

Editorial:

Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal

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Abstract

Islands are sites of innovative conceptualizations, whether of nature or human enterprise, whether virtual or real. The study of islands on their own terms today enjoys a growing and wide-ranging recognition. This paper celebrates the launch of *Island Studies Journal* in the context of a long and thrilling tradition of island studies scholarship.

Keywords: islands, island studies.

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The Setting

- There are some 550 million people living on islands: around 10% of the world's total population.
- Islands¹ occupy just 1.86% of the Earth's surface area², but 13.1% (106 out of 812) of UNESCO's World Heritage sites (as at February 2006) are on islands or else are islands *in toto* (UNESCO World Heritage web-site).
- No fewer than 43 (22%) of the world's sovereign states are exclusively island states; and many states have one or more island regions or sub-national jurisdictions (CIA, 2005).
- Innovative forms of sovereignty tend to involve islands, especially small islands. Åland, Aruba, Bermuda, the Isle of Man, Mayotte, Puerto Rico and dozens of other island territories have struck unique status arrangements with much larger national or supra-national bodies. Many of these island territories, even if former

¹ Australia & Antarctica are excluded; but such a decision is contestable. Data from Global Shoreline Database: www.ngdc.noaa.gov/mgg/shorelines/gshhs.html. This data set is made up of 180,498 islands.

² This drops to just 1.47% if one excludes Greenland. My thanks to Christian Depraetere for this information.

colonies, have rejected outright political independence (Watts, 2000; Baldacchino, 2006): as has done Tokelau in February this year³.

- Many innovative forms of environmental management⁴ and epidemiological research⁵ tend to involve, or be based on, islands.
- Major advances in evolutionary biology, ecology and bio-geography have occurred on the basis of pioneering island field research: insularity is pronounced as the flywheel of evolution, with copious island-based examples of endemism (Carlquist, 1974)⁶, as well as extinction⁷.
- Anthropology cut its teeth with the study of island societies in allegedly pristine and quasi-laboratory settings⁸.
- Social network theory has been developed from the particular research contexts afforded by small island environments (Barnes, 1954; Boissevain, 1974).
- Islands are platforms for the emergence of national identity and for the affirmation of cultural specificity: critical resources, especially in a context of sweeping globalization and the death of cultures and languages. As prototypical ethno-scapes, islands have spearheaded the study of the production of locality (Appadurai, 1996: 180).
- Amongst the ten territories declared as having the highest Gross National Income *per capita* levels of (conventionally estimated) economic development, four – Aruba, Bermuda, Iceland and French Polynesia – are islands or island archipelagoes with small populations (*The Economist*, 2003b).

³ ‘Tiny Isle of Tokelau rejects Independence’, Washington Times, February 16, 2006. Available at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/upi/20060216-030745-3351r.htm> (Accessed 24 March 2006).

⁴ Crosby (1986) and Grove (1995: 9) remind us that Mauritius was the site of the modern world’s first environmental debate. Landes (1998: 69) documents the island groups of Açores and Madeira as the world’s prototype plantation economies. Their separateness, distinctiveness and more manageable size render islands obvious starting points for designing sustainable ecotourism programmes via biosphere reserves, national parks and other diversity-rich areas (Di Castri & Balaji, 2002).

⁵ The island of Mafia, off Zanzibar, is the World Health Organization test site for the elimination of advanced lymphoedema [elephantiasis] (*The Economist*, 2003a). The islanders of Tristan da Cunha may hold the key to the asthma and lung cancer genes (Scott, 2003). The Micronesian islands of Pingelap and Pohnpei have the highest known incidence of achromatopsia [colour blindness] (Sacks, 1996; Gabilondo, 2000). Iceland is today a key leader in genetic decoding, thanks to its well documented genealogical heritage (Vesilind, 2000).

⁶ These include gigantism (e.g. the Komodo dragon lizard) and dwarfism (e.g. the Icelandic horse).

⁷ “The incidence of endangered or extinct species is greater on islands than on continents. More endemic species have been created on islands, but more have perished there” (Young, 1999: 253).

