

Carloforte and Ísafjörður, more-than-islands in transitions

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SUSTAINABILITY

Transitions are impacting the imaginary on intangible heritage. New narratives are emerging, highlighting a potential agency of languages for social cohesion in newly establishing multicultural assemblages.

A more-than-island perspective, able to "think with" the island is required to develop policies and projects aimed at social and cultural sustainability.

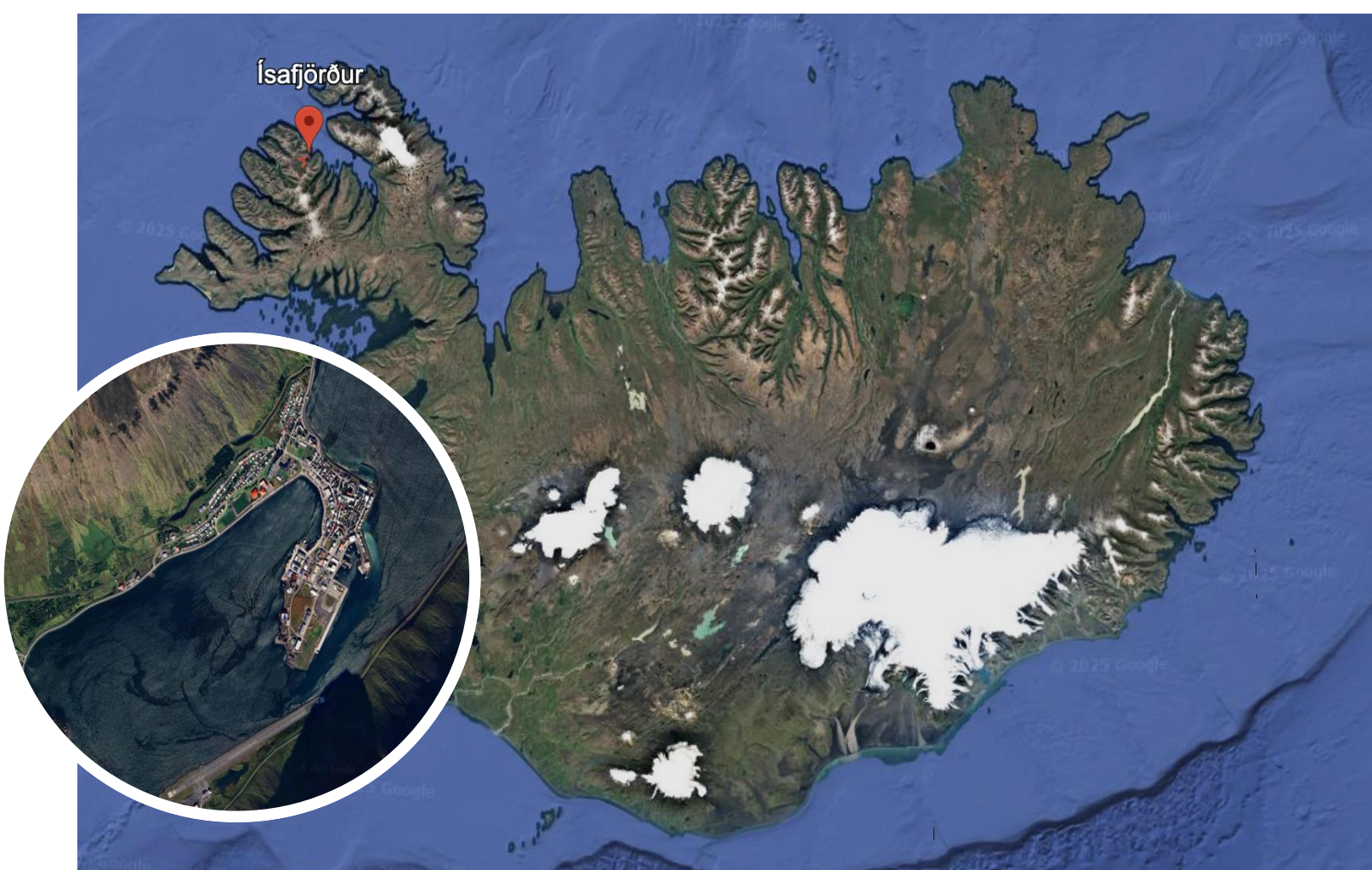
«We recognise space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny.» (Doreen Massey, 2005)

CONTEXT

The research is carried out in **Carloforte, on the Island of San Pietro, Italy**, and in the municipality of Ísafjarðarbær in the Westfjords region of Iceland.

The two realities appear to share similar **trajectories in shifting narratives on insularity**, remoteness and transitions which have social, linguistic and economic sustainability impacts.

- **Economic shift:** from traditional economies to new innovative practices (Sullivan, 2011); from resource dependent livelihood to cultural economies based on the transformation of identities (Jóhannesson, 2003) as a key element for spatial reorganization (Sarup, 1996)
- **Social shift:** territories can be shaped by the community capacity – or incapacity – to cope with instability, change, and new challenges (Kokorsch and Benediktsson, 2018)



What we know:

Islands are ideal **fields** to explore contemporary transitions, tracking inhabitants' reactions (Brinklow 2023; Baldacchino 2006; Malatesta, Gallia 2026). While small island populations are representative of global mobilities, inhabitants' perspectives on **transitions** is less studied. Island dynamics can be described as **assemblages** (Delanda 2016; Tsing 2025) or "hyper-lieux" (Lussault 2023).

Research gap:

- No contributions on how and if intangible heritage narrations can act to **re-shape territories** and, extensively, the concepts of insularity and remoteness
- The impact of the ongoing transitions on this **fluid** concept of "island" is still unexplored
- The **interplay** between discursive practices, intangible heritage manifestations, transitions and contested island definitions

RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent do the intangible heritage narratives act to **re-shape the concepts of insularity and remoteness in San Pietro and Ísafjörður**?

Sub-questions:

- How are the **narratives of language** evolving in San Pietro and Ísafjörður as a consequence of the on-going transitions (economic and social)?
- Where and how do **linguistic practices** and narratives of languages as place attachment expressions (namely the programmes *Gefum íslensku séns* and *Tabarchin Pe léze e scrive*) have an impact on the perception of "insularity" and "remoteness"?
- Is it possible to identify patterns, boundaries or **conditions of cross-influence** between linguistic practices and the on-going transitions (economic, social) that may impact a different **conceptualization of insularity**?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The research builds on an **interpretative, grounded theory approach**. Deep focus is put on the participants' subjective (and collective) meaning productions, included the researcher's, whose positioning within the case studies will always be considered in the knowledge construction (Sultana, 2006).

Donna Haraway's and Karen Barad reflections on diffraction (Barad, 2007; Haraway 1992) are kept as an inspirational reference throughout the study. Barad's process of interference, meaning that **our study areas are iteratively reconfigured by intertwined relations, entanglements and intersections**, is key to interpret the relational positioning of the researcher into the fields as well as the new **reconfigurations of the concept of island into "more-than-island"**.

SELECTED REFERENCES

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CHOICE OF CASