

‘Covid-Islands’ and ‘Covid-Archipelagos’: Sociospatial Identities and Spatiotemporal Dynamics of Island and Archipelagic Insular Imaginaries of the Covid-19 Pandemic



»Covidni otoki« in »covidna otočja«: družbeno-prostorske identitete in prostorsko-časovna dinamika otoških imaginarijev med pandemijo covida-19

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ABSTRACT

During the global Covid-19 pandemic, households, communities and regions around the world were faced with the hardening of borders at a variety of jurisdictional and spatial levels. These policy actions saw a sharp rise in insularisation occur as border geographies spurred insularity. The purpose of this paper is to examine this phenomenon and explore how this insular imagery took hold. Jurisdictional islanding in the form of “Covid-islands” and “Covid-archipelagos” is introduced and explained as policy constructs which occurred at both micro and macro levels during the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper then examines Eastern Canada’s Covid-archipelagic “Atlantic Bubble”, constructed by the joint-islanding of the Canadian provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, as an illustrative case study example. The paper finishes by analysing the sociospatial and temporal dynamics of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, tying to dimensions of culture, territory and society interconnected amongst prior concepts and paradigms of island understanding. Islanding in the Covid-19 era brought us back to the notion of seclusion and detachment that in a way

echoes the paradigms that had already been deconstructed in the field of island studies. However, the emergence of these sociospatial island imaginaries leads us to re-think insularisation and what it meant to be insularised in the Covid-19 period.

KEYWORDS: insularity, island studies, Covid-19, Covid-islands, Covid-archipelagos, island imaginaries

IZVLEČEK

Med globalno pandemijo Covida-19 so se gospodinjstva, skupnosti in regije po vsem svetu soočale z utrjevanjem meja na različnih ravneh, bodisi v pravnem ali prostorskem smislu. Zaradi teh ukrepov je na podlagi spodbud mejnih geografskih območij prišlo do močnega povečanja izolacije ali otočenja. Namen tega prispevka je preučiti ta pojav in raziskati, kako se je uveljavila ta podoba izoliranosti. Razložena sta koncepta »covidnih otokov« in »covidnih otočij«, ki sta se pojavila kot obliki pravnega otočenja ali izolacije, kot konstrukta politik, ki so se med pandemijo pojavile na mikro in makro ravni. Kot študija primera je predstavljen t. i. »atlantski mehurček«, covidno otočje na vzhodu Kanade, ki so ga sestavljale province New Brunswick, Nova Škotska, Otok princa Edvarda ter Nova Fundlandija in Labrador. Sledi analiza socialno-prostorske in časovne dinamike covidnih otokov in covidnih otočij, povezanih z razsežnostmi kulture, ozemlja in družbe, ki so medsebojno prepletene s koncepti in paradigmami razumevanja otokov. Otočenje nas je v času Covida-19 znova približalo pojmu osamitve in odmaknjenosti, ki na nek način odraža paradigme, ki so bile na področju otoških študij že dekonstruirane. Vendar nas pojav teh socialno-prostorskih otoških imaginarij vodi k ponovnemu razmišljanju o izolaciji in o tem, kaj je to pomenilo v obdobju Covida-19.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: otoškost, otoške študije, Covid-19, covidni otoki, covidna otočja, otoški imaginarij

INTRODUCTION

The insularisation of our worlds speaks to a phenomenon of islanding across several disciplines and domains in a non-geographic sense. Moving beyond the realm of geographic islands, this paper seeks to engage with this concept through the prism of the Covid-19 pandemic. The intention is to explore the pursuit of insularity and islandness as an island imaginary, beyond traditional geographic definitions and contemplations of islands.

In this particular issue, the editors “aim to explore the complex cultural and social worlds that shape our everyday lives and that are often portrayed as isolated”, the goal being to “gain new insights that go beyond the usual assumptions of spatially distant and self-contained domains” (Oroz and Simonič 2023: 151). This article presents an interpretation of insularisation present during the Covid-19 pandemic, which offers a new insight into multiple spatial and temporal insular dynamics that shaped realities during that time. Presented within this paper are new islanded and insular concepts of “Covid-islands” and “Covid-archipelagos”. These island constructs, Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, embody the social and discursive construction of islands, as to how they are conceptualised and appear in geographical imaginaries. Emerging during the Covid-19 pandemic, Covid-

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islands and Covid-archipelagos stretch across the domains of politics, economy and society and occurred at both the individual/household (micro) and regional/jurisdictional (macro) levels. These occurrences placed a focal point, reinforced by government policy actions, on insular imagery. This new concept of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos provides a fresh lens through which island identities, insularity, and islandness can be observed and studied.

This paper is in the anthropological tradition, by an interdisciplinary island scholar residing in Prince Edward Island, Canada, who experienced the Covid-archipelago of the subnational Canadian “Atlantic Bubble” firsthand. The methods employed include ethnographic writing and autoethnographic reflections through field notes, documents, and shared verbal conversations. The researcher was a policy practitioner working in the executive branch of government during the Covid-19 pandemic, directly supporting senior officials. This paper, and a broader associated research project, seek to understand the islanded experience of the regional Atlantic Bubble and the unique societal and cultural contexts of such insular imaginaries. Thus, a duality of experiences was observed from inside the governmental policy response efforts and the broader social and cultural interaction and responses occurring outside.

This paper introduces the concept of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos as new islanded, insular constructs as frames of inquiry, highlighted by the illustrative Atlantic Bubble case study, with these sociospatial island imaginaries. There is no literature to date on non-geographic islanded constructs in the Covid context, and in addressing this gap, this paper in part broadens the understanding of the application of islandness and insularity in these instances.

Initially, the concepts of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos will be described and placed within the sociospatial and temporal contexts. Next, the case of the Atlantic Bubble will be discussed and explained as an experienced and observed phenomenon, and as an illustrative case study of a Covid-archipelago. Lastly, this concept will be analysed and situated within the broader contexts of the society, culture, and history which informed and shaped it.

FRAMING THE ARCHIPELAGO: ARCHIPELAGIC UNDERSTANDINGS AND THINKING

Archipelagic thinking and this understanding are central to this paper and the concepts of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos advanced herein. Conceptualisations of archipelagic conditions have encouraged scholars to consider the interplay between and amongst island spaces and the connecting mediums. In the field of island studies, the seminal work of Hau’ofa reoriented Oceania (the Pacific) as a connecting medium, rather than as a barrier, creating “a ‘sea of islands’ as opposed to “islands in a far sea” (Hau’ofa 1994: 7). Stratford et al. (2011) sought to advance the concept of “island and island” relations within the humanities and social sciences after identifying two dominant topological relations in scholarship, those of land and sea, and island and continent/mainland. An island-island understanding of thinking with the archipelago is championed, with a stated desire “to articulate new

research agendas to explore alternative cultural geographies and alternative performances, representations and experiences of islands” (Stratford et al 2011: 114). Further concepts such as aquapelagos (Hayward 2012) encourage scholars to consider the relationship and the intertwined nature of the maritime medium.

Recent scholarship in island studies has further expanded upon what has been termed “archipelagic thinking” (Pugh 2013; Stephens and Martinez-San Miguel 2020). Archipelagic thinking has been outlined as “denaturaliz[ing] the conceptual basis of space and place” (Pugh 2013: 9). In their edited volume *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking*, Stephens and Martinez-San Miguel outlined their definition of an archipelago:

not only as a system of islands but also as a set of humanly constructed relations between individual locations (islands, ports, cities, forts, metropolises, communities). The archipelagic is conceived, therefore, as a set of relations that articulates cultural and political formations (collectivities, communities, societies), modes of interpreting and inhabiting the world (epistemologies), and symbolic imaginaries (as a poetic but also as habitus). (2020: para. 31)

Indeed, this focal text equipped with this definition sets forth to employ the archipelago as:

a lens that may allow us to engage in interdisciplinary conversations about the ways in which space and time are resignified. These resignifications occur and recur in a complex set of human, object, and (natural or built) surface relations that can congeal into a particular meaning, which can then also become permanent or remain ephemeral. In our understanding, the archipelago calls for a meaning-making and rearticulation that responds to human experiences traversing space and time. Archipelagoes happen, congeal, take place. They are not immanent or natural categories existing independently of interpretation. Yet they can also become an episteme, an imaginary, a way of thinking, a poetic, a hermeneutic, a method of inquiry, a system of relations. They are painful and generative, implicated in native cosmologies or cosmo-visions, or assembled as part of imperial/colonial undertakings. They can refer to multidimensional, focal, spatial forms of thinking that emerge from concrete relationships with inhabited spaces. (Stephens and Martinez-San Miguel 2020: para. 6)

In exploring archipelagic thinking and understandings and engaging with them in the development of the linked concepts of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, it is also important to consider the area of border studies, looking at how borders and boundaries are constructed and conceptualised, as they represent an important aspect of this story.

INSULARITY, BORDER, BOUNDARIES AND TIDEMARKS

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term “insular” as “of, relating to, or constituting an island” (Merriam-Webster 2024). The etymology of the term is from Late Latin “insularis” and the Latin “insula”, which means “island” (Merriam-Webster 2024). Cultural insularity is readily associated with islands (Shell 2014). Likewise, Simonič (2017) notes that the sea offers both demarcation but also openness to islands, contrasting this against the Alpine topography and the closure and closeness it represents. For islands, travelling across both time and space, distances and “temporal depth” lend to this islanded insularity (Gillis 2001:

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39). The duality of the marine space in serving as both a boundary and a connector is a key point in the relational aspect of an islanded or insular identity. Zilmer notes “the fusion of island symbolism and pragmatism” (2011: 35) characterised by dimensions of both separation and interaction in explaining the power and purpose of insular island settings in old-Norse literature. This fusion with the island as a literary setting and device echoes the duality of marine space, and there are clear parallels to the symbolism and pragmatism in the island imagery of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos. Further, in contemporary times, it has been suggested that remoteness is “something achieved rather than found” (Gillis 2001: 40).

