



CONCEPT NOTE FOR THE FIRST MODULE OF THE MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSE
LEADERSHIP IN SMALL STATES (LIST)

Module 1: Introduction to Leadership in Small States

This module is an introduction to the course Leadership in Small States. It aims to give a brief introduction to both small state studies and leadership studies, while also offering an insight into how these two academic standpoints interact.

Leadership is often understood as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to achieve shared objectives” (Yukl, 2013:23). Leadership is basically about ensuring followership to achieve a certain goal. This is true when understanding leadership as a set of practices by which the principal of a school ensures that teachers follow her lead towards prioritizing improved reading skills for students and when we try to understand how small states may make other states follow their agendas and objectives in international negotiations. In this sense, leadership is also about the power to shape goals and direction of others.

Whereas power on the international stage may come easily to larger states, small states face structural disadvantages related to their size in the international community. Having a small population inherently inhibits the aggregate structural power of states and creates hurdles that need to be compensated for. Among the chief weaknesses of small states are their smaller diplomatic forces and human resources. Small states are unable to maintain a large and diverse diplomatic force, which limits the manpower and specialised skills that can be put into forming foreign policies and taking part in negotiations. Also, small states have smaller economies, which limits their influence when it comes to economic negotiations. Furthermore, the transaction costs of diplomacy are far more burdensome for small states, since they do not have large foreign policy apparatuses. Small economies of scale inhibit them from developing specialized knowledge on a wide range of foreign policy issues. Weak aggregate structural power makes them less attractive coalition partners and incapable of side payments in negotiations. The fact that small states have varied interests prevents them from forming natural coalitions with each other in order to offset the power of large states (except on issues that concern the size of states specifically, such as treaty reforms in international organizations). Small states therefore face a shared set of diplomacy challenges relative to large states.

To compensate for these political and administrative disadvantages, small states have to develop special strategies in order to defend their interests and strengthen their position in the international system. Small states need to turn the special characteristics of possessing small public administrations and foreign services into advantages. They have to build up administrative competence based on distinctive features of small public administration such as informality, flexibility, and greater autonomy of officials, as compared with large public administrations. Small states have also successfully used the strategies of prioritization, coalition-building, and image-building to exert influence. Small states are often able to respond swiftly and intelligently to challenging situations and because of their flexibility and adaptability they are often seen as small but smart. These strategies may improve the potential for small states to generate followership, and hence take on leadership, and to some extent at least off-set some of the disadvantages caused by their relative lack of power.

To understand how small states can take on such leadership and behave “smart”, we need to consider what causes states to be smart and which factors facilitate leadership. In the case of small states, leadership may often determine their fate and therefore when explaining the foreign policy behavior of small states understanding both individual leadership behavior, by e.g. a head of state, as well as the organizational set-up which facilitates this leadership becomes key.



Hence, we need to understand leadership at two levels; the national and international stage.

Nationally, small states may have more flexible and tightly coordinated administrations and they may be able to generate a national consensus, which can serve them well in international negotiations. It takes leadership to ensure coordination, capacity building in prioritized areas and consensus building between societal sectors. It is thus vital for a small state to develop administrative competence in areas of key interest and provide leaders with the knowledge that will help them in taking the initiative when needed and drive forward coalitions in issues that the small state wants to move forward as well as to ensure societal support.

Internationally, leadership skills are required for small states to be able to practice the correct prioritization and tactical bargaining in international diplomatic surroundings. Small states need to defend their interests in their key sectors and within these sectors they need to be able to show leadership initiative, offer smart solutions to problems, while also wielding positive influence outwards. This can be achieved through consensus-forming, policy innovation and figure-heading external initiatives.

However, we should also – both at the national and international level - take an interest in both how civil servants and politicians take on leadership. At both levels, politicians are dependent on the preparation and competences of their civil servants while civil servants will be dependent on politicians for political direction, consensus building and bargaining.

The course and the following modules will cover the different dimensions of leadership as well as consider how different types of actors should and do take on leadership in a small state context.

Learning outcomes:

- Understand and explain the concept of leadership, in particular in a small state context.
- Apply critical insight into how small states can utilize their specific characteristics to take on a leadership role in international affairs.
- Analyze through case studies the position of small states in the international community.
- Evaluate where opportunities lie for small states in taking on leadership roles.