

THE ROYAL REPUBLIC OF LADONIA

A Micronation built of Driftwood, Concrete and Bytes

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ABSTRACT: The Royal Republic of Ladonia, the brainchild of artist Lars Vilks, is a micronation that advocates freedom of expression, supporting art and creativity. This article outlines Ladonia as the physical territory claimed in the Kullaberg peninsula in Sweden and the online community, where the government, nobles, and citizens gather. Ladonia coexists as both a physical territory and as a large and active online community, distinguishing itself from other micronations, which are either active online communities or claim small physical territories. Using Ladonia as the context, this article extends the concept of *aislamiento* (insularity/islandness) to show how a micronation can have coexisting and interrelated states of *aislamiento*.

KEYWORDS: *Aislamiento*, Sweden, Micronationalism, Micronations, Post-Nation, Third Places

Introduction

To define is to limit. (Oscar Wilde, 1890)

Ladonia is a micronation built on freedom of expression that values art and creativity. In defining Ladonia this article has the challenge of constraining this micronation within a conceptual framework, and Oscar Wilde's words apply to this challenge. To define Ladonia we need to find its limits, both virtual and physical. The territory claimed by this micronation is part of a natural reserve on the Kullaberg peninsula in southern Sweden (Figures 1 and 2). Ladonia was established in 1996 as the result of a years-long court battle between artist Lars Vilks and local authorities over his artworks; notably 'Nimis', which is made of driftwood, and 'Arx,' which is made of concrete. Besides its physical territorial claim, Ladonia also boasts a large and active online community. As Hayward (2018) argues, one manifestation of micronationalism has involved a series of attempts to create semblances of nations on islands and offshore platforms due to their clearly defined boundaries as demarcations of, and rationales for, their imagined secessions (eg the

¹ In order to eliminate any perception of potential conflict of interest, the first-mentioned author discloses he has never been involved or took part in the Ladonian Government or politics whatsoever but since November 30th 2014 he is a noble citizen of Ladonia.

Principality of Sealand, the Kingdom of Redonda). A more recent tendency has involved the creation of micronations as entities that only exist within extended online communities (eg the Grand Duchy of Westarctica, the Grand Duchy of Flandrensis). This study discusses how Ladonia coexists as both a physical territory and an online community.



Figure 1 – Map of Ladonia's position on the Kullaberg peninsula
(Source: <https://www.ladonia.org/about/maps-landscape/>)



Figure 2 – Ladonia's position within Sweden
(Source: <https://www.ladonia.org/about/maps-landscape/>)

In supporting its assertion of Ladonia coexisting in a physical territory and as an online community, this article uses the concept of *aislamiento* for the territory in the Kullaberg peninsula and reviews the concept of “third place” for the online community. *Aislamiento* is a Spanish term that extends the notion of geographic islandness to that of socio-psychological isolation (Anderson, 2016). The physical territory and the online community may have their own particularities but they share the values of Ladonia, evidencing how a micronation can co-exist both as physical and online entity. Consequently, this article contributes to the study of micronationalism by showing how a micronation can have coexisting and interrelated states of *aislamiento*.

A qualitative research method was employed using publicly available data, including, but not limited to, data obtained through media outlets, the information available in the official homepage of Ladonia (<https://www.ladonia.org/>), and especially the news available on the *Ladonia Herald* (<http://www.ladoniaherald.com/>). Vilks is a prolific contributor to the *Ladonia Herald*, and from 2005 (the first year where publications start being systematically posted on the current version of the online newspaper) to 2014, Vilks published on average approximately 100 articles per year.² However, the activity on the online newspaper began to decline in 2012, with only a mere 15 publications in 2015, and with a continued reduction since then.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section explains the concepts of *aislamiento* and “third place”, and how they may apply to micronations. This is followed by a section describing the Royal Republic of Ladonia. The following section then discusses how the micronation of Ladonia can co-exist as both a physical territory and as an online community. A conclusion ends the article.

1. Conceptual Context

This article explains how Ladonia coexists as both a physical territory and an online community. This study adopts the definition of micronations as “territories that have been declared independent by individuals or groups despite the minimal likelihood of their being recognised as independent by any established nation state or international body” (Hayward, 2014b: 1) and micronationalism as “the enterprise of attempting to extract relatively minuscule parcels of territory from nation states to suit the needs, inclinations and/or fantasies of small groups of individuals” (Hayward, 2018: 160). Hence, most micronations are online communities or claim small physical territories (Taglioni, 2011). To address Hayward’s (2018) dichotomy in micronationalism as online communities or physical territories, Anderson’s (2016) concept of *aislamiento* is used for conceptualising Ladonia’s physical territory with geographic boundaries and Oldenburg (1999)’s concept of “third place” is introduced for conceptualising Ladonia’s online community.