The Covid-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, led to the proliferation of the significant hardening of borders at international and subnational levels worldwide. This was exceptionally visible with geographic islands at both terrestrial and maritime borders and boundaries (Agius et al. 2022; Halliday 2024). In drafting our understanding of borders and boundaries, the literature spans across social science disciplines. In broadening our understanding of borders and boundaries, the following quotations from sociologist Georg Simmel are a fine starting point:

The boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially. (Simmel 1997: 142, as cited in Paasi 2012: 2303)

The border is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences but rather a sociological fact that is shaping up spatially. (Simmel 1992: 697, as cited in Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra 2018: 353-354)

These quotations from the sociological tradition interchange the terms “border” and “boundary”, which brings to mind the slightly different considerations and meanings of these terms. Reverting once again to the dictionary, the Cambridge dictionary defines a “boundary” as “a real or imagined line that marks the edge or limit of something” (Cambridge 2024). A “boundary” is afforded the imaginary domain, while a “border” remains in reality and is seemingly firmer for it. Borders are also identified as “metaphors” for the reasoning that “they are arbitrary constructions based upon cultural convention” (Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra 2018: 349). Similarly, recent scholarship has suggested tidemarks, a word which combines the “metaphorical and material” found in contemporary border studies (Green 2018: 80). In this, the spatial and temporal are enveloped and considered as “being lively and contingent” (Green 2018: 81).

In considering insularity and insular imagery expressed as Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, the real practising of the hardening of national borders and subnational boundaries saw the transformation, especially visible and tangible in the case of subnational boundaries, into hardened borders. In the case of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, further inspiration is drawn from Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra, and from Simmel for suggesting that “processes of spatial boundaries have their roots in the psychological forces of the soul by which people in a given territory hold together a geographical space” (Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra 2018: 354).

Additionally, Paasi puts forward that:

Contrary to tradition, borders are now rarely conceptualized as separate sociospatial entities. Further, rather than permanent elements, borders are seen as historically contingent institutions that are constituted in and constitutive of the perpetual production and reproduction of territories. The inseparability of borders and territories does not imply that they should form fixed bounded wholes, but rather that they are dispersed sets of power relations that are mobilized for various purposes. (Paasi 2012: 2304)

Green argues that “the location and meaning of borders are always established as a relation, as well as a separation, between locations” (2018: 69). Similarly, borders are noted as a “dynamic process, shifting through time and space” and require causal investigation as to “how, why and when borders are shaped, endure or recede” (Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra 2018: 356). From the anthropologic point of view, three major dimensions are associated with borders: cultural, territorial, and social (Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra 2018). Questions arise in the interactions and relations between these three dimensions, and aspects of these dimensions will be further drawn out below.

Having reviewed and discussed archipelagic and aquapelagic understandings and archipelagic thinking, it is now time to introduce and explain the concepts of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos.

COVID-ISLANDS AND COVID-ARCHIPELAGOS

As mentioned above, in outlining the concepts of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, this article is presenting these constructs from both a micro or household level and a macro or jurisdictional level. The differences in spatial scale are used to distinguish and describe the scale of these interactions and insular processes which took place. The levels of these frameworks are familiar to social science scholars from several disciplines.

A Covid-island is defined as a definite sociocultural policy construct of an islanded household or jurisdiction with distinct spatial, temporal, and social boundaries, which occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. The insular construction and imagery of Covid-islands arose from the social and physical distancing enforced in many jurisdictions as a policy response to Covid-19, which sought to limit disease transmission. Covid-islands were prolific at the micro-level, as many households experiencing the pandemic were encouraged by local public health officials to limit social contact, and various regimes of isolation and quarantine were enacted at the household level in numerous jurisdictions. In this way, a process of islanding within individual networks occurred.

From a jurisdictional perspective, the hardening of subnational boundaries into firm and hardened borders, alongside the hardening of existing national-level (international) borders, spurred the creation of Covid-islands on the jurisdictional level, where non-island jurisdictions in the geographic sense undertook insular, islanding actions. This form of islanding and insularity was common practice throughout the early waves of the Covid-19 pandemic as jurisdictions and governments attempted to minimise and more closely regulate the movement of peoples guided by epidemiological principles. Both the thickness of the

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border and the level of intrusiveness of policies varied by jurisdiction and so too did the degree of islanding and by extension the relativity of islandness experienced. The variance in these policy settings was found in the structured policy regime issued via public health and/or emergency orders under the respective relevant statutory authority.