⁸ The forays of Radcliffe-Brown (1922) in the Andaman Islands, Malinowski (1922) amongst the Trobriand (or Kiriwina) Islanders of Papua New Guinea, Mead (1928, 1934) in Samoa and the Admiralty Islands, and Firth (1936) in Tikopia led to the birth of ethnography and the consolidation of social anthropology as a discrete social science discipline with its own methodological rigour (Baldacchino, 2004a; DeLoughrey, 2001: 35).

- The world's largest service industries – travel and tourism – have catapulted islands as favoured destinations and rendered them mythical and unreal to the ever-fertile Western imagination⁹.
- What may be the world's first modern English-language novel – Daniel Defoe's (1719) *Robinson Crusoe* - and so much drama, fiction, art, poetry and music are inspired by, or are based on, islands¹⁰. This trend continues in motion picture films (*Cast Away*) or TV serials (*Big Brother* and *Survivor*). Such episodes connect to an island myth that can be traced back various centuries (Pitt, 1970: 1, 3; Gillis, 2004).

Need one say more? Rather than justify why studying islands is important, it would appear more appropriate to try and explain why 'island studies' remain a largely unacknowledged field of study, and an island studies journal has had to wait until now to emerge.

The Island

Thanks to an apparent yet beguiling openness, it is deceptively simple to conceive of 'the island' as the convenient platform for any whim or fancy. An island is for all seasons and for all tastes. An island can be both paradise and prison, both heaven and hell. Any island, any islander, is a contradiction between 'here' and 'there' (Kirch, 1986a; Péron, 1993: 16; Villamil, 1977), gripped by negotiating the anxious balance between roots and routes (Clifford, 1997; Connell & King, 1999: 2; Jolly, 2001); like the body, both sustained and yet threatened by incursion (Edmond & Smith, 2003: 4). Islands are paradoxical spaces which lend themselves to smug subordination via different discourses:

“Islands ...absolute entities ... territories, territorial; relational spaces – archipelagos, (inter)dependent, identifiable; relative spaces – bounded but porous; isolated, connected, colonized, postcolonial; redolent of the performative imaginary; vulnerable to linguistic, cultural, environmental change; robust and able to absorb and modify;... utopian and dystopian, tourist meccas, ecological refugia...” (Stratford, 2003: 495).

In fact, a significant component of the contemporary intoxicating 'lure' or 'fascination' of islands (Baum, 1996, 2000; King, 1993) has to do with the fact that islands suggest themselves as *tabulae rasae*: potential laboratories for any conceivable human project, in

⁹ The impact of tourism is nowhere more sudden, pervasive, transparent, and perhaps even irrevocable or unsustainable, as on small warm-water islands and their (more fragile) habitats and/or communities (Apostolopoulos & Gayle, 2002; Baldacchino, 2004b; Briguglio *et al.*, 1996; Conlin & Baum, 1995; Gössling, 2003; Lockhart & Drakakis-Smith, 1996): UNESCO recognized this island condition in reviewing case studies of tourism effects in five island territories: Bali, Bermuda, Cyprus, Malta and the Seychelles (De Kadt, 1979).

¹⁰ Many characters who travel to islands in the course of a story, even if by themselves, usually return disturbed, broken, refreshed, redeemed, resolute, shaken or somehow transformed, by the experience. These range from the atavistic anarchism of William Golding's (1954) *Lord of the Flies*; the noble intentions of social engineering in H.G. Wells' (1894) *The Island of Dr. Moreau*; and a recent commentary on religious experience and morality in Douglas Glover's (2003) *Elle*, marooned on the Île des Demons.

thought or in action. There is something about the insular that beckons specificity, greater malleability, less inhibition, a more genuine ‘been there, done that’ (even if merely psychological) finality, an opportunity for a more thorough control of intervening variables which then are more likely to guarantee successful outcomes (e.g. Baum, 2000: 215). But the small, remote and insular also suggest peripherality, being on the edge, being out of sight and so out of mind: situations which both expose and foment the weakness of mainstream ideas, orthodoxies and paradigms.