1.1 *Aislamiento* – The Kullaberg Peninsula

Small territories that declare independence unilaterally or try to establish themselves as sovereign states are often islands, offshore platforms, or some sort of floating structures. Previous research in this journal discusses cases such as Lamb Island (Hayward, 2014a), Forvik (Grydehøj, 2014), Sark and Brecqhou (Johnson, 2014), Isonia (Hallerton and Leslie,

² To ensure the accuracy of our account, the section describing the Royal Republic of Ladonia was sent to Vilks, who responded confirming the accuracy, subject to a few minor corrections and additions, which have been incorporated into the final article.

2015), Principality of Outer Baldonia (MacKinnon, 2014) and the Principality of Sealand (Hayward, 2014b). The concept of *shima* encompasses more than the standard definition of islands, expanding to a broader idea of *islandness* (Suwa, 2007). Anderson (2016) and Suwa (2007) both argue that *islandness* involves more than the clear technicalities of cartography and geography. The idea of *shima*, in this regard, becomes a key to exploring the idea of islands embedded in cultural formations. Islands are, in this regard, “cultural landscapes” where imagination takes the form of reality. As Hayward (2016) discusses, some of the theory developed for studying islands can also be applied to other regions that are somehow islanded by geophysical features. The “islandish” identity of such places, which are not necessarily islands, can be created by their isolation (Anderson, 2016; Castro and Kober, 2018; Hayward, 2016), which includes some types of peninsula. Examples of such phenomena on peninsulas are Gibraltar (Gold, 2016) and New Zealand’s Otago Peninsula (Potiki, 2016).

When discussing the effects of isolation Anderson (2016) states that the concept of *aislamiento* is deeply social and political. It is noteworthy that the identification and promotion of micronations which are highly engaged in local social and political activity are often absurd. Hence, as Hayward (2018) points out, it is no accident in this regard that a variety of artists, including Vilks, have evoked micronations as a part of a broader artistic practice. Micronations can be considered as performed identities, and the human agents that create micronational *shima* are richly informative about highly specific communities and perceptions (Hallerton and Leslie, 2015).

1.2 The “Third Place” – The Online Community

Prior to the development of the Internet as a platform, people wishing to socialise within a community would need to gather in physical places. However, as Oldenburg (1999) states, such places started fading from our society even before the development of the Internet; perhaps due to our lifestyle changing towards an automobile-centric, suburban, fast-food, shopping-mall way of life (Rheingold, 2000). Hence online communities now play a key role functioning in ways resembling “third places” in the real world, with booming online communities supplanting the traditional bricks-and-mortar “third places” (Ducheneaut, Moore, and Nickell, 2007; Quandt and Kröger, 2013; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006).

Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) call one’s “first place” the home, involving those that one lives with, and the “second place” as the workplace. “Third places”, then, are anchors of community life and facilitate and foster broader, more creative interaction. A “third place” should be free or inexpensive, highly accessible, involve regulars (those who habitually congregate there) and be welcoming and comfortable. Oldenburg (1999) documents the decline in brick-and-mortar “third places” where individuals can gather to socialise informally beyond the workplace and home. A generation of young people are increasingly using virtual worlds, and they are almost certainly more familiar with these virtual social spaces than with, for instance, the corner bar (Ducheneaut et al, 2007; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006). Ducheneaut et al. (2007) see many similarities between physical “third places” and online communities, and the conceptualisation of “third place” has been used consistently to describe the communication of computer-mediated contexts such as online communities (Soukup, 2006). While Oldenburg (1999) describe activities and public spaces in the physical world, these concepts have also been applied to virtual worlds (Ducheneaut et al, 2007; Quandt and Kröger, 2013; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006). Online communities might not be the same kind of place that Oldenburg (1999) had in mind, but many of his descriptions of “third places” could also describe online communities.

Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) conclude that an online community, as a whole, can function in ways resembling the “third places” of the real world, having the capacity to function as one form of a new “third place” for informal sociability. Ducheneaut et al (2007) claim online communities offer social spaces that have their own virtues and problems, similar to the “third places” described by Oldenburg (1999). Based on their results, Ducheneaut et al. (2007) believe online communities are promising environments that could be designed to replace or perhaps supplement the “third places” of the physical world. It is noteworthy that Facebook groups are included within online communities which may function in ways resembling “third places” (Foster, 2013).