By applying archipelagic thinking via different connecting spatial mediums, the development and effect of an archipelagic construct becomes more visible and more tangible in a sense. A Covid-archipelago can be defined as an archipelagic construct consisting of multiple Covid-islands connected via a spatial medium during the Covid-19 pandemic. There are apparent differences in applying concepts such as these at both noted levels. Endless examples undoubtedly abound at the micro and macro levels of tightening borders and social distancing, which in effect is the same enabling factor that brings about the island(ed) identity for those respective peoples, households, and jurisdictions.

At the micro level, as Covid-islands sprung up, islanded identities were formed, and connectivity was key. Households were encouraged to “bubble” with a small number of other households in the same jurisdiction, thus creating micro-level Covid-archipelagos. Individual households were encouraged to keep very small social circles or bubbles and limit contact outside the household in jurisdictions such as New Zealand (NZ Herald 2020), the United States (Stieg 2020), Canada (Pelley 2020) and the United Kingdom (Roberts 2021). Additionally, through the employment of virtual technologies, employing the spatial medium of cyberspace allowed household micro level Covid-islands to ignore physical spatiality, disregarding physical borders, and become micro level Covid-archipelagos with other households located in any geographic context.

At the macro level, during the Covid-19 pandemic, select regions around the globe formed “travel/quarantine bubbles” with imposed hard borders. Examples include the “Trans-Tasman Bubble” of the islands of New Zealand and Australia, the “Bailiwick Bubble” of Guernsey, Herm, Alderney and Sark, the “Atlantic Bubble” of the Canadian provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick, and the “Baltic Bubble” of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Such Covid-archipelagos were the embodiment of the micro bubbling idea on a macro scale. The jurisdictions involved shared geographic proximity with firm transportation linkages across transportation mediums but also provided an islanded experience through the easing of intra-regional border and isolation regimes through monopolistic or preferential arrangements. These regional undertakings became safe havens in the global sea of Covid-19 cases and offer a unique class of case study for this conceptual framework. In particular, this paper will focus on the case of the subnational Canadian Atlantic Bubble, which was constructed in 2020 following the initial wave of the pandemic.

THE ATLANTIC BUBBLE: A MACRO-LEVEL COVID-ARCHIPELAGIC CONSTRUCTION IN ATLANTIC CANADA

In the aftermath of the initial wave of the pandemic in 2020, a Covid-archipelago formed called the Atlantic Bubble, which endured for approximately half of the 2020 calendar

year. The Atlantic Bubble encompassed the four most-easterly provinces within Canada: Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Nova Scotia (NS), Prince Edward Island (PEI), and New Brunswick (NB), commonly referred to as Atlantic Canada, covering a land mass of 793,269 square kilometers (Canadian Press, 2022). The four provinces had a combined population of 2,454,850 as of Q2 2020 (StatsCan, 2025).¹ It was announced on 24 June 2020 via the Council of Atlantic Premiers, first appeared on 3 July 2020 and disappeared on 23 November 2020, after the Canadian island province of PEI (connected by the Confederation Bridge to NB, and by seasonal ferry to NS) and the coastal-island province of Newfoundland and Labrador (connected to NS by year-round ferry) suspended their participation, owing to the rising case numbers in NB and NS.

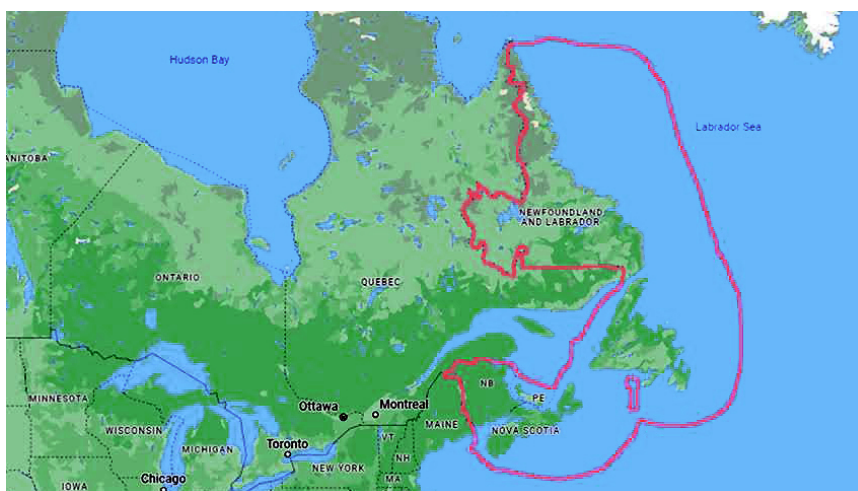


Image 1: Google Map Representation of the Canadian “Atlantic Bubble”

A somewhat unique aspect of this regional construct is that the island province of Prince Edward Island is connected via a bridge to the continental mainland province of New Brunswick, which in turn shares a land border with the continental mainland of Nova Scotia. The island of Newfoundland, as part of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, is connected via ferry service to Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, itself connected to the rest of mainland Nova Scotia via a permanent causeway. The territory of Labrador is a continental mainland territory, which solely borders the Canadian province of Quebec and is only connected to the island of Newfoundland via ferry, which actually lands in the province of Quebec, adjacent to the Labrador border.

