

Institute of Island Studies: Contributing to Public Policy on PEI

Presentation to ENV-4010: Public Scholars on Environmental Issues

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About the Institute of Island Studies

Who we are

The Institute of Island Studies is a research and public policy institute based at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) focusing on the culture, environment, and economy of small islands around the world, with an emphasis on Prince Edward Island. [Learn more](#)

Origins and historical contributions

The Institute of Island Studies (IIS) was founded in 1985 by former UPEI President Peter Meincke and first IIS Director Harry Baglolle. Contributing to the formulation of public policy on PEI was always at the forefront of Harry Baglolle's vision for the Institute. In time, the focus of the IIS has expanded to include seeing PEI through the lens of other islands, with a growing emphasis on evidence-based decision-making through research and knowledge mobilization.

Over the years, the IIS has been engaged in many projects and events focusing on island culture, sustainable development, land use, and the knowledge economy:

- *Global:*
 - North Atlantic Islands Program (1994–1998; *North Atlantic Forum*)
 - [North Atlantic Forum](#) (1998–ongoing; Research projects, publications, conferences)
 - [Island Lecture Series](#) (ongoing; focus on PEI, regional, and global islands)
- *Local/regional:*

- Public forum on [Island Mobility, Migration, and Population Issues](#)
- Public forum on the [Geography of Local Governance](#)
- [CRRF/NAF conference in 2015 – Water, land, governance](#)
- *PEI-focused:*
 - [A Place to Stay? Report of the Prince Edward Island Population Strategy '99](#) (1999/2000)
 - [Recruiting Talent to PEI](#) (2018)
 - [Vital Signs Report](#) (2019)
 - PEI Indicators of Quality of Life (2021–2025)

Island Studies constellation at the University of Prince Edward Island

The Island Studies ‘constellation’ at the University of Prince Edward Island comprises:

- [Institute of Island Studies](#) (1985–present)
- [Island Studies Press](#) (1987–present)
- [Master of Arts in Island Studies \(MAIS\) Program](#)
 - Thesis-based program launched in 2003
 - Course/work-study stream added in 2017
- [UNESCO Chair in Island Studies and Sustainability](#) (2016–2024)

Past initiatives include:

- Canada Research Chair in Island Studies: [Dr. Godfrey Baldacchino](#) (2003–2013)
- [Island Studies Journal](#): Founded 2003, hosted at IIS until 2021.

Learn more about the Island Studies constellation at UPEI [here](#).

Mandate and Vision

Vision: To be the leading centre of excellence on issues related to island studies scholarship, public policy and engagement.

Mandate:

- To encourage a deep knowledge, understanding, and expression of Prince Edward Island
- To serve as a bridge between the University and Island communities
- To contribute to the formulation of public policy in Prince Edward Island
- To undertake and facilitate island studies research and education at local, national and global scales

Learn more about the Institute’s vision, mandate, and governance [here](#).

Environment and Climate Change: Awareness and Education

The Institute of Island Studies, as part of the broader Island Studies constellation at UPEI, is actively involved in building awareness and education around environment and climate change issues.

The key ways that the Institute undertakes this are:

- ◊ [Publications \(Island Studies Press\)](#)
- ◊ [Public Symposia](#)
- ◊ [Island Lecture Series](#)
- ◊ [Conferences](#)
- ◊ [Research](#)
- ◊ [Master of Arts in Island Studies \(MAIS\) Program](#)

Publications – Island Studies Press

Island Studies Press is the publishing arm of the Island Studies constellation at UPEI. The press produces scholarly books for a popular audience as well as poetry, literary non-fiction, and drama, dealing with aspects of the culture and environment of Prince Edward Island and beyond. Relevant publications from Island Studies Press include:

- Videos:
 - [Like the Back of My Hand](#) (Island nature; 1994)
 - [Island Clay: An Introduction to the Royal Commission on the Land](#) (Land use; 1991)
- Reports:
 - [Hedgerows Can Help: Soil Conservation, Crop Protection, Wildlife Habitat, Landscape Beauty](#) (1998, [2002](#))
 - [Pondering Ponds: A Process for Assessing Community Attitudes Toward In-Stream Impoundments on Prince Edward Island](#) (2000)
- Books:
 - [Pulling Strings: Policy Insights for Prince Edward Island from other Sub-National Island Jurisdictions](#) (2008)
 - [Time and a Place: An Environmental History of Prince Edward Island](#) (2016)
 - [From Black Horses to White Steeds: Building Community Resilience](#) (2017)
- [‘Annual Report on Global Islands’ Series](#) (2018–ongoing)
 - Partnership with the Foreign Affairs Office of Hainan Province, P.R. China
 - Themes: Economics, tourism, governance, public health.

Learn more about Island Studies Press and browse their full catalogue [here](#).

Public Symposia

The Institute's public symposia provide an opportunity for stakeholders on all sides of an issue to come to the table to discuss items of public policy importance.

Past public symposia relating to environment and policy have included:

- [Island Water Futures: Assessing the Science](#) (2014)
- [Island Land Use Policy: At an impasse?](#) (2014)
- [Island Mobility, Migration, and Population Issues](#) (2016)
- [The Geography of Local Governance](#) (2016)
- [Sustainable Agriculture and the Island's Food System](#) (2016)
- [Making the case for PEI to be Canada's first carbon-neutral province](#) (2017)

Learn more about these and other public symposia events [here](#).

