Insularisation and Lifestyle Migration on the Island of Hvar

Otočenje in migracije zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga na otoku Hvaru

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses lifestyle migration on the island of Hvar through the lens of an ethnographic approach. The diversity of migratory experiences among the interviewees, who were interviewed for the purposes of this research, is examined through the concept of insularisation, approached as a profoundly ambivalent phenomenon encompassing both distancing and isolation, as well as the need for connection and integration into the rhythm of island communities. Through the concept of insularisation, the authors explore the discrepancy between imagined ideas about islands and their Mediterranean identity, and the practical experiences of lifestyle migrants, which highlight various obstacles and challenges. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of the concept of lifestyle migration and the connections formed with the notion of islandness.

KEYWORDS: lifestyle migration, island of Hvar, insularisation, ethnographic approach, Mediterranean

IZVLEČEK

Prispevek na podlagi etnografskega pristopa analizira migracije zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga na otoku Hvaru. Avtorja raznolikost migracijskih izkušenj med intervjuvanci, ki so sodelovali v raziskavi, preučujeta skozi koncept otočenja, globoko ambivalenten pojav, ki zajema tako oddaljevanje in izolacijo kot tudi potrebo po povezovanju in vključevanju v ritem otoških skupnosti. Na podlagi koncepta otočenja raziskujeta neskladje med predstavami o otokih in njihovi sredozemski identiteti ter dejanskimi izkušnjami migrantov, ki se v realnosti srečujejo tudi z različnimi ovirami in izzivi. Ta pristop omogoča bolj niansirano razumevanje koncepta preseljevanja zaradi življenjskega sloga in povezav, ki se oblikujejo na podlagi pojma otočnost.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: migracije zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga, otok Hvar, otočenje, etnografski pristop, Sredozemlje

INTRODUCTION

> I like it just the way it is. Like some dogs here run free. I remember being a kid in Scotland, the dogs used to run free. Thirty years ago. But they don't run anymore.

This statement, made by one of our interlocutors eight years ago during our ethnographic research on the island of Hvar, originally came about as a field curiosity and ethnographic reflection. It resurfaced in our discussions in 2024 when, during research on migration processes, we heard similar stories from interlocutors comparing their life on the island to life in their countries of origin. A common theme in the various narratives – from both 2016, 2017 and 2024 – were temporal and spatial exoticisation, along with the frequently emphasized criterion of "lifestyle", which once again stood out as a fundamental point of comparison for diverse experiences, personal utopias and aspirations, cultural practices, and embodied knowledge.

Despite the similarities between these temporally separated studies, our research focus in this repeated study – guided by a refreshed understanding of migration as a complex process – was significantly different. In 2016 and 2017, the experiences of our interlocutors represented a research novelty that cautiously coexisted with the dominant trend of emigration studies or, to a lesser extent, return migration in a traditionally emigrant country (cf. Čapo Žmegač 2010; Oroz and Urem 2015). However, the post-pandemic context of remote work, the growing prevalence of digital nomads, and the arrival of workers from geographically distant countries like Nepal and the Philippines have significantly redefined the broader research context.

The recent changes in migration patterns, as observed by our sources, have fostered a shift in the islanders' perspectives toward new arrivals. Their perspective towards new islanders highlights the importance of connection beyond just origins or community ties, encouraging a more integrative research approach to newcomers to the island. In this paper, we have focused on the experiences and perspectives of migrants who have made the island their new home, and whose migration practices fall under the concept of lifestyle migration. Lifestyle migration serves as a conceptual framework to explore diverse forms of privileged migration encompassing phenomena like amenity migration, international retirement migration, residential tourism, second-home ownership, and international counter-urbanisation. In our research, we consider the concept of lifestyle migrants as an umbrella term that encompasses various mobility practices and motives for relocation. Lifestyle migrants are defined as "relatively affluent individuals of all ages moving either part-time or full time, permanently or temporarily to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life" (Benson and O'Reilly 2009: 609). Contemporary migration processes in these cases, which encompass various lifestyles, were inspired not only by the imaginations of the island and what it represents, but also by the act of relocation itself and the immersion into the island's atmosphere. The lifestyle migrants with whom we conducted interviews often described this atmosphere as enigmatic, unique, and both spatially and temporally distinctive.

In these circumstances, we sought to answer numerous questions: What is lifestyle migration? How does lifestyle migration manifest on the island? How are discussions that emerge from the encounters between locals and new residents culturally organised, and how are the criteria for belonging to the island, becoming an islander, or embracing islandness being redefined? How do the processes of acceptance and rejection of others in island communities intertwine, and how do arguments of inclusivity and exclusivity coexist in the contexts of changing demographic, economic, social, and cultural transformations?

This paper aims to address above mentioned questions through the concept of insularisation. We explore insularisation by examining the diverse lifestyles of our interlocutors who have relocated to Hvar. Our goal was to understand not only their motivations for moving but also the various cultural adaptations they have undergone. We analysed how the highly ideologised cultural phenomenon of lifestyle was experienced through the interplay of diverse cultural practices, embodied knowledge, local perspectives, and global processes. Therefore, we saw insularisation as an ambivalent process shaped by cultural, social, gendered, economic, and ideological factors. This process defines the practices of lifestyle migrants and the relationships that occur from their interactions with local island communities. Our approach to insularity has been inspired by Katrin Dautel and Kathrin Schödel's edited volume *Insularity: Representations and Constructions of Small Worlds*. They approach insularity as a complex and analytically potent metaphor that emerges as ambivalent and research-stimulating in real island contexts and discursive usages (2016: 11–12). Unlike Dautel and Schödel, our understanding of insularisation is primarily processual and performed within the specific circumstances described by the concept of lifestyle migration. On the one hand, insularisation is shaped by escapist desires for seclusion, which in the context of a Mediterranean island evoke ideas of isolation, individuality, and a slowed pace of daily life. As such, insularisation carries strong ideological connotations evident in the emphasis on the term lifestyle. From the perspective of lifestyle migrants, insularisation is thus marked by fragmentation, dispersion, and affectively diverse experiences which find cultural expression and local manifestations in the island setting. On the other hand, despite calls for isolation and slowing down, insularisation is also characterised by the desire of lifestyle migrants to connect with the islands communities in which they live, their seasonal rhythms, and their unwritten rules, which are closely tied to the concept of islandness.

The ambivalence of insularisation thus becomes more complex, as it takes root in already established social and cultural worldviews, practices, and performances that find their unique articulation in the island environment. Through this conceptual framework of insularisation, we seek to offer our understanding of the processes and cultural phenomena at the core of our research. Although our research on the island of Hvar was limited to short visits and highly location-specific approaches within which we conducted semi-structured interviews, analytically, we aimed to contextualise this approach by navigating between global processes and local perspectives, between the static and the dynamic aspects that characterise island stays and departures. In this constellation of ongoing tension between "the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure" (cf. Geertz 1983: 69), we wanted

to provide a framework for understanding highly complex migration movements, which are difficult to compare to the sedentary way of life often associated with living on an island.

In this paper we were interested in new immigrants on the island as part of the project Ethnographies of Islandness – Island Migrations, Mobilities and Identifications (ETNO-TOK) project[1] conducted by the Institute for Migration Research. We carried out fieldwork on the island of Hvar in 2024, conducting in-depth interviews with both international and domestic lifestyle migrants who had relocated to Hvar within the past decade. Some interviews were conducted even before the formal start of the project, specifically in 2016 and 2017, when twelve international lifestyle migrants (from Belgium, Germany, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Slovakia) were interviewed. During fieldwork carried out in June and September 2024, sixteen new participants were interviewed, including eight international lifestyle migrants (from Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa, and the United States). All interviews used in this paper have been anonymised. Our interlocutors currently reside in Hvar, Stari Grad, Jelsa, Vrisnik, Vrboska, Milna, Ivan Dolac, Pitve, Selca, Brusje, and Velo Grablje. The lifestyle migrants we interviewed on Hvar are a highly diverse group in terms of age, gender, and social background. As the research was conducted in two phases, the more recent interviews revealed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and various global crises (e.g., Brexit, economic crisis) on migration decisions and emerging work patterns, such as remote work and digital nomadism.

INSULARISATION AND MIGRATION – THE CHALLENGES OF ISOLATION AND INTEGRATION

Increased mobility shifts in migration motivations, the diversity of causes, and a more branched-out typology of migration have characterised migration trends over the past few decades. According to Brian Hoey (2005), the choice of a place to live is inherently connected to lifestyle. In a contemporary world marked by numerous crises, precarity, the effects of the post-pandemic era, continuous migration, and ecological challenges, lifestyle migration represents a small but relevant phenomenon and a symptom of global changes, which remains underexplored in the Croatian context. Given that contemporary migration is often initiated by desires for a particular place, experience, feeling, and way of "taking control" over one's life to realise a desired or avoid an undesirable future (Collins 2018: 3), lifestyle migration can be seen as an open project and a quest involving diverse destinations, aspirations, and dreams (Benson and O'Reilly 2009: 609; Rogelja 2017, 2018). This conceptualisation of lifestyle migration as an open process rather than a closed act aligns with our understanding of insularisation. The conceptual intertwining of insularisation and lifestyle

migration, which we have explored on the island of Hvar, becomes even more complex when we add the concept of "islandness" to these categories. According to Vannini and Taggart, islandness is the result of the practical experience of living on an island, understood "corporeally, affectually, practically, intimately, as a visceral experience" (Vannini and Taggart 2013: 227; Hay 2006: 34). Furthermore, according to Vannini and Taggart:

> Islandness is therefore not simply a sense of place, typical of islands, but also multiple ways through which relations among inhabitants, and between islands and their dwellers are practiced. Such organic understanding of islandness is the active and creative unfolding of social and material rapports, an unfolding through which islandness emerges in multiple shapes, each shape in relation to the connection that give it rise. (2013: 236)

Since moving to an island involves a certain confrontation with the rhythms, rules, and ways of life that go beyond the romanticised images of what an island should be, the process of adaptation to a new cultural environment presents challenges for lifestyle migrants – challenges that are gradually overcome through a synchronisation with the rhythms of the island community on Hvar. The experience of "island time" was influenced by unwritten social norms that promoted personal flexibility and subjective interpretations of punctuality. This led to experiences such as delayed service appointments and instances where people blamed the ferry captain for departing early, even when the ferry left on schedule. Time was perceived as elastic rather than fixed, intertwined with the experience of space, thus pointing to relational and experiential understandings of island rhythms (Oroz 2020: 45). In this sense, we understand islandness as an embodied experience – a series of countless successful and repeated performances of island life, as highlighted by our interlocutors, with all the cultural, spatial, and temporal nuances specific to Hvar's unique island character. Whether they involve the unwritten rules of island life, pronounced seasonality and annual rhythms, immersion in the dialect or local relationships, islandness, insularisation, and lifestyle migration are deeply connected and relationally open phenomena, which were analytically significant in the context of our research on Hvar. Given that migration movements on Croatian islands have been marked by continuous emigration – a trend that has largely shaped the direction of demographic research over the past few decades (Klempić Bogadi and Podgorelec 2020; Lajić 1992; Nejašmić 1991) – new forms of migration and contemporary mobilities motivated by the search for a different quality of life on the islands have directed our research focus toward lifestyle migrants. Recent studies[2] examine the cultural and social capital of lifestyle migration through the lens of privilege (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014) and the relativisation of the homogeneous concept "middle class" (Scott 2019), as there exists a structural class difference between those from wealthy countries and those from less privileged nations (Korpela 2019). This group of migrants can be characterised as individuals who have made a

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[2] Over the past 15 years, there has been a substantial increase in academic research on this group of migrants across various countries. For instance, there are websites that connect researchers focused on lifestyle migration studies, such as the *Lifestyle Migration Hub* at Tampere University in Finland.

conscious decision about how and where they would live (Torkington 2010), which means that a high degree of economic autonomy is a significant aspect of lifestyle migration. In a sense, lifestyle migrants reject their existing way of life and its associated values (career, competitiveness, etc.) and, by deciding to migrate, opt for their desired, ideal life. The search for a good life arises from a reflective and intersubjective process, characterised "not a quest for a better way of life, but an active attempt to find congruence between values and everyday existence in the chosen lifestyle" (Osbaldiston, Picken and Denny 2020: 132).

In studies of the complexities of lifestyle and migration there are three dimensions of quality of life, which migrants perceive both individually and in comparison: the material quality (including factors such as income, employment, and housing), the relational quality (referring to personal and social relationships), and the subjective quality (values, perceptions, and experiences) (Goodwin-Hawkins and Jones 2022: 2). On the other hand, lifestyle migrants bring economic, social, and cultural capital into new environments, potentially serving as catalysts for social, economic, and even environmental regeneration (cf. Woods 2005). With their social networks, skills, and experiences, lifestyle migrants can help create new connections and stimulate flows of people, ideas, and products between urban and rural areas (Mayer, Habersetzer and Meili 2016). Alongside the potential for revitalising the communities they join, there is also an undeniable impact on processes of gentrification and rising property prices, which deepens economic and social divides and can lead to the formation of immigrant "enclaves" (Kondo, Rivera and Rullman 2012). Within this constellation of relationships, where the presence of lifestyle migrants from an island perspective might be considered a blessing in disguise, lifestyle should not be seen only as a practice of (self-)fulfilment for migrants, but also as an initiator of various practices that affect and insularise the islanders themselves. Whether it involves the marginalisation of small island communities, the intensification of depopulation, limited economic opportunities, political exclusion, or cultural isolation (cf. Vannini 2023: 6), lifestyle migration provokes mixed reactions that can significantly impact small and fragile island communities. In the imaginary of islandness, "where islanders often do not see themselves or where they wish to be free from imposed insular characteristics" (Dautel and Schödel 2016: 11), understanding lifestyle migration raises questions of "connection and disconnection, a sense of proximity or distance, as well as opportunities for cultivating accessibility or separation" (Vannini 2023: 6), a form of performance of spatial and temporal exoticisation induced by cultural practices (cf. Gillis 2001).

The Croatian islands are a relatively common choice for new settlers seeking a better quality of life, a more fulfilling and alternative way of living, preferred lifestyles, greater autonomy, and freedom of choice. However, their appeal can be understood not only in the broader context of the fascination with the Mediterranean but also, in a practical sense, within the context of diverse challenges, obstacles, and paradoxes. Reflecting on the challenges of insularity within the context of Croatia's island spaces, Nikola Bašić identifies three paradoxes that perplex researchers. The first paradox concerns the gap between economic development and the intensification of tourism activities on the islands, juxtaposed with simultaneous demographic decline and a lack of signs of revitalisation. In other

words, although the islands are positioned in the national imagination as a flagship of identity politics, "the statistics of tourism growth are inversely proportional to the statistics of demographic atrophy" (2024: 12). The second paradox arises from the discrepancy between state strategic investments in the islands and the lack of tangible positive effects on island communities themselves. The third paradox pertains to young, educated islanders who, by choosing the islands as an expression of a specific lifestyle, could bring freshness and vitality to these spaces. As Bašić points out, we could add digital nomads to this group, who might boost the vitality of the islands during the "depressive winter intervals when our islands sink into a 'salty darkness'" (2024: 13). However, this utopia has also dissipated due to the strong connection to the mainland, which, instead of enhancing the quality of life on the islands, has anchored islanders in an urban archipelago, deepening their dependence on the mainland. Consequently, the appeal of Croatian islands should not disregard the political, social, economic, and ideological aspects that shape their attractiveness while also contributing to their Mediterraneanness. As noted by Nevena Škrbić Alempijević (2014: 27–47), in Croatia's case the question of identification with the Mediterranean carries significant ideological implications involving various practices of silencing – from the exclusion of undesirable Balkans to the exclusion of the southern Mediterranean coasts and the selective embrace of European, northern Mediterranean spaces.

Furthermore, the attractiveness of Croatian islands can also be understood within the broader context of the Western fascination with islands, which, according to John Gillis, frames them as places of allure, exoticism, and spatial and temporal isolation (cf. 2001; 2004). This fascination was particularly evident in the first half of the 20th century, when representations of the Mediterranean were shaped by discourses of spatial and temporal exoticism (Gordon 2003; cf. Moe 2002; Tucker 2019), which found practical realisation in the pursuit of lifestyle migration. As a result, islands – particularly those in the Eastern Adriatic – have emerged as spaces with fluid boundaries within a shifting temporal landscape (Oroz 2024: 161). When viewed through a local lens, this perspective has taken root within the concept of Mediterraneanism, which acquires specific articulations in the island setting. In this sense, Mediterraneanism should not be seen as a static concept defined solely by the geography of the Mediterranean: rather, it is shaped by what Michael Herzfeld calls "practical Mediterraneanism", a network of performative statements that shape realities, cultural practices that influence lived everyday life, and globalisation which elicits a response from a regional perspective, and whose essentialising effects can be critically considered in the lived everyday experience (Herzfeld 2005: 63). This concept of Mediterraneanism is closely linked with the question of lifestyle, which is both conceptually and in its content inseparably tied to the migratory processes on the island of Hvar. As Thierry Fabre observes in *La Méditerranée n'est pas une étoile morte*:

> Seeking a Mediterranean way of life is not a return to the old categories and references of Mediterranean anthropology, which have rightly been criticized: honor, siesta, machismo, masculinity... [...] Today, these are life paths that have meaning and evade essences or structures established by forms of knowledge in order to characterize or identify them once and for all. (2019: 7)

According to Fabre, the Mediterranean characteristics of lifestyles invite us to explore the interactions of history and other lifestyles (ibid.), a concept that prompts us to question the persistence of borders in a world obsessed with acceleration in the spirit of modern capitalism (2019: 9). As such, the Mediterranean lifestyle arises from a world created among worlds, an alternative world that resists dominant currents (Fabre 2019: 10) and, in its fixation on the "Mediterranean dream", defies our nightmares (Fabre 2019: 12). This understanding of the Mediterranean lifestyle moves away from an imagined set of "Mediterranean characteristics" and approaches a view of the Mediterranean as a system of complementary differences (Bromberger 2006: 92). Reflecting on complementary differences in relation to the Mediterranean entails an exploratory dive into the simultaneous understanding and misunderstanding, constitutive relationships and contradictions, which are situationally represented through metaphors of isolation or encounter, borrowing or rejection, antagonisms, and frictions (Bromberger 2006: 103–104). Thus, our focus on lifestyle migration has taken into account the local nuances of island daily life and the practical challenges that shape contemporary migration practices.

ISLAND WORLDS AND CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION PRACTICES

So, I sat in the Netherlands without a job, without a visa, without a house. And I was a bit like, don't know what to do. [...] [T]hen I decided my best to stay in Europe. So, I basically just looked at the borders that opened outside the Schengen states, actually Schengen states, and the first borders that opened outside Schengen was Croatia. And so then I landed in Split, but the cheapest Airbnb I could find for this long term was on Šolta. So I stayed in Stomorska for two and a half months. After that, I moved to Hvar. [...] So in this time that I came here, I trained as a [redacted], then I became a certified [redacted] ... And my clients are worldwide. And I work online. All my meetings are online. (LSM9[3], Brusje)

Well, the short version is that we had decided a long time ago that we maybe wanted to move to Europe, and Covid presented a time for us to do that, because we were both working remotely at that time, and we decided Croatia, because it was one of only, I think, five countries that was open for visiting during Covid in the beginning part. So, we came in August of 2020, and we decided to come here specifically, mainly because we wanted a peaceful place to be during Covid. (LSM12 and LSM13, Jelsa)

In the context of our comparative research – analysing narrations from 2016/2017 and 2024 – lifestyle migration on the island of Hvar reveals notable differences over time. The lifestyle migrants on Hvar remain a heterogeneous group in terms of culture, gender, and age. However, unlike in 2024, when most interlocutors cited the global pandemic as a key motivation for relocation (often referencing their experiences with terms such as "before the pandemic" or "due to Covid" / "during the Covid pandemic") and emphasized the rise of

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[3]
To protect the anonymity of our interviewees, particularly in the context of the small island communities to which they belong, all interviewees are identified with the label LSM (Lifestyle Migrants) and the corresponding interview number. Alongside these labels, we have included the names of the locations where the interviews were conducted in parentheses, which may or may not correspond to the interviewees' actual places of residence.

remote work, the research conducted a decade earlier suggested that migration was primarily motivated by a desire to escape lives burdened by professional obligations.

The Hvar-specific aspect of our research into lifestyle migration and Mediterraneanism – associated with the island in question – revealed important insights through conversations with new immigrants. These conversations showed that the imaginary of Mediterraneanism is deeply intertwined with a web of stereotypical island characteristics, as well as contemporary practices emerging from cultural encounters, where notions of the modern and traditional, the authentic and borrowed converge. This portrayal of Hvar, emphasizing the Mediterranean spirit of the island, is often highlighted as a dominant motivator for relocation, although romanticised depictions frequently dissolve in the face of practical realities. Romanticised expectations about life in small island communities presented practical challenges that significantly diverged from anticipated lifestyles. The island of Hvar, with 27 settlements, is marked by internal divisions. It consists of two distinct micro-regions: the more developed and populated west, home to about 80% of the population, and the historically isolated east. These divisions stem from a complex history of migration, settlement, and shifting political systems, shaping both real and perceived boundaries (Perinić Lewis 2017). Lifestyle migrants are also moving to places in the western part of the island that align with their ideals of small island and Mediterranean settlements and communities. In the case of Hvar, island settlements which attract migrants seeking a sense of belonging and the construction of meaningful physical and emotional attachments to place and community (Sampaio and King 2019) figure as havens from fast-paced environments and as desired anti-stress zones, free from the hectic nature of urban life.

> Yeah, that sense of freedom, the surroundings, the peace, the silence. We were just, you know, every time we came to the island, we were actually happy. You know, like when you have that feeling – this is it. You know? This is the Mediterranean I was always looking for. (LSM7, Velo Grablje)

> I moved to Hvar, and then I fell in love with the islands, and the lifestyle, the blue water, and the ease of life. (LSM9, Brusje)

> Sea and green, and good mixture, and very bright, bright air. [...] The island, I don't know, it's really, the air is different than on the continent. The stars are different too... (LSM1, Ivan Dolac)

> Cleanliness. Not just in nature, but in relationships as well. (LSM2, Jelsa)

> Well, I think we're much more free. We're much more free, especially here, on the island. (LSM14, Stari Grad)

Although our research experiences and the course of interviews were limited in terms of time, the connections established in the field often continued even after leaving Hvar. The narratives of our interlocutors, articulated through a blend of English and Croatian, were frequently coloured by the stories of their life journeys, feelings of unfulfillment in the countries from which they came, and the rhetoric of "discovering" the island, which

became the final destination of their travels. As emphasised by our interlocutors, their perceptions of the Mediterranean and its way of life – in the context of their prior mobility experiences – influenced their comparisons with familiar locations, often dominating their descriptions of Hvar. Given that most of our interlocutors had relocated multiple times, with some having lived and worked in other Mediterranean countries, the island of Hvar was often compared to these past experiences and presented as the ultimate stop in their personal life journeys. These comparisons primarily revolved around their countries of origin, but also highlighted the advantages of island living, with natural beauty and a slower pace of life being highlighted as key factors contributing to a higher quality and more fulfilling lifestyle. The island's natural beauty and way of life were the two most frequently mentioned motivators for relocating to Hvar. While these motives are fundamental to the island's tourist promotion, our interlocutors often disconnected them from tourism advertising, instead presenting them as reflections of their own lived experiences on the island. With the exception of two interlocutors, all of the other participants had lived in other countries, including other Mediterranean nations.

> We decided to come to Croatia. Because I know Spain very well, I lived in Salamanca in Spain for a year, and I like the Mediterranean. And so, we were looking for a place to go, but the reason we didn't go to Spain is because I already speak Spanish and my partner didn't, and I already speak some French, and he doesn't. So, we thought, well, let's go to a place where neither of us know the language. [...] Let's give ourselves an equal start, or else I'll end up doing all the work, you know, so, that's what we decided. (LSM10, Stari Grad)

> We travelled to, like, I don't know, seventy countries in the world. And this is a place where we made, like, the most tight-knit community, I would say. (LSM13, Jelsa)

> I'm telling you, it's like a movie, well, I mean, this is paradise! For me. On Earth. I went to China, to Hong Kong, to Japan, to Singapore, I've been everywhere. There's Bangkok, like Thailand. I could live there, always the same. The sun comes up at seven in the morning and it's dark at seven in the evening. Hot, humid, monotonous. The food's nothing special. But here, it's pure bliss. (LSM3, Vrisnik)

The idealisation of the island and Hvar's island communities, framed through themes of escape and utopia (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014), revealed that creating a lifestyle within the island environment is linked to the notion of an idealised home that extends beyond the confines of a physical residence. As our interlocutors explained, "home" encompasses the broader space of the island, offering the potential for an improved quality of life in spite of the inevitable obstacles, disappointments, conflicts, and the adjustments required to accept the shortcomings of an ideal (Salazar 2010). The sense of belonging to the island is influenced by connections with the local community and the natural environment, where interpersonal relationships are often presented through metaphors of the natural, pure, and unspoiled. The use of such metaphorical language by our interlocutors is no coincidence; it is connected to long-established patterns of Mediterranean representation that have circulated in public discourse since the early 20th century, when the tradition of summer travel to the region began

(Löfgren 1999). The subsequent transformation of these discourses, which were integrated into general knowledge about the Mediterranean, was further influenced by the postwar tourism boom. This period shaped contemporary images of the Mediterranean and narratives around the authenticity and immediacy of life in the region (Škrbić Alempijević 2014).

Alongside the often-emphasized characteristics of the Mediterranean and its way of life, our interlocutors often expressed a theme of newfound freedom and self-realisation. According to our comparative ethnographic research, all participants described themselves as people seeking a better life. Lifestyle, often highlighted as a key aspect of migration practices, entailed choosing a location where isolation from daily concerns and the establishment of closer social ties – lacking in their countries of origin – were possible. The island lifestyle was often portrayed through a temporal lens, as the specificity of social relations on the island and a slower pace of life were perceived as a phenomenon "lost" in their home countries, but preserved on the islands. When discussing quality of life, the idea of a close-knit and connected island community was frequently highlighted as a positive aspect, even though this experience coexisted with the notion of isolation from a world that was becoming too stressful. The narratives from our interlocutors revealed that the island figures as a space where concepts of freedom, belonging, a slow-paced daily life, connection with nature, and autonomy in creating lifestyles intersect. Whether referring to freedom in career choices, parenting, identity formation, pursuing life projects, or living in line with imagined ways of supposed island lifestyles, the idea of the island became infused with a variety of meanings and metaphors.

> We communicate with all the neighbours. [...] It's a great feeling because we can walk on the street and people say: 'Dobar dan,' and we talk to anybody. Anybody has five minutes... (LSM8, Selca)

> ...I have a daughter, and that part of parenting always seemed simple here. That part that feels like freedom to me, as I have the freedom to let her run free here, I don't have to fear, there's no danger here, we're somewhat... We all know each other, look after the children. So, that part is just phenomenal. (LSM2, Jelsa)

> We lived in big cities, and you can have lots of people that you know, but it's not really, like, a tight-knit community. And there's, I think, coming as outsiders here, it was very cool and fun for us. [...] We were like, 'Wow, it's so cool to be able to know everybody on the street!' Like, you saw when we came here, we know kind of everybody, and that's something you can't get in a big city. (LSM12 and LSM13, Jelsa)

These demonstrate that islandness manifested in multiple ways – on the one hand, it was defined by the rhythms of community, and on the other, by the freedom to shape one's life within the island's social framework. This attempt to reconcile multilayered, place-based identities rooted in island culture with emerging trends of life-style migration is increasingly challenging the concept of islandness (Foley et al. 2023: 1806), thereby helping us better grasp what islandness is and how it is constituted through entangled practices of mobility and immobility (Foley et al. 2023: 1808). The freedom frequently highlighted by our inter-

locutors is inseparable from material independence, which encompasses work, income, and housing. At the time of the interviews, all of our interlocutors lived on the island in properties they owned (or those belonging to their island partners), with only a few engaged in renting accommodations to tourists. Most of them initially came to the island as tourists, either with their parents during their youth, as singles with friends, or with their own families. In reviews of island demography, researchers point out that unlike the situation on islands in other Mediterranean countries – particularly Spain and Greece – lifestyle migrants on Croatian islands face a shortage of available housing and suitable settlements. As a result, they are less likely to cluster together or form distinct new communities within existing ones (Klempić Bogadi and Podogrelec 2020: 102). In our research on Hvar, however, we observed that some settlements – particularly those experiencing significant depopulation – had a higher number of newcomers (e.g. the village of Pitve on Hvar).

The sense of isolation that is intensified during winter, as noted by nearly all our interlocutors, offers a different perspective on the realities of island life compared to the one imagined before relocating. Thus, new relationships often emerge during the winter months to counteract the periods of total isolation. Our interlocutors often emphasized that winter is a time when they frequently visit family in their countries of origin, often aligning these trips with school holidays for the children. For the islanders, the "winter" criterium and living on the island during this period is frequently regarded as a test for newcomers, synchronising them with the rhythm of island life.

> And there's absolutely nothing in the winter. Everything's closed. There isn't much to do around here, that's the problem, you know, there's not much... Because I came from a big city and so I'm a bit bored. [...] [A]nd that's true for winter, I'm kind of bored and I did not see that when I came. When I came here, I just saw that it's beautiful, peaceful, relaxation, and now I see... (LSM5, Milna)

> ...We are a bit isolated, we are on an island, and you can't just go to Split when you feel like it. You have to wait for the ferry. So that, but I have, I'm used to it, it suits me and that's that, it doesn't matter. (LSM3, Vrisnik)

At the same time, as newcomers in these insular communities, our interlocutors often reflected their own otherness, which can be a source of isolation. Interestingly, some of the motivations for choosing Hvar as a migration destination were unconventional and not based on prior knowledge of the island or any rational selection process. These motivations and their explanations are dominated by feelings as unstructured, intuitive arguments, revealing how connections to the island and its people are forged. In the context of intuitive feelings as a non-choice, as well as reflections of embodied experiences, the statements of our interlocutors reveal how concepts of insularity and islandness are formed.

> ...I think that there's something about women moving away to live next to water in my family. Maybe it's this emotional, historical connection... So that's the only explanation I can have. I don't know why I should have been driven to come here and why I should have felt so at home here. But I do. (LSM10, Stari Grad)

...everything that's here I would miss, I mean it's a completely different life. It's... well, I don't know, I could not be sitting outside having a coffee like that, I could not... it's completely different. I don't know what it is, it's... It's a feeling that you have. You have a feeling where you belong and where you don't belong. (LSM4, Vrboska)

Insularisation and islandness, along with the distance and limitations that prompted islanders to emigrate, have become attractive factors for our interlocutors, enabling them to achieve desired life changes, flexibility, and sustainability. Integration into island communities, however, is more challenging on certain levels, particularly due to language barriers. As a result, lifestyle migrants tend to form stronger connections with each other than with the local island community. Consequently, the insularisation that manifests on various levels demonstrates how the island becomes a home for diverse social communities – micro-islands that, depending on language, sociability, and connectivity, are situationally established, overlap, network, or dissolve at certain moments. Driven by the emergence of increasingly complex forms of mobility and work, research into such mobile communities within virtual spaces has grown. These studies utilise netnographic methods (Mancinelli 2020) and the "mobile virtual ethnography" (Germann Molz 2021: 231-236) approach to gain insights into "the lives of research participants who are continuously on the move across geographical and virtual spaces" (Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2023). Such research, including the analysis of social media content among international migrants, has been conducted in the city of Zagreb (Čapo and Kelemen 2017; 2018). Some of our interlocutors mentioned being members of virtual groups connecting immigrants. One example is the Facebook group *Expats on Hvar*, where members exchange experiences, post advertisements, and ask questions. The group was created on 1 April 2013, and its administrator and moderator is Paul Bradbury, a versatile Briton who is a journalist, writer, consultant, and entrepreneur. Bradbury has been living in Croatia for twenty years and is recognised as Croatia's most well-known international migrant. He owns *Total Croatia*, the largest English-language news portal in Croatia. Initially residing in Jelsa on Hvar, he now lives in Zagreb. The group has 4,872 members and includes both immigrants and a significant number of locals. On the Facebook page, members share information about events, products, services, shops, housing, and administrative issues, as well as pose questions and share experiences. While most posts focus on resolving "practical" problems and everyday needs, we observed that the most common question potential future migrants ask in the group concerns living on Hvar year-round. Here are the comments shared in response to a Facebook post questioning the experience of staying on the island all year round.

> ...There is a good expat community, the locals are friendly, and the weather is mild. The sea stays above 20 centigrade till February. If you expect vibrant nightlife, entertainment, etc, no there isn't any. But we make our own. Also, Split is only a one-hour catamaran or two-hour ferry ride away. We have gone to Split, taken in a fine dinner, took a whole box for ourselves at the opera, overnight stay and breakfast, all for less than we would have paid for tickets to Covent Garden or (especially) the Met. (FB Profile 1)

> Yeah, come here in October, rent a studio and stay till Easter - then you'll know for sure! (FB Profile 2)

On the minus side - be ready for possible extended rainy periods and nothing to do or go to, outside the house. And no restaurants that work off season except one or two on the whole island (as well as bars/movies/theater) so socialising situations are very rare. (FB Profile 3)

I have lived here all year for the last 10 years. A completely different place than the madness of summer. I agree with all the comments above. There are spells of rain, but I attach a weather synopsis for the past 10 years as a guide. (FB Profile 4)

Can't recommend it enough. It's our ninth year here full time and it's beautiful and tranquil with some excellent weather. I swim all year and so the best thing to do is come over and stay a winter to see if it's for you. (FB Profile 5)

Make liquor, build something have a hobby whit out needing electricity. And enjoy the silents. (FB Profile 6)[4]

We noticed that immigrants who are single or have moved as couples tend to belong to different social circles, interacting with both locals and other foreign immigrants. They note that they mostly socialise with locals who are younger than them and who share similar lifestyles or attitudes. Some interlocutors feel the island is enough for them and do not need the world outside of it. They see it as home, to the extent that they wish to be buried there.

And because of young people, we all use the same internet. So, it was pretty easy for us to make really good friends really fast here. Because we all have the same jokes. We talk about the same things. And actually, that's the core reason we decided to stay here, because we made so many friends and we have such a good community. (LSM12, Jelsa)

I have enough space here on Hvar. I have enough space. [...] I go to Split less than ten times per year, really rarely. (LSM3, Vrisnik)

From the island you can go anywhere. You can go back to the mainland or you can go to another island. [...] I am not moving any more. [...] I said I am not going back. If I am dead, you can bury me here or you can throw my ashes in the sea. (LSM4, Vrboska)

A lack of fluency in Croatian emerged as a recurring theme in all of the interviews, significantly shaping the rhythm of their integration into the local community. Even at the beginning of the interviews, our interlocutors decided which language they preferred to speak with us. Most of the interviews with the foreign immigrants were conducted in English. The exceptions were four interlocutors who spoke Croatian during the fieldwork conducted in 2017. In 2024, all of the interviews with foreign interlocutors were conducted in English, even with those who had lived on Hvar for over a decade. The reasons they cited varied, but a common one was embarrassment over their limited knowledge of Croatian, which they only dared to use within a close circle of friends or family. Native English speakers found Croatian particularly challenging to learn, often attributing this to the fact that many locals speak English well and prefer to communicate with them in English.

[4]
Facebook group "Expats on Hvar" (posted on 28 October 2024).

I say, 'No, please speak Croatian.' No way. I'm braver to speak it if I go to Split by myself and I'm on my own, and I'm, you know, in shops or whatever, you know, I can muddle through. [...] My English has gotten a lot worse since I've been here. I speak broken English and write it, too. My Croatian hasn't gotten better, but my English has gotten worse. (LSM11, Stari Grad)

It was hard, the first two years, they were really hard. I didn't speak the language, and without language, you can't do anything. I talked all the time, always listened and now it's not so bad. I know that my grammar is still awful. (LSM5, Milna)

Language serves as one of the most significant barriers to integrating into local island communities. Foreign immigrants married to locals often speak Croatian or the Čakavian dialect specific to their settlement. The Čakavian dialects of Hvar differ considerably from standard Croatian, and many immigrants reported that it took them a long time to start understanding Croatian – let alone this particular dialect. Immigrants with children typically learn the language more quickly and integrate more easily. Their children speak Croatian enriched with the idioms of their local communities.

Also all of the dialects, you know, I can ask five people, how would I say, and I will get five different answers. (LSM11 from Canada, Stari Grad)

What was also very, very interesting is that everybody from the very beginning spoke to my children in dialect. It was fascinating. So everywhere, everyone, you know. They'd say, 'Oh, postole,' you know, and like everything. I was like, these words aren't in the dictionary! [...] My children feel completely part of the community. People call them 'naši' (ours). (LSM9 from UK, Stari Grad)

When it comes to integration, there are boundaries based on personal decisions about their levels of involvement. They do not relinquish the freedom to live according to their choices for the sake of integration or assimilation. Instead, they determine their own levels of involvement, create their own islands, and connect with island networks that understand and support them.

It's not a problem for me, but I don't know what it's like for the islanders. It's probably very hard then. As I said, I either get involved or stand aside and don't let anyone enter in this part which is mine, and that's that. [...] Later, people would say to me, my friends would say that I was the target of gossip for the entire town, but at that time for me it wasn't, I had no idea, and it did not bother me. (LSM2, Jelsa)

Living on the island year-round and gradually being accepted by the local community – as perceptions of otherness and strangeness fade – provides insight into both the benefits and challenges of life in small island settlements. This includes navigating local rivalries (Perinić Lewis 2017; Perinić Lewis and Škrbić Alempijević 2014), norms and the dynamics of gossip (Šterk 2024), which are deeply woven into the social fabric of such tightly connected communities.

The second most frequently cited obstacle is administration, ranging from local to state levels (especially for those who required visas). Bureaucratic "local islands" are among the most challenging for migrants to navigate or comprehend, forcing them to rely on strat-

egies of improvisation with the help of friends and acquaintances from local communities. Gender differences also emerge in this context, as women may be unwilling or unable to access certain island networks, reflecting a form of gendered insularisation. This includes a conscious rejection of independence in some aspects of island life involving interactions with public services and bureaucracy. Married migrants, especially women from larger urban areas, state they leave bureaucratic and administrative tasks to their husbands, as these processes frequently operate according to the most local of rules that are difficult to grasp.

> Administration is very frustrating in general here, I think, even for locals. […] You don't have to make it super easy for people, but, like, what I found frustrating is there's inconsistency. Like, you might do one process one year, and then it changes the next one depending on the person and how their day is going. (LSM13, Jelsa)

> Here I have husband. I'm protected. I don't have to do anything here. For example, husband goes to Općina, husband goes to police to register me or something. So, very, very relaxing feeling. (LSM1, Ivan Dolac)

> Bureaucracies… Doesn't know, the woman clerk doesn't know what papers you need. That was sooooooo frustrating! I felt like I could not function here. That I couldn't, simply, those principles from when I lived in the city, where this worked, in relation to work, in relation to anything, that it doesn't work here. I have to ask my husband for everything, he knows how it works, to take care of it. (LSM2, Jelsa)

Many foreign immigrants are actively involved in local associations as volunteers or have even established their own organisations based on their interests, bringing together both immigrants and locals. Nearly all interlocutors expressed a desire to contribute to the community through their knowledge, ideas, skills, activities, or innovations, while being careful not to harm or alter traditions and established relationships. Depending on their motivations for moving and length of stay, these predominantly highly educated migrants often exhibit a critical perspective on certain aspects of island life based on the island's economic and legal systems, governance policies, and social and cultural dynamics. At the same time, their knowledge and experiences from living in one or more countries make them focused on exploring opportunities, potential, and the future of the island communities where they have created a new home and life.

> …I don't wanna do anything that will like destroy the culture or do some harm to Croatia. I wanna come here and blend in, I don't wanna be an outsider. (LSM6, Selca)

> I think that we who come from outside the island bring a different perspective. Something we bring to the island. Maybe we don't change anything at once, like, when we come with this youthful enthusiasm. It's probably not going to work like that, but we contribute to some kind of culture. Some kind of different view. We… We force, kind of force these people to look at the other side. Because we are here, we have our place and you can't just, you know, push us away. And there's plenty of us. (LSM2, Jelsa)

Our research focused on the processes of insularisation and islandness, along with their associated notions of freedom, immediacy, and isolation. In the context of the island of Hvar, with its fragmented and divided communities (Perinić Lewis 2017, Perinić Lewis and Rudan 2020), insularisation on the one hand functions as a conscious process of isolation and detachment from hectic life rhythms for the lifestyle migrants we interviewed. On the other hand, insularisation also involved connecting with the local community and integrating into its seasonal rhythms and symbolic norms. While these practices may appear contradictory, the fact that there is deliberate distancing and approaching, belonging and estrangement, acceptance and exclusion, synchronism but at a distance, reveals insularisation as a cultural and situational phenomenon that manifests differently through the lens of migration. In this way, insularisation shares much with the concept of islandness, as it highlights contradictions and entanglements as constitutive elements in understanding islandness (Foley et al. 2023: 1809).

Our comparative research (2016/2017 vs. 2024) shows the shift in motives for lifestyle migration to Hvar. In 2024, many cited the pandemic and remote work, while earlier migrants were more driven by a desire to escape professional pressures. This interplay of escapism and utopianism, encapsulated in the concept of lifestyle and highlighted in certain moments, has demonstrated that lifestyle migration is a layered, dynamic, and complex phenomenon. The discourses of naturalisation and authenticity that dominate the narratives of our interlocutors closely echo those from the early 20th century, shaped by the rhetoric of discovery and a European imperial gaze that interpreted the economic underdevelopment of southern Europe and the Mediterranean through the lens of progress and hierarchical gradation (cf. Arcara 1998; Aldrich 2002). Characterised as a seminal point of archaic social relations and marked by ideals of naturalness and authenticity (cf. Moe 2002), the Mediterranean of the early 20th century became a haven for affluent Europeans: a spatial and temporal "Other" of Europe (cf. Buzard 1993). The democratisation of travel and the rise of tourism, particularly after World War II (cf. Löfgren 1999), connected these discourses to marketing strategies and the promotion of "newly discovered" Mediterranean destinations. Motifs of unspoiled nature and its associated "pure" interpersonal relationships referenced by our interlocutors, which figure as features of the Mediterranean lifestyle, are not merely benign phenomena of personal (self-)realisation. Rather, they are deeply ideological practices that, in the contemporary context of various crises (ecological, climate, economic, migratory, etc.), constitute the island as a form of utopia with the patina of Mediterraneanism, where such lifestyles are still perceived as viable.

However, unlike the colonial aspects that mark the history of other Mediterranean countries (cf. Arcara 1998; Moyà Antón 2013) and the (self-)imposed class and cultural limitations associated with lifestyle migration, our research on the island of Hvar has revealed significantly different practices of belonging to island communities. For lifestyle migrants, the idea of home and belonging is not achievable without accepting the symbolic rules of

the island communities, which require adapting to the rhythm of life on the island. While the practices of embracing islandness are somewhat constrained by language barriers and the necessity of economic independence, lifestyle as experienced through insularisation emerges as a process that enables gradual synchronisation with island communities and the acceptance of their cultural specificities. At the same time, mobility—and in this case, lifestyle migration—calls for a more inclusive approach in island studies (Foley et al. 2023: 1809), one that is not limited by spatial determinism and is sensitive to newly emerging phenomena that entangle islands in a web of multiple relations.

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POVZETEK

Prispevek raziskuje migracije zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga skozi koncept otočenja. Temelji na etnografskih raziskavah, ki so bile izvedene na otoku Hvar v letih 2016/2017 in 2024. Otočenje je kompleksen proces distanciranja in izolacije. Raziskava prinaša vpogled v kontrast med namišljenimi predstavami o otoškem življenju in resničnimi izkušnjami prilagajanja lokalni kulturi in življenju na otoku, na katerega pogosto vplivajo različni praktični izzivi in težave. Raziskave kažejo, da so selitve zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga močno ideologizirane, predvsem z vidika dojemanja otoškega življenja. To se odraža v zgodovinsko in družbeno zakoreninjenih predstavah o Sredozemlju, ki so prisotne v širši javni sferi. Poleg tega je tovrstno preseljevanje tesno povezano z otoštvom kot utelešeno relacijsko izkušnjo, vezano na različne pripovedi, prakse in imaginarije. Analiza delno strukturiranih intervjujev, opravljenih pred in po pandemiji Covid-19, razkriva, da migracije zaradi življenjskega sloga delujejo po eni strani kot zavesten umik od hitrega življenjskega ritma, po drugi strani pa kot oblika integracije v lokalne sezonske vzorce in simbolne kode. Dinamika, ki se morda zdi protislovna, saj vključuje tako nenavezanost kot angažiranost, pripadnost in odtujenost, sprejemanje in izključevanje, pa vendarle kaže, da je migracija zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga globoko pogojena z različnimi odnosi, ki ustvarjajo pripovedi o pripadnosti, osebni svobodi, izolaciji in samouresničevanju.