The synergetic outcome of these two features is to propel islands as sites of innovative conceptualizations, whether of nature or human enterprise, whether virtual or real. This generates more scope for tinkering, a greater readiness for either making the strange familiar (breaking out of the mould) or making the familiar strange (such as ‘finding your soul’¹¹). This is well illustrated in the TV-profiling of Ricardo Montalbán, fulfilling the wildest dreams of his eccentric clients on *Fantasy Island* (American Broadcasting Corporation, 1977). This proneness to novelty is generally exacerbated by increasing remoteness and by smaller size of territory and population. Islands are the first, the harbingers, the pioneers, the miner’s canary (Baldacchino & Milne, 2000: 241). In the words of United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, islands are the frontline zones where many of the main problems of environment and development are unfolding (UN, 1999).

Prospects

The prospects for island studies thus appear encouraging. The comparative, global, interdisciplinary and/or trans-disciplinary study of islands is possible and plausible. There are today many more ‘island scholars’, self-styled or otherwise; and better known to each other than before. The adoption of ‘island studies’ as a focus of inquiry, straddling as well as going beyond conventional disciplines, can be a powerful force towards a better understanding of the world and the furtherance of knowledge. ‘The island’ is increasingly recognized as “... a legitimate subject for social scrutiny, whether as conceptual device, as metaphor, or as ... distinctive location” (Skinner, 2006: 3). Advances in the logistics and technology of human mobility and data exchange have made it increasingly feasible, and financially less prohibitive, to visit or study islands; to bring together researchers, policy makers and civil society spokespersons from/to islands; and to make electronic material accessible, quickly and cheaply, to islanders.

Island Scholarship

It is difficult to assign even a tentative date to the origins of island studies scholarship, cutting as it does across disciplinary boundaries. Was it Joseph Hooker’s 1866 Lecture on Island Flora? William Shakespeare’s (1611) *The Tempest*? Thomas More’s (1516) *Utopia*? Cristoforo Buondelmonti’s (1418) *Isolario*? Homer’s (3000 Before Present?) *Odyssey*? Or should we look beyond Europe, considering Zakariya Al-Qazwini (1202-

¹¹ Innisfree Island, Ireland, is marketed as one such refuge for the soul, the Sligo County Tourist Board seeking to capitalize on the poem *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* by Irish poet W. B. Yeats (1899). See Royle (2001: 12).

1283) and his *Atar al-Bilad*¹²? Or the story of the first beach crossing in the Western Pacific, some 2000 years ago (recaptured by Denning, 2004)? In more scholarly circles, looking at islands *because they were islands* was probably initially pioneered by zoo-geographers (Darwin, 1859; Wallace 1880), then by geographers (Brunhes, 1910/1920; Semple, 1911), then by anthropologists (Radcliffe-Brown, 1922; Mead, 1928; Firth, 1936). The rest of the disciplines followed, some hesitatingly, and with the odd voice of dissent thrown in (e.g. Selwyn, 1980). Concerns over economic development, viability and security - often conflating islands with the overlapping category of small jurisdictions - emerged, linking islandness to inconsequentiality, non-viability or vulnerability (e.g. Robinson, 1960). This was followed by public administration (e.g. Baker, 1992); educational planning (e.g. Bray & Packer, 1994); tourism management (e.g. Conlin & Baum, 1995); epidemiology (e.g. Cliff *et al.*, 2000); biogeography (e.g. Whittaker, 1999); biology (e.g. Carlquist, 1965); archaeology (e.g. Kirch, 1986b); history (e.g. Howe *et al.*, 1994); information technology (e.g. Little *et al.*, 2000); migration studies (e.g. King & Connell, 1999); sustainable development (e.g. Biagini & Hoyle, 1999); renewable energy (e.g. Weissler, 2004); and music studies (e.g. Hayward, 2006). The realm of the literary and fictional is not immune from similar epiphanies: we come across the microcosm of Lilliput and the mobile panopticon of the flying island of Laputa in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (Swift, 1726, Parts I & III, respectively), the heart-breaking *Paul et Virginie*, by Jacques-Henri de Saint Pierre (1787); the gentle yet doomed utopian Buddhist island of Pala in the last novel by Aldous Huxley (1962); more recently, Bill Holm's (2000) *Eccentric Islands*; and so much poetry and prose (e.g. McLeod, 2000; Hay, 2005). For a dash of science fiction, consider *Galapagos* by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1985). And, to try and tie it all together, the closest thing yet to an island studies 'reader' is probably Royle (2001).