To understand the Atlantic Bubble, it is important to understand the borders which delineated it both externally and internally. Externally, the Atlantic Bubble (via NB) shared

1

Broken down as follows: NL (527,733), PEI (158,401), NS (986,204), NB (782,512).

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a 513-kilometre terrestrial border with the state of Maine, U.S.A., as well as an international maritime border. An international maritime boundary was also shared with France, by way of its overseas territory of St. Pierre and Miquelon (off the coast of NL). Further, two separate portions of land border, covering approximately 4,000 kilometers, and a maritime border involving a vehicle passenger ferry (to the Îles de la Madeleine) connected it with the Canadian province of Quebec (via NB and PEI respectively).

The Atlantic Bubble involved a targeted and geographically limited easing of travel restrictions for residents of the hardened internal subnational borders within the region, initially established by their respective subnational governments, in concert with measures taken by the federal government to harden international borders in order to limit virus transmission and spread. Each of the four provinces constructed and manned border checkpoints which did not exist prior to the pandemic. It is this hardening and widening of internal subnational borders, alongside the domestic travel restrictions, which gives the Atlantic Bubble a delineated and distinct spatial frame.

In the case of the Atlantic Bubble, as an islander, I watched the hardening and proliferation of our internal, subnational border at the bridge linking our island province to our neighbouring Canadian province of New Brunswick. These efforts, spurred by public health policy, led to the hardening and assembling of a physical border checkpoint. In retrospect, as is standard practice, such a checkpoint was not precisely at the terrestrial edge of our island territory, but within sight of it. In considering such a construction, the employment of concrete road barriers, traffic cones, and painted lines to marshal and constrict inbound traffic wholly changed the pre-pandemic traffic flow, absent of any checkpoint. I came to the realisation that such an interprovincial border had always existed, but owing to the island form usually just as the solid border boundary of the island's shape on a two-dimensional paper map. The island was usually coloured a different colour than our neighbouring continental landmasses to distinguish between the different subnational Canadian provinces. Further, I contemplated the fact that such a provincial border between our island (PEI) and NB, connected via this year-round bridge, actually falls within the midpoint of the connecting Northumberland Strait, the marine aspect more so considered a (maritime) boundary as opposed to a border. With a bridged connection between an island and the mainland, the arrival at the end of the bridge is also deemed as your arrival onto the island.

Given the freedom of movement for Canadian citizens enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, within reasonable limits, such hardened internal borders were entirely foreign to us. The reasonable limits had been located in creating our Covid-island and the subsequent regional Covid-archipelago. Ordinary residents of the four provinces were afforded the opportunity to travel inter-regionally without any quarantine regime, while any approved visitors/travellers from outside (including other Canadians) were subject to a mandatory fourteen-day quarantine period. It should be noted that the creation of the Atlantic Bubble came from the regional intergovernmental institution, the Council of Atlantic Premiers, which is unique in Canada for being the only such permanent, resourced and established body in the country.

There is a clear subnational hierarchy centred on layers of jurisdiction and autonomy in Atlantic Canada. This regional construct itself rests upon the foundation of four subnational provinces that formed the Atlantic Bubble: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. As provincial jurisdictions, each is an equal member of the Canadian federation with their own governments, which affords them a level of domination comparative to similar subnational islands who do not enjoy such jurisdiction or autonomy.

Insularity was yearned for and felt within the apparent safety of the Atlantic Bubble, as framed by this joint policy action and captured in media narratives giving voice to key policy actors and citizens (Cowan 2020; English and Murphy 2020; Gunn 2020). Residents were quoted by news media speaking favourably of the Atlantic Bubble, with examples such as “they’re just trying to keep us safe. They’re doing a great job,” and “I feel very safe in the Atlantic bubble. It makes me feel very fortunate that we live where we do” (English and Murphy 2020). A non-probability sample poll conducted in August 2020 with over 3,300 respondents found that satisfaction with the Atlantic Bubble policy travel regime/restrictions was high across all four provinces, with PEI and NB both at 90%, NS at 86%, and NL at 76% (MacKinnon, 2020). Individual and collective pressure and responsibility were present in the efforts to maintain this bubbled new normal and see off any threats to this new islanded lifestyle. This manifested through the emotive actions of citizens seeking to confront, act against, or report any infraction or transgression, real or perceived, towards fellow citizens. Examples included out-of-jurisdiction plated vehicles being “plate shamed” through vandalism, written notes or direct confrontation (Wright 2020), or dozens of calls to a government telephone line to report the behaviours of others (Campbell 2020).

