ridden. Second, articles can be made visually attractive with the inclusion of relevant photographs, maps and other graphics. Even for me, coming as I do from a different language background, such highlights remain the ‘golden rule’ for manuscripts to be submitted to *ISJ*.