For Oldenburg (1999), the function of the “third place” is to serve the community by hosting regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals. To achieve this, “third places” must have a set of unique characteristics. However, researchers such as Ducheneaut et al. (2007) warn that Oldenburg’s criteria for “third places” should be used as indicators of the activities a social space should support, not as definite rules. A set of eight characteristics of “third places” for online communities based on Oldenburg (1999) and as compiled and adapted from three contemporary studies (Ducheneaut et al, 2007; Quandt and Kröger, 2013; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006), is provided below:

1. **Neutral ground:** Occupants of third places have little to no obligation to be there and individuals are free to come and go as they please with little obligation or entanglements with other participants. These individuals are not tied down to the area financially, politically, legally, or otherwise.
2. **Leveler:** Someone’s economic or social status does not matter in a third place, allowing for a sense of commonality among its occupants. There are no prerequisites or requirements that would prevent acceptance or participation in the third place.
3. **Conversation is the main activity:** In the third places, conversation is the main activity and wit is collectively valued.
4. **Accessibility and accommodation:** Third places must be accommodating to those who frequent them and - by definition - must also be easy to access, such that one may go alone at almost any time of the day or evening with an assurance that acquaintances will be there. Because virtual communities are perpetually accessible, participants are free to access as they see fit.
5. **The regulars:** Third places include a cadre of regulars who attract newcomers and give the space its characteristic mood. It is the regulars who give the place its character and who assure that on any given visit some member of the community will be there. Such regulars dominate not in a numerical sense but in an affective sense, setting the tone of the conversation and the general mood of the space.
6. **A low profile:** Third places are characteristically homely and without pretension.
7. **The mood is playful:** The general mood in third places is playful and marked by frivolity, verbal wordplay, and wit. Seriousness is anathema to a vibrant third place; instead, frivolity, verbal wordplay, and wit are essential.
8. **A home away from home:** Occupants of third places will often have the same feelings of warmth, possession, and belonging as they would in their own homes. They feel a piece of themselves is rooted in the space and gain spiritual regeneration by spending time there.

The next section provides a description and brief history of the Royal Republic of Ladonia, which will be followed by a section discussing how this micronation simultaneously coexists as both a physical territory and an online community.

2. Driftwood, Concrete and Bytes³

2.1 The Artworks and the “War” with Sweden

Ladonia is in the Kullaberg Nature Reserve, which is located in the Kullaberg peninsula in Skåne County, Sweden. The Kullaberg Nature Reserve is owned by the Krapperup Estate and consigned to the Gyllenstierna Krapperup Foundation. Ladonia is a few kilometres northwest of the town of Arild and somewhat farther from the town of Mölle. The story of Ladonia begins with Lars Vilks, a Swedish artist and author, a former professor at the Art Academy of Bergen (Lindqvist, 2011; Vilks, 1994). On the 31st of July 1980, the first pieces of driftwood that were to become the basis of an extended artwork known as ‘Nimis’ were brought together at the Kullaberg Nature Reserve (Vilks, 1996b, 2005a, 2005e, 2010b). ‘Nimis’ (Latin for “too much”) comprises a series of wooden sculptures considered as the heart of Ladonia (Figures 3 and 4). During the early 1980s Vilks continued working on and expanding ‘Nimis’ until it included multiple towers (with names such as ‘Wotan’s Tower’ and the ‘Tower of the Winds’) connected by a massive wooden labyrinth that allows visitors to climb down from the side of the mountain to the shore.

In 1982 the local authorities became aware of ‘Nimis’ and on February 19th the County Administrative Board in Skåne started to take action against Nimis, initiating what Vilks has characterised as the “war” with Sweden (Vilks, 1996b, 2005e). After a few years and several appeals, on November 3, 1986 (on a date that has become known as “Doom Day” in the Ladonian calendar) the Supreme Court decided Nimis was illegally built in a nature reserve (Vilks, 1996b, 2005e). Notwithstanding this, in 1991 Vilks commenced work on a new artwork called ‘Arx’ (Latin for “fortress”), made from reinforced concrete, which was completed in 1998 (Vilks, 1996b). In 1992 police inspected the work in progress and in 1994 Vilks was convicted for building ‘Arx’ in a nature reserve and fined 10,000 Krona (US\$1,100) by the District Court in Helsingborg.