It would be just as difficult to try and define island studies merely as material written about islands, on islands, by islanders or for islanders. Islanders are reclaiming more of this field from mainlanders, and embracing more participative methodologies while doing so. But disempowerment, and the likelihood of being written *about*, still generally increases with smaller island population size.

Institutional Recognition

The study of islands on their own terms today enjoys a growing and wide-ranging recognition. There are many differently enthusiastic 'island' initiatives of major international institutions: the United Nations (via its Small Island Developing States [SIDS] Programme - freshly energized by its 'Barbados Programme of Action + 10' meeting in Mauritius in 2005 - and its specialized agencies, such as UNESCO's *Small Island Voice* and UNDP, as well as by the 43-strong Alliance of Small & Island States [AOSIS] active in the General Assembly); the World Bank and its small states forum; the European Union (mainly via its Regional Policy Directorate-General, the Committee of the Regions and the lobbying of the Islands Commission within the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions); and regional fora (such as the Pacific Islands Development Program, South Pacific Forum, the Baltic Seven Islands Cooperation

¹² Translates liberally as *The Book of Vestiges of the Nations*. Translated into Spanish as Delgado Perez (2003).

Network, the Indian Ocean Commission or the Caribbean Community). A Global Islands Network (GIN) is active, and maintains an impressive web-site and news alert service at www.globalislands.net. The International Small Island Studies Association (ISISA), set up officially in 1992, continues its well-attended biennial conferences; and since 2005 has a web-site maintained by the University of Tasmania at: www.geol.utas.edu.au/isisa/. The Japan Society of Island Studies (Nihon-Tosho-Gakkai) was set up in 1997 and maintains a trilingual web-site at: www1.odn.ne.jp/cah02840/JSIS/. The Small Island Cultures Research Initiative (SICRI), set up in 2005, is a welcome addition of a global network of island scholars and activists: www.sicri.org/. A score of universities – including Malta and Hawaii - have an island-related institute or research centre. The University of the South Pacific has a Faculty of Islands and Oceans. International publishers Pinter (UK) launched an ‘Island Studies Series’ in 1996. There is the commitment to small-state, mainly island, scholarship by the Commonwealth where 32 out of the 53 member (mainly island) states have populations of less than 1.5 million. And, with the recognition of ‘island studies’ as a legitimate area of scholarship, the world’s first academic chair in Island Studies, a Canada Research Chair, has been installed at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada, since 2003.

Academic Journal Recognition

International journals, often cast within strict disciplinary parameters, have sporadically dedicated special, ‘one off’ issues to island matters. These include: *World Development* [Vol. 8(12), 1980; Vol. 21(2), 1993 and sub-section in Vol. 32(2), 2004]; *Prospects* [Vol. 21(4), 1991]; *Asian Journal of Public Administration* [Vol. 16(1), 1994]; *Convergence* [Vol. 29(2), 1996]; *Health and Place* [Vol.1(4), 1995]; *Journal of Historical Geography* [Vol. 29(4), 2003]; *Public Administration & Development* (various issues); *The Round Table* (various part issues); *International Journal of Educational Development* [Vol. 21(3), 2001]; *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* [Vol. 28(1-2), 2001]; *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* [Vol. 32(1), 2001]; *Geografiska Annaler* [Vol. 85B(4), 2003 & Vol. 87B(4), 2005] and *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* [Vol. 95(3), 2004]. Thematic island journal issues known to be slated for 2006 include: *The Geographical Review*; *Journal of Developing Societies*; *Sustainable Development*; *The Round Table* and the *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship*.

All this is very useful, and contributes towards the sharing of island scholarship amongst a wide audience; so much space and support are gratifying. But it is not enough. ‘Island studies’ research, once undertaken, gets dispersed in a multitude of different journals, always assuming that respective journal editors have been convinced that the material is appropriate for inclusion. A suitable branded journal of island studies has yet to come to light; and, until there is such a journal, ‘island studies’ is much more likely to remain a loose and uncoordinated collection of research initiatives in search of a ‘home’.