THE CULTURAL, TERRITORIAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF COVID-ISLANDS AND COVID-ARCHIPELAGOS

As noted, the anthropologic point of view finds three major dimensions associated with borders: cultural, territorial, and social. So, looking to the literature, how does the new concept of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos engage with the existing islanded concepts and intersect with these dimensions? The territorial aspect of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos has been introduced and discussed above. The delineation of both is captured in the varied spatial scales of both the micro (household) and the macro (jurisdictional), and the bordering integrity of these constructs proved integral to their existence. Alongside the territorial, the dimensions of culture and society will be unpacked and analysed below through the existing literature and conceptions of islanded spatiality, society, connectivity, identity, islandness, island constructing, and island imaginaries.

A core concept to begin with is that of “social islands” advanced by sociologist David Pitt and defined as “relatively small groups of people who consider themselves, and in important symbolic and behavioural indicators are indeed, separate from other groups (i.e. there is a clear social boundary) both horizontally and vertically in the social structure,

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and are usually also discrete in space and time as well” (Pitt 1980: 1052). The study of such a phenomenon should also examine these distinct social groups and their boundaries (Pitt 1980). Indeed, underpinning this proposed frame is the relative nature of island spatiality and “the ability of island spaces to keep objects out (or in)” (Baldacchino 2007: 5). As outlined by Ratter:

For a geography of islands, space and its significance as a factor of influence is a central focus. As a spatial science, geography is concerned with the mutual relationship between space and society in the sense of analyzing and assessing the significance of space for society and, in return, the significance of societal relations for the development of space. Geography is concerned with revealing the structures of island spatiality. (Ratter 2018: 2)

The field of island studies has been framed as “very much about the implications of permeable borders” (Baldacchino 2007: 5). As recently posited, “connection, then, rather than isolation, might be the key to understanding islandness, necessitating reflection on how cultures of mobility and immobility are being experienced” (Foley et al 2023: 9). Island connectivity was a key dynamic which was impacted by travel restrictions and bordering regimes during the pandemic (Agius et al. 2022). As such, from a geographic perspective, Ratter states that an “analysis of the organisation of space can thus provide important insights on the social, political and economic structures and effects at play and how these are themselves subject to changing external and internal forces.” (Ratter 2018: 3) Given the nature and state of the external public health threat brought on by the pandemic, the core concern for leaders and governments was in reducing the transmission of the virus and protecting the health of the population. Public health policy was the primary driver in bordering and quarantine policies, and the collective action of adherence to these decisions shaped and drove the negotiation of accepted social boundaries and increased personal boundaries. Governments encouraged this insularity and shaped the perceptions around such a culture of (im)mobility.

Questions of island identity and the essence of islandness have been at the heart of the field of island studies since its establishment. In his opening chapter ‘Identity Matters’ in his text *Social Identity*, sociologist Richard Jenkins outlines his views on identity and identification, stating that identification is a process which “has to be made to matter” through meaning constructed (2014: 6). The conceptualisation of islandness has been described as “an entangled concept, which requires us to grapple with seeming contradictions” (Foley et al. 2023: 10). Islandness has been defined as “an intervening variable that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways” (Baldacchino 2004). As such it is the “varied spatial and relational contexts that give precise formations of islandness meaning as well as the culturally specific values with which islands are imbued” (Grydehøj 2020: 3). At least one scholar has posited that islandness can be “earned over time” by those residents who are not native-born islanders (Conkling 2007: 198). Writing in the *Geographical Review*, anthropologist Karen Olwig states:

[i]slands attain their meaning within a complex network of interrelationships that involves strong centrifugal as well as centripetal forces. It therefore cannot be assumed that islands continue to have significance as sources of belonging and identification. As sources of belonging, islands are sociocultural constructions that change during the course of people's lives. (Olwig 2007: 272)

According to Jenkins, “the first principle of social constructionism, groups are real if people think they are: they then behave in ways that assume that groups are real and, in so doing, construct that reality. They *realise* it” (2014: 12, author's italics). This point is key to the construction of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, which occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. Grydehøj (2018) argues that islandness is a relational state dependent upon a partner, be it a larger island or a mainland. Islandness occurs in contexts with land masses surrounded by mediums other than water (Foley et al. 2023). In broadening our thinking and the application of how islandness is being achieved, “deconstructing and overturning the island as the ‘other’ emerges in expressing islandness as a social construct across numerous fields and examples” (Foley et al. 2023: 9). In the case of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, the medium in question is the surging Coronavirus, surrounding and at times permeating these island constructs. The relational state of islandness in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic provided that contextual contrast and partnership in those safe ‘island’ havens and sociological constructs, and other jurisdictions who were not. In the case of the Atlantic Bubble, the policy decisions and actions were supported by societal buy-in to the concept and belief and realisation in the social constructionism of this insular, islanded identity, supported by the existing shared regional identities across the four provinces.

Additionally, in discussing identity, Pitt observes: “Identity itself depends on a definition externally as well as internally. To be part of a group is to be not part of another group. This external relationship is also hierarchical or involves dependencies” (1980: 1054). An anthropologic interpretation of culture highlights the importance of culturally constituted social differences, which “emerge in relation to interlocking patterns of meaning that are constructed by and struggled over by people who occupy different social positions that incorporate differentials of power” (Delaney 2017: 20). Unlocking their meanings in their respective specific cultural context is the key. This paper is sited within the cultural context of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, when the evolution and emergence of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos occurred.

The paper earlier discussed the concept of “social islands” as a starting point for these existing theories in the literature. Gillis (2004) makes mention of “cultural islands” in a similar vein, while bringing together the material world and imaginative processes in setting forth his concept of “islanding” as a joint construction utilising both processes. Others have put forward that islandness requires “island” to be utilised as a verb, with the corresponding action of “islanding”, as a theory instrument to better understand the concept (Baldacchino and Clark 2013). An entire thematic issue of *Shima* was dedicated to “almost islands”, denoted as such “by virtue of both geography and related political, social and/or infrastructural aspects” (Hayward 2016). As explained by the editor in outlining their criteria,

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“Their islandish identities are created by both the marine spaces that border substantial parts of their terrain and a sense of islandness resulting from either difference from adjacent locales and/or impediments to easy intercourse with them” (Hayward 2016: 5).

The Japanese term “shima” is representative of this form of thinking as “it embodies a dual meaning - islands as geographical features and islands as small-scale social groups where cultural interactions are densely intermeshed” (Suwa 2007: 6). The construction of a shima “is a work of territorial imagination, an extension of personhood and a ‘cultural landscape’” (Suwa 2007: 6). This concept of imaginaries, which combine aspects of geography and society, is tied directly into the thinking that underpins Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos.

The conceptualisation of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos is further shaped by Fletcher’s theory of performance geography, which was defined as “a space of cultural production which privileges neither geography or literature (in their narrow sense) but insists on their interconnection” (2011: 19). For Fletcher, this approach is “a fresh conceptual model for considering islands as productive of individual and social identity” (2011: 30). This theory highlights the “dynamic and mutually constitutive relationship” between island places and how they are rendered or, in the author’s term, “depicted” (2011: 27).

Additionally, the more recent concept of “island imaginaries” provided a framework to “capture more centrally the material-semiotic dynamic”, explained as “how the physical and metaphorical properties of islands are mutually constitutive” (Gugganig and Klimburg-Witjes 2021: 326). The authors are keen to stress that “island imaginaries” holds significance for both words, as it is a reciprocal understanding that “offers a tool to analyze this mutual constitution of island visions and materializations” (Gugganig and Klimburg-Witjes 2021: 333).

All the aforementioned concepts speak to the building body of literature in island studies and other disciplines around questions of island composition, island attributes, and islandness. This exemplifies emerging understandings that go beyond the island simply as a purely geographic construct. There has been an extensive volume of contributions and debate centred on the duality of “real” islands versus metaphoric islands in the literature, and the question of what necessarily constitutes an island. This paper advances an understanding of a temporal period, defined by an external shock of a worldwide pandemic, in which islanding occurred, and island identities were established.

CONCLUSION

Looking through the prism of the Covid-19 pandemic, Wille and Weber offer that “[a] border geography of the COVID-19 pandemic must therefore be thought of in the plural and include multiple border(ings), which are classified as spatial and social (dis-)orderings on different scales” (2020: 363). This paper has attempted to unpack the complexity of border and boundary hardening, which triggered islanded conceptions and understandings via insularity. In this we mean existing subnational boundaries were transformed via means of

policy direction, grounded in public health priorities, into more rigid and visible borders. Furthermore, this practice leads to islanded realities in non-island and island contexts. These Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, serving as metaphorical or imagined island constructs, form the basis of conceptualising insularity as an analytical concept through this phenomenon. Such islanded creations provided an enforced sense of security and a true notion of seclusion and detachment from a global pandemic.

From 3 July to 23 November 2020, the duration of the Atlantic Bubble, Atlantic Canada became a place of envy and want owing to its exclusive status as a Covid-archipelago haven. Suddenly, residents in other regions of the country were taking notice and wanting in, counter to the long-standing metropole narrative of Atlantic Canada as a peripheral region of limited opportunities and permanent habitation appeal. From a vantage point within the region, it was now being defined as what it did provide: a seemingly safe idyllic space where subnational, non-quarantine inter-provincial travel was permitted to residents, somewhere where the “new normal” was being put into practice. One wonders whether this experience has led to a softening of distinct sub-regional or provincial identities because of what the Atlantic Bubble (literally) encapsulated. The period of the Atlantic Bubble would seem to be a relative high point in the recent history of an externally created regional identity.