Although both ‘Nimis’ and ‘Arx’ were deemed illegal constructions in the Kullaberg Nature Reserve, no action was taken to remove the artworks from the location. As Vilks noted:

When the authorities were to take actions against Nimis and Arx they had been sold (Nimis is now owned by the famous artist Christo). It would then be necessary to start the juridical process from the beginning with the new owners. (p.c 08.12.18)

In 1996, the Swedish Chancellor of Justice censured the County Administrative Board in Skåne due to its passiveness concerning both artworks remaining illegally in the nature reserve. In order to protect his artworks, Vilks seized the moment on 2nd June and declared the area surrounding them as the micronation of Ladonia (Vilks, 1996b, 2005e). In 1998, the County Administrative Board in Skåne reopened the case regarding the illegal artworks in

³ The material used for this section derives mostly from Vilks publications in the *Ladonia Herald* and from information provided on Ladonia’s official homepage. The authors are grateful to Lars Vilks for verifying the accuracy of this section and providing his own comments.

the Kullaberg Nature Reserve and demanded that were removed; however, the District Court denied the demand for demolition.



Figure 3 – ‘Nimis’ in August 1980

(source: <http://www.ladoniaherald.com/2010/celebration-nimis-30-years/>)

In 1999, Vilks created ‘Omfalos’, his third artwork in the Kullaberg Nature Reserve. ‘Omfalos’ is made of reinforced concrete and stones and stands 1.6 metres high. The Gyllenstiernska Krapperup Foundation reported Vilks to the police over the matter of ‘Omfalos’. Vilks responded that he was not the artist and that he merely has named the piece. In April 1999, Enforcement Services recommend demolition, which Vilks appealed against in the District Court. The Gyllenstiernska Krapperup Foundation demanded 100,000 Krona (US\$11,000) from Vilks in damages, legal expenses and that all the artwork to be removed. While the financial penalties were not imposed, the District Court recognised Vilks as the maker of ‘Omfalos’.

In 2000 the County Administrative Board in Skåne made an official pronouncement that exempted the area claimed as Ladonia from the nature reserve, meaning that the artworks would no longer be illegal, but the Gyllenstiernska Krapperup Foundation appealed against this pronouncement to the Supreme Court. In 2001 the Gyllenstiernska Krapperup Foundation demanded that the Enforcement Services remove ‘Omfalos’ but in April 2001 the Swedish artist Ernst Billgren bought Omfalos for 10,000 Krona (US\$1,100) and Billgren and Vilks appealed the decision in the District Court in Malmö. Billgren requested that ‘Omfalos’ not be harmed, and Vilks agreed with the owner Billgren to find an “artistically interesting solution” to the removal of ‘Omfalos’. Vilks applied to the County Administrative Board in Skåne to blow it up through the use of 100 kilos of dynamite as a tribute to Alfred Nobel in connection with the 100-years anniversary of the Nobel prize. On December 7th 2001 the County Administrative Board in Skåne made a secret decision that only the

Enforcement Services received. On the Sunday morning of December 9, 2001, the authorities swung into action and removed 'Omfalos' through the use of a boat with a hydraulic crane (Lindqvist, 2011).

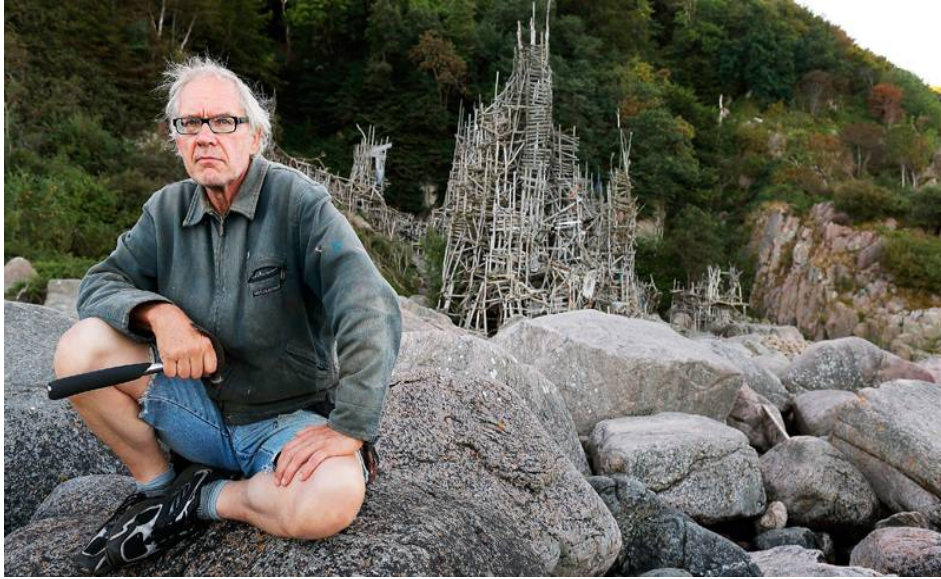


Figure 4 – Lars Vilks, with 'Nimis' in the background (source: <https://www.ladonia.org/administration/secretary-of-state/>)