To be fair, a few excellent journals, like *The Contemporary Pacific*, *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, *Caribbean Geographer*, *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies*, *Journal of Pacific Studies*, or the French-language *Archipel*, treat islands and island issues habitually, from a distinctly regional reach and focus.

Meanwhile *INSULA: The International Journal of Island Affairs*, is a notable effort, running since 1992, which is not however intended to be rigorously peer reviewed. *Microstate Studies*, launched in 1974 by Norwell E. Harrigan from the United States Virgin Islands, survived as an annual for 5 years.

What is 'Island Studies' Anyway?

There is sufficient evidence that islands – small islands in particular - are distinct enough sites, or harbour extreme enough renditions of more general processes, to warrant their continued respect as subjects/objects of academic focus and inquiry. The core of 'island studies' is the constitution of 'islandness' and its possible or plausible influence and impact on ecology, human/species behaviour and any of the areas handled by the traditional subject uni-disciplines (such as archaeology, economics or literature), subject multi-disciplines (such as political economy or biogeography) or policy foci/issues (such as governance, social capital, waste disposal, language extinction or sustainable tourism). Not to mention the aspect of small islands as somewhat closed (read manageable) systems, amenable to study: most scholars - who are not necessarily islanders - enter into the study of small islands precisely in order to test and explore conceptual schemes and specific hypotheses emerging from academic and policy debates at a mainland, regional or global level: "rehearsals for reality" (Judson, 1980: 119). One could also argue that there is much academic and public policy mileage yet to be made – especially by and for islanders who are active in academe or in the policy field - by looking critically and comparatively at island experiences and at 'pan-island' approaches to similar challenges.

In the opening lines to their historic text, McArthur & Wilson (1967: 3) state also that: "...the island is the first unit that the mind can pick out and begin to comprehend." This certainly has implications for the humanities, wherein 'the island' becomes an attractive location, or itself the instigator, for attitudes which sweep from total, God-like control to an equally total submission to Nature; and for processes ranging from reinvigorating therapy to dark obscenity.

The emerging consensus is that 'island studies' should not necessarily be seen as a discipline; and perhaps not even as a 'discipline-in-waiting'. It also need not have a distinctive methodology. It is primarily an inter-, or even trans-, disciplinary focus of critical inquiry and scholarship. "Islandness is an intervening variable that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways" (Baldacchino, 2004a: 278). This is no weakness or deficiency; rather, therein lies the field's major strength and enormous potential. Other 'area/focus-driven' studies, each with their own stable of proven journals and literature (Arctic Studies, Asian Studies, Gender Studies, Ethnic & Migration Studies, Northern Studies, Urban Studies, Regional Studies ...) are well established nowadays and attract enormous interest. Many of these journals and their fields – as in the case of island studies - reflect the apparent contradiction of increasing relevant geography and place in the context of creeping globalization and its threat of all-enveloping homogenization.

Explaining ‘island studies’ as the critical, inter- and pluri-disciplinary study of islands on their own terms is perhaps an elegant explanation, but still somewhat cryptic. When Grant McCall made the clarion call in 1994, his thrust was radical, his intent iconoclastic. If the 20th century had been the century of mainland, industrial, large-scale, continental (but polluting?) progress, he argued (and hoped), that perhaps the 21st century could prove to be that of island, small-scale, service-driven (and perhaps more sustainable?) prosperity. McCall (1994, 1996) called this bold, islands-driven focus *Nissology* (after νησί – [nisi] the Greek word for island). Its key mandate: sharing, advancing and challenging existing theorization on islands and island studies; while avoiding, delimiting or debunking false or partial interpretations of the island condition. It is a message very similar to that of another respected island scholar from the insular Pacific, Epeli Hau’ofa (1993). He would have us see islands right at the centre of things, and not at the fringe; he would have us talk about “our world of islands”, rather than “the islands of the world”.