Island Lecture Series

The Island Lecture Series takes place annually during the academic year and features presentations from local and global island scholars, authors, and community members.

Past Island Lecture Series sessions relevant to environment and policy have included:

- [Weathering Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu](#) (Dr. Jean Mitchell)
- [The Goose and the Golden Egg: The Environmental Turn in Island Tourism, 1970-1990](#) (Dr. Ed MacDonald)
- [Shifting sands: Capturing climatic and cultural change through art](#) (Brenda Whiteway)
- [From policy to action: Lessons from Samsø](#) (Jocelyn Plourde)

Learn more about our Island Lecture Series and explore our full events archive [here](#).

Conferences

Past conferences hosted and/or sponsored by the IIS relating to environment and policy include:

- [NAF-CRRF 2015: Building Community Resilience: Innovation, Culture, and Governance in Place](#)
- [Building Small Island Resilience to Global Climate Change: International Symposium and Public Forum](#) (2016)
- [Sharing Stories of Island Life, Governance and Global Engagement: The 1st International Conference on Small Island States and Subnational Island Jurisdictions](#) (2019)

Learn more about these and other conferences hosted and sponsored by the IIS [here](#).

Research

Recent and ongoing research projects by the IIS relating to environment and policy include:

- [Comparing Small Island States and Subnational Island Jurisdictions: Towards Sustainable Island Futures](#) (2017–2021)
 - Research project looking at people’s attitudes toward governance and quality of life on small island states and subnational island jurisdictions, with a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and sustainable island tourism.
- [COVID-19 Island Insights Series](#) (2020–2021)
 - Critical assessments of how specific islands around the world have performed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the extent to which their recovery plans are able to promote long term resilience and sustainability.
 - Upcoming workshop May 20, 2021, laying the groundwork for an event at COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021.
- “Exploring climate change through the language of art” (Forthcoming chapter by Laurie Brinklow, Rilla Marshall, and Brenda Whiteway in *Handbook of the Changing World Language Map*)

Additionally, the IIS has hosted many international scholars who come here to teach and study. For example, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the IIS hosted an intern from the Netherlands, supported by funding from [UPEI Climate Sense](#), who was looking at the creative arts and climate change adaptation, feeding into policy.

Learn more about the Institute’s research and publications [here](#).

Master of Arts in Island Studies

The Master of Arts in Island Studies (MAIS) at the University of Prince Edward Island is a unique, interdisciplinary, and policy-driven graduate program that critiques islands on their own terms.

There are currently approximately 50 students in the program, and there have been approximately 50 graduates to date.

There are three specializations in the [course-based stream](#), which was introduced in 2017:

- Island Tourism
- Sustainable Island Communities
- International Relations & Island Public Policy

In the long-running thesis program, there have been many theses relevant to environment and policy, including:

- [From policy to action – renewable energy in Samsø, Denmark](#) (Transition to zero net carbon emissions; 2018)
- [Prince Edward Island and Renewable Energy: The Preconditions for a Sustainable Future](#) (Community reactions to wind turbines in Eastern PEI; in progress)
- Energy democracy on small islands (in progress)
- Summerside case study: Smart grids (in progress)

Learn more about the Master of Arts in Island Studies program [here](#). The full list of completed MAIS thesis titles is available [here](#).

Contributing to Public Policy on Prince Edward Island

Through all of these activities, the Institute of Island Studies aims to be an “honest broker,” bringing all sides to the table for informed discussion and debate. We endeavour to engage with various audiences, including government officials, politicians, academics, and the general public. We also offer contract research services to enable governments to create evidence-based policy.

Since its creation in 2016, the [UNESCO Chair in Island Studies and Sustainability](#) has opened many doors for the IIS and has contributed to UPEI’s growing reputation as *the* international centre for island research and education.

Many of the Institute’s research projects are supported by SSHRC and Tri-Council Research Grants, and we also continue to forge strong partnerships with the PEI Provincial Government and other agencies (e.g., Measuring Indicators of Quality of Life [forthcoming 4-year project]).

How do we measure success?

While it is sometimes difficult to know whether or to what degree the Institute’s work has directly contributed to changing public policy on Prince Edward Island, there are several cases where the relationship is clear. For example, we know that in the 1990s the provincial government adopted our recommendation to use tax levers to lower taxes for businesses opening in Slemon Park, near Summerside. More recently, in 2018, the Institute was contracted by the Prince Edward Island Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning to undertake a research project to

determine the opportunities for and barriers to Islanders returning home, resulting in a [report](#) which directly informed a massive campaign called "[Maybe you should come home.](#)"

As we look towards the future of Island Studies, there are many additional ways that the Institute of Island Studies can measure its success, such as continuity for over 35+ years, respect in the community, an international reputation, recognition for our publications, and being awarded the UNESCO Chair in Island Studies and Sustainability – just to name a few.

To learn more about the Institute of Island Studies, visit islandstudies.com or [contact us](#).