In January 2002 Vilks made a request to the County Administrative Board in Skåne to erect a low-lying memorial on the site formally occupied by of 'Omfalos,' with permission for an 8 centimetre high monument being granted on 27th February (Vilks, 2005b). On February 22, 'Omfalos' was collected from the Enforcement Services and relocated to Mölle. On 26th September the District Court informed Vilks that the Enforcement Services required 92,500 Krona (US\$10,250) for the removal of 'Omfalos', in addition to legal expenses of 11,000 Krona (US\$1,200). The matter was appealed and in January 2003, the Court of Appeal decided that there is no leave to appeal the ruling of District Court, so the sum of 103,500 Krona (US\$11,450) remained payable. Vilks then appealed this decision to the Supreme Court. On March 27, 2003, 'Omfalos' was transported to Stockholm and the owner, Ernst Billgren, donated it to the Moderna Museet. In 2004, the Supreme Court upheld the ruling of the District Court regarding the payment of the 103,500 Krona (US\$11,450) and Vilks subsequently sued the State for 300,000 Krona (US\$33,200) over damages that he alleged that 'Omfalos' contracted during the removal.

While disputes over the artworks subsided in the mid 2000s, the State Secretary of Ladonia stated his concern that the "war" with Sweden was not over in 2011:

Concerning the ongoing war against the Swedes, it should be reported that they again are trying to interfere. This time they are accusing Ladonia of using wood taken from a Swedish forest near the border. There will be a court case about this incident. It might be true that Ladonia has taken wood from a Swedish forest but that has been the case even before Ladonia was proclaimed. Since

around 1985 we have been using would that have been left by the Swedish Authorities. (Vilks, 2011: online)

This concern proved warranted, with Vilks noting that the Skåne Regional Council commenced further legal action against Ladonia in 2018:⁴

In 2018 the County Council opened a new trial against the restorations work after the arson in 2016.⁵ The case is still open but probably I will lose and pay some fines. In 2017 the County Council invited me and our Minister of Art & Jump, Fredrik Larsson, to discuss an agreement concerning the future of the project. My lawyer recommended me to turn the proposal down which I did. (p.c 08.12.18)

2.2 An Interactive Micronation

Ladonia was declared as an independent nation by Vilks on 2nd June 1996 and immediately began accepting citizenship applications, formed an online parliament, and named Vilks the temporary regent (ie Chancellor). The name Ladonia comes from that of the dragon Ladon in Greek mythology, who had been appointed to guard the golden apples in the gardens of the Hesperides in the very far West by Juno, and the image of its fight against Herakles was placed by Zeus among the stars (Smith, 1867: 397, 704). The green flag of Ladonia was created by the Swedish artist Leif Eriksson with the green colour comprised of a mixture of the blue and yellow in the Swedish flag augmented by a green cross marked with thin white lines (Vilks, 1996b) (Figure 5).

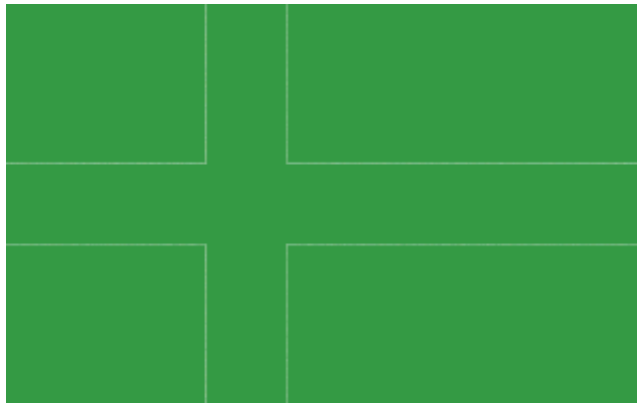


Figure 5 – Ladonian National Flag (source: <https://www.ladonia.org/about/symbols-currency/>)

⁴ The Skåne Regional Council is the county council of Skåne County in Sweden. The county council is composed by elected members and is the highest political body in the region, as opposed to the County Administrative Board in Skåne which guards the interest of the state in the region under the chairmanship of the county governor.

⁵ See subsequent discussions of arson incidents.