There is a felt urgency to develop and nurture an audience for island studies scholarship and a reputable platform for a growing community engrossed by island studies – including teachers, researchers, students and public policy officials who are interested in, hail from, live on, or work on, islands. Moreover, ‘island studies’ need/should not be focused only on islands themselves, but also on relations between islands and mainlands. Indeed, in deference to the ‘openness’ of islands, part of the interest in the study of islands in both physical and human sciences lies in their interaction with and impact on other islands (the beckoning study of archipelagoes?) and continents (or vice-versa), as well as the opportunities islands provide for comparisons and alternative models of development. Furthermore, in many areas of inquiry, studies of a particular phenomenon are also strengthened and enriched by an ‘island-mainland’ [other than an ‘island-island’] comparison or dialectic (such as cultural history, electricity generation, waste management or price differentials). Seeing islands as part of complex and cross-cutting systems of regional and global interaction should be one of the strengths of island studies as well as of an island studies journal, and another reason why scholars focused on continents might want to read and contribute to the field.

An electronic journal with open access – with papers in a suitable ‘read only’ format available for free download - can make island studies scholarship accessible to a large readership and disseminate material with minimal cost far and wide, hopefully contributing to informed public policy by, on and for island(er)s, while serving as a platform of rigorous scholarship.

Structure

The development of an international and pan-disciplinary editorial board for *Island Studies Journal* was a saga unto itself. How does one start when no other designated ‘island studies scholars’ (as far as I knew/know) existed? Back in summer 2003, I invited 10 colleagues interested in island research and drawn from different disciplines to recommend up to 6 other academics whom they considered to be ‘island studies scholars’. The individuals mentioned were then contacted and requested to come up with a list of 6 ‘island scholars’ themselves. This snowball technique of co-nomination ended

after 3 months when individuals were nominating persons that had already been nominated in previous rounds. This landed a fine catch of 248 academics; and the 14 scholars (sadly, all men!) who had been nominated most often (at least 6 times) were invited to form an *ad hoc* advisory board, which then went on to deliberate the rationale, objectives, form, frequency and name of/for an island studies journal, plus suggesting other additions to improve the disciplinary breadth and geographical scope of the editorial board itself. Much of the *raison d'être* for *Island Studies Journal*, summarized in this article, is drawn from these e-mail conversations.

Conclusion

Through the pages of *Island Studies Journal*, with its low production and maintenance costs, plus its free access and download functions, one hopes that island studies scholarship will expand in scope, interest and policy relevance, bringing in a broader and more suitably representative cadre of contributors engaging in still more topics and issues. Perhaps one of the reasons why the island studies field has been so difficult to define is that it has lacked precisely such a publishing platform, one that would spawn focused debates and their intellectual synergies. Such a home should help island studies deepen its roots and spread its routes¹³.

One thing is and remains certain. Whether it is in terms of relevance to human fantasy, or sheer number of candidates for research, islands are as significant and as bountiful as they can get:

“Certain natural environments have figured prominently in humanity’s dreams of the ideal world: they are the forest, the seashore, the valley and the island”
(Tuan, 1990: 247).

“Open the map. More islands there, man,
than peas on a tin plate, all different size,
one thousand in the Bahamas alone
There are so many islands!
As many islands as the stars at night”
(Derek Walcott, *The Schooner Flight*, 1979)

A Postscript on Institutional Location

The Institute of Island Studies (IIS) at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) is the institutional home of *Island Studies Journal*. [Indeed, the IIS had already considered setting up a ‘Journal of Island Studies’ in 1989, and requested Dr Russell King to develop a ‘concept note’ to this effect, which he did.] UPEI is a provincial university with a solid track record in island studies scholarship. It supports an Institute of Island Studies (since

¹³ My thanks to Jerome McElroy for suggesting this insertion.

1985); offered its first 'island studies' course in 1991; runs Island Studies Press; pioneered the Small Island Information Network (SIIN); facilitated the North Atlantic Islands Program (since 1992); nests the new Canada Research Chair appointment in Island Studies (since 2003); runs academic programmes in Island Studies, including both an under-graduate Minor (since 1999) and a Master of Arts (since 2003). UPEI hosted the 7th ISISA International Conference in 2002; and will host the 3rd annual SICRI conference in June 2007. The Institute of Island Studies is committed to the interdisciplinary study of islands around the world, while maintaining its main research and policy focus on Prince Edward Island. *Island Studies Journal* forms part of a web-based, dedicated island studies database facility (www.islandstudies.ca) which is being developed at UPEI with the support of a Canada Fund for Innovation (CFI) grant.

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