Building forth, this illustrative Covid-archipelagic construct was a well-defined, bounded islanded space, yet connected via the existing road transportation and maritime ferry linkages as an archipelagic construct. During the period of the Atlantic Bubble, this social island-ed identity was very much defined by the relationship between those inside and outside and the associated divergent dynamic of mobility and immobility at play. The temporal dynamic of border regimes across the jurisdictions was a direct reflection of the Covid-19 epidemiology and began in strict insularity with the initial wave of Covid-19, followed by adjustments of border settings as a foundational component of the joint construction of the Atlantic Bubble creation. The temporal dynamic of the individual and group levels, the micro and the macro, were again reflected in the nature of the development and creation of the Atlantic Bubble and these islanded imaginaries. In a way, the residents inside the Atlantic Bubble were employing and experiencing multiple island identities at both the individual/household and regional levels. To riff off Gillis, Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos became “a source of personal and social identity for millions of people” who *became* “resident islanders.” (2004, p. 144) Gillis was writing of island tourism and geographic islands, but in this case, many people residing on non-physical islands did become resident islanders in our conceptual construct during the temporal dimension of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos.

The socio-spatial dynamic of this Covid-archipelago, this islanded construct, was driven by interactions between the governments in setting out the policy objectives and policy actions which shaped the policy response of the Atlantic Bubble and the spatial patterns of intra-mobility within the hardened borders, intentionally designed to register and control the movements of individuals and enforce a strict quarantine regime on those individuals ordinarily residing outside of the Atlantic Bubble who sought entry into it. Such

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an arrangement spatially shaped the insularity and the social interactions of the people who experienced it. Further, this islanding and the associated bordering practices had significant impacts across the dimensions of culture, territory, and society.

The islanded identity was very informed by the boundaries and borders erected and hardened, which drew distinctions for those inside the Covid-archipelago and how this islanded space was experienced. The performative and cultural geography was given meaning as a place where these jurisdictions and their respective residents assumed individual and social island(ed) identities which embodied and expressed islandness. This identity was taken aboard alongside other existing identities at the individual and jurisdiction level, and this islandness was very much dependent upon the relational interaction with the rest of Canada and, from a policy perspective, the federal government. This identity was defined externally by the rest of the country as well as internally by those who proudly flaunted their status of the new normal and non-quarantine travel within the Atlantic Bubble. The societal culture of togetherness and islandness came to the fore within this Covid-archipelago.

Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos are defined by their relativity to other places, their spatial and temporal aspects, their social construction and the permeability and interaction with their borders and defined boundaries. Such islanded construction provided an islanded sense of identity for those within the boundaries of these creations, affording a regime of apparent self containment and attaching ideals of islandness as shaped and impacted by this spatiotemporal existence. The hardening of subnational boundaries into firm borders provided the boundedness necessary to invoke such an understanding. Writ large, the Covid conditions led to significant insularisation occurring at numerous spatial scales worldwide. Island states and jurisdictions in the true geographic sense were feted as exemplar places, which were utilising their isolation and geography to keep the initial waves of the pandemic from permeating their shores.

Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos encompassed and interacted with the three major dimensions of borders: cultural, territorial, and social, as analysed above. The case of Covid-archipelagos, at multiple scales and employing different connective mediums nevertheless informed and in a sense defined by the boundaries and borders emplaced, is the embodiment of archipelagic thinking and island-island relations in pandemic times. Islanding in the Covid-19 era again brought us back to the notion of seclusion and detachment that in a way echoes the paradigms that had already been deconstructed in the field of island studies. Metaphors of islands still haunt our everyday life, but these emerged island imaginaries enabled archipelagic relations to emerge practically in the shadow of island metaphors of seclusion. This consequently leads us to re-think insularisation and what it meant to be insularised in the Covid-19 period. The interaction of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos and the concept of insularity suggest that engagement with these frames of inquiry is crucial to consider in the future of island studies, and further exploration of this complex issue is warranted. One must wonder how Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos may impact future policy-making and insular embodiment during potential global crises in the future.

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Članek predstavlja »covidne otoke« in »covidna otočja« kot novo prostorsko-časovno dinamiko otoških imaginarijev, ki so nastali med pandemijo Covida-19. Ti družbeno-prostorski otoški konstrukti so se pojavili tako na mikro (gospodinjstva) kot na makro (pravo) prostorskih ravneh na podlagi različnih interakcij in procesih otočenja. Koncepta covidni otok in covidno otočje temeljita na literaturi in idejah iz različnih akademskih disciplin, ter predvsem na osnovi teorije otočnosti. Opredeljuje ju njuna relativnost v odnosu do drugih krajev, njun prostorski in časovni vidik, njuna družbena konstrukcija ter prepustnost in interakcija z njunimi mejami in opredeljenimi omejitvami.