The *Ladonia Herald* was established online to disseminate news about Ladonia (Vilks, 1996a) and has been the main channel of communication among Ladonians since the creation of the micronation with a Facebook group being established for Ladonian citizens in 2008 (Vilks, 2008b). Celebrating the creation of Ladonia, Vilks made the following announcement in the *Ladonia Herald's* first issue:

The idea with industrial Ladonia is to produce experiences, ideas and information. Ladonia will not deal with what we can call "basic needs" as this is a minor task in the western world. One of the first problems to deal with is the concept of unemployment. There is no unemployment in Ladonia as there will be work to do and create in this country. The work done by Ladonians and by visitors and foreigners can be presented in the physical part of the country but to a large extent in the information files on the internet. I, therefore, ask everyone that makes a visit to this page to make a creative production in order to build up a supply of possibilities. (Vilks, 1996a)

In 1997, once 1,000 citizens had joined Ladonia, a combined election and referendum was held to decide on a system of government, ratify a constitution, elect a president, and elect a Queen. Following this, Ladonia was declared a (paradoxical) "republican monarchy" (or a "remony"), with a Queen and a president (Vilks, 2009b). The Ladonian government is composed of its Queen, the State Secretary, its ministers, ministries, ambassadors and embassies. Ywonne I Jarl was elected Queen in 1997 but disappeared in 2011 (Vilks, 2011b, 2011i). The disappearance of the queen brought some uncertainty to Ladonia (Vilks, 2011h), but finally, a new queen, Queen Carolyn I, was announced in on Ladonia's National Day (Vilks, 2011c, 2011f) and on 19th September 2011 the coronation of Queen Carolyn I was held at 'Nimis,' attended by members of the new Royal Family, the State Secretary, ministers, and members of the Swedish media.

The Office of the State Secretary regularly releases citizenship numbers and the corresponding numbers for every year of citizenship enrolment since independence in June of 1996 (although these numbers do not reflect any births or deaths) (Vilks, 2017). As of 2018, Ladonia has about 20,000 citizens, 840 nobles, and 125 ministers. The State Secretary processes requests for new citizenships and accepts requests for noble titles. To become a citizen, the person must apply through the official homepage of Ladonia to become a noble the citizen must pay 30 Örtug. The Örtug is the Ladonian currency, valued at approximately €1.00 or 10 Krona (US\$1.11), with the proceedings going to the maintenance of Ladonia.

In its early days, new citizens of Ladonia would receive a token passport (Vilks, 1996b), however, the matter escalated when, in 2002, approximately 4,000 Pakistan citizens applied for citizenship in Ladonia in hope of a better life in Europe. Since then, from time to time Ladonia emphasises that it does not issue passports or visas for entering Europe. As Vilks wrote in the *Ladonia Herald*:

I want to repeat that Ladonia does not issue passports. Especially from Nigeria and Pakistan we still have a lot of applications for citizenship with the aim of receiving passports for international use. Anyone is welcome to become a citizen of Ladonia. But we cannot offer any jobs or housing nor passports. (Vilks, 2008d)

However, Vilks noted that in 2018 Ladonia has again experienced a high inflow of citizenship applications:

In the beginning of 2018 there was a new case of citizen applications mostly from India and Pakistan. Someone had made a video on YouTube with pictures from Ladonia but also from Ladonia, Texas. It showed how applications could be made. We received around 10.000 applications and they are still coming. We had the video removed from YouTube... but it made little difference. (p.c 08.12.18)

Given that Ladonia is not recognised by the international community, there is an understanding in the Ladonian government that there should be no further issuances of passports (Vilks, 2011a).

While engaging with the online nation of Ladonia is relatively easy, visiting the physical nation of Ladonia is harder. People interested in visiting Ladonia must drive about 40 km northwest from Helsingborg heading to Himmelstorps Hembygdsgård. The path begins as an easy stroll past Himmelstorp, a well-preserved 18th Century farmstead, but quickly becomes a steep and rocky climb down to the coast. From Himmelstorp the distance down to Nimis is 1.2km following the signs, which are a yellow N carved into things like fence posts. The trail passes through relatively steep and rough terrain. Sturdy shoes and good physical health are required if you wish to visit the physical territory of Ladonia. Despite this level of difficulty in accessing it, thousands of local and international tourists visit each year, especially during summer (Lindqvist, 2011; Stebleton, 2016; Vilks, 1996b, 2014b). Ladonia attracts tourism not only due to the artworks but perhaps also due to the controversy. Despite the confrontations with the County Administrative Board in Skåne, a large percentage of the local community supports Vilks, especially people working in the tourism industry (Paíno, Pocasangre and Suárez, 2016: 30-31) since the area has become a tourist attraction. Both Ladonians and Swedish authorities are concerned for the safety of visitors. The most common accident is when a person makes a wrong step among the stones or on the steep path to Nimis (Vilks, 2008c) and each year there are several accidents (see Vilks, 2006a, 2009a). Due to this, the County Administrative Board in Skåne decided to erect signs to inform visitors of the dangers of climbing 'Nimis' (Paíno et al, 2016: 30-31, 54).

'Nimis' is particularly exposed to the elements, especially storms and has required frequent maintenance. The first version of 'Wotan's Tower' (one of 'Nimis's' structures) was destroyed by a storm in 2000, then the second version destroyed in 2011 by another storm (Vilks, 2011g). Another strong storm hit Ladonia in 2013, destroying the third version of 'Wotan's Tower', and toppling the 'Tower of the Winds', as well as the 'Throne' (other structures that comprise part of the 'Nimis' artwork) (Vilks, 2013). In December 2014, 'Wotan's Tower' was destroyed yet again by another storm (Vilks, 2015). Besides storms, 'Nimis' has also fallen victim to arson attacks. On 28th January 1985, vandals torched 'Nimis' and the flames destroyed two-thirds of the structure. Another substantial fire was reported on 3rd February 1997⁶ (Vilks, 2005e) and on 24th-25th November 2016 a quarter of 'Nimis' was damaged by an arson attack, with the 'Tower of the Winds' destroyed (Unattributed, 2016). Even though Ladonia is subject to storms and arson attacks, Vilks and other volunteers continue working on its artworks. It is understandable that maintenance is a safety concern for both Ladonians and Swedish authorities (Paíno et al., 2016; Vilks, 2006f). Sometimes work is undertaken to erect new towers (Vilks, 2005f), other times on the restoration of current artworks (Vilks, 2006e, 2010c, 2013).

⁶ In personal correspondence in 2018, Vilks notes the correct year of this arson attack is 1997, not 1996 as recorded in Vilks (2005e).



Figure 6 – Queen Carolyn I visits Ladonia after the arson attack in 2016
(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ladonia/>)

Ladonia is often intertwined with a wide range of different types of artworks. This connection began with Vilks himself being an artist (Vilks, 1994) and the support from other members of the artistic community, such as Joseph Beuys, who bought 'Nimis' for US\$1,500 on April 25, 1984 (Vilks, 2005e). Following his death two years later, Jeanne-Claude Denat de Guillebon and Christo (Vladimirov Javacheff) bought the artwork (Vilks, 1996b). Artists continue to visit Ladonia regularly (see Vilks, 2007h, 2012) and many others are inspired by Ladonia. As an example, in literature, there is the 2006 "poetic cookbook" *Ladonian Magnitudes*, by the Canadian author Bryan Sentes, and one of Ladonia's ministers is Australian poet Chris Mansell (Mansell, 2011; Vilks, 2011d). Ladonia was also featured in an exhibition at Apexart in New York in 2007, with a square metre representing Ladonia (Vilks, 2007c, 2007e), and an ensemble called Neurobash became the Ladonian National Band in 2007 (Vilks, 2007g; Hallerton and Hill, 2019).⁷

⁷ There are also a number of other cultural contributions from Ladonians that acknowledge the micronation in various ways, for example, a member of Ladonia's nobility featured a pizza named 'Nimis' in his restaurant (Vilks, 2007d).



Figure 7 - 'Arx' (photo by Håkan Dahlström, 2007:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/93755244@Noo/819574754>)



Figure 8 - 'Nimis' (Photo: Erik Daugaard, 2007:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/80528961@Noo/1279720237>)

Due to the micronation's controversial origins, Ladonians are used to satire. For instance, unbeknown to him, American filmmaker Michael Moore was awarded an Honorary Citizenship and Honorary Knighthood (Vilks, 2007f). Also, although ignored by the organisers, Ladonia submitted a contribution to the Eurovision Song Contest in 2009 (Vilks, 2009c), and in 2010, as part of the celebrations of 30 years of Nimis, Ladonians held an election where people could vote whether Sweden should join Ladonia (Vilks, 2010a). The controversy surrounding Ladonia and Vilks often sparks media interest, and reporters and film crews visit Ladonia to interview the State Secretary, the Queen and ministers. For example, film crews from the Discovery Channel program *Lonely Planet*, Al Jazeera International, and CNN have visited Ladonia (Vilks, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b), as well as documentary makers from Canada, Latvia and the Netherlands (Vilks, 2008a, 2014a, 2014c, 2014d).

3. Discussion

The Royal Republic of Ladonia coexists as both a physical territory and a large and active online community, contrasting with most micronations, which are either online communities or else claim small physical territories. The territory in the Kullaberg peninsula is subject to the concept of *aislamiento*, whereas the online community is a "third place". The physical territory of Ladonia is in the Kullaberg Nature Reserve, which is in the Kullaberg peninsula in Skåne County, Sweden, and can only be reached on foot following a steep and rocky climb down to the coast. Due to its isolation, Vilks was able to build his 'Nimis' and 'Arx' mostly unchallenged by local authorities. 'Nimis' itself has grown to majestic proportions and is considered the heart of Ladonia, and the main attraction. Consequently, it can be argued that Ladonia attempts, and often succeeds, in having its very own identity, distinct from mainland Sweden - an identity rooted in Vilks' message that art trumps the social and political establishment. This identity succeeds in part due to the absurdity of the enterprise of establishing Ladonia, which in itself should not be surprising given Ladonia is the brainchild of an artist (Hayward, 2018).

As evidenced in the previous section, Ladonia has experienced issues just like any other micronation that has a physical territory, such as problems related to the issues of passports and legal disputes with authorities (eg the Principality of Hutt River, the Principality of Sealand, etc.). Due to the amount of local and international tourists visiting Ladonia, the social and political independent identity of Ladonia is supported by neighbouring communities and especially the local tourism industry. Therefore, it can be argued that *aislamiento* is fomented from both sides of the border.

Since his micronation's inception, Vilks has used the internet to spread Ladonia's message as a proud, free, and interactive micronation. One year after its declaration of independence, Ladonia had more than 1,000 citizens registered. In 2008 the official Ladonian citizens' closed Facebook group was established, and as of 2018, the Facebook group had approximately 1,800 members. Following on contemporary research, it is argued the closed Facebook group functions in ways resembling a "third place" (Ducheneaut et al, 2007; Foster, 2013; Quandt and Kröger, 2013; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006). Following on from the decline of bricks-and-mortar "third places" (Oldenburg, 1999), micronational entities that only exist within extended online communities have become welcoming free and highly accessible virtual places where people can habitually congregate. The Ladonian citizens' closed Facebook group fulfils the requirements of a "third place" by offering a neutral ground, being a levelling place, where conversation is the main activity. The page is

conveniently accessible by any Ladonian citizen, it has its own regulars, a low profile, and the mood is playful. Finally, Ladonia has become “a home away from home”. It is noteworthy that only a small proportion of Ladonian citizens in the online community have ever set foot on the physical territory of Ladonia. While Ladonia has similar origins to the Principality of Hutt River (ie legal issues - see Castro and Kober, 2018), Ladonia has a mission which attracts artists and people who champion art and creativity (although nobody lives in the reserve). What is interesting about Ladonia is how the physical territory coexists with the online community, and how they support each other. One is the physical Ladonia, where tourists hike to visit Vilks’ artworks, and the other is the online community, where the government, nobles, and citizens gather. Events which take place in the physical territory of Ladonia in the Kullaberg Nature Reserve are propagated via the online community, and decisions and suggestions made on the online community contribute to the physical territory of Ladonia.

A comparison can be drawn between Ladonia accepting online citizenship applications and Estonia’s e-Residency program (<https://e-resident.gov.ee/>) launched in 2014. Similar to Ladonia, Estonia has decided to use the internet to offer virtual residency. Whereas Ladonia offers its citizens a platform for freedom of expression, art and creativity, Estonia offers access to services such as company formation, banking, payment processing and taxation. The Estonian program is aimed at location-independent non-Estonians entrepreneurs who are not required to have visited the country. The Estonian virtual residency program shows how established nations may also adopt similar strategies to micronations, providing an example of what citizenship might look like in a post-national world (Keating, 2018).

While Hayward (2018) has asserted that micronations are either physical territories or extended online communities, Ladonia displays both characteristics, being a physical territory and an online community that resembles a “third place”. The physical territory at “war” with Sweden, isolated in a nature reserve on a peninsula, legitimates the socio-political *aislamiento* of Ladonia, and therefore the brainchild of an artist of a proud, free, and interactive micronation, gets embroiled in a bigger quest of welcoming worldwide citizens deprived of a “third place”. As mostly light-hearted undertaking which provides its citizens with the opportunity to socially engage, Ladonia has some similarities with the now-defunct Principality of Outer Baldonia (MacKinnon, 2014). Notwithstanding, as McConnell, Moreau, and Dittmer (2012) observe, humour and irony are not necessarily antonymic to seriousness, as such playful engagement can be interpreted as a critique of states and their bureaucracies.

4. Conclusion

The Royal Republic of Ladonia was established as a micronation for freedom of expression, supporting art and creativity. Since its inception the micronation has established itself in the territory Vilks has claimed for Ladonia and within an extended online community. Ladonia coexists as both a physical and online community, distinguishing itself from other micronations, which only exist in one of these realms. The physical territory in the Kullaberg peninsula and the online community may have their own particularities, but evidence shows they are interrelated, making Ladonia a unique micronation that spreads across both. Drawing on this, we have demonstrated how a micronation can have coexisting and interrelated states of *aislamiento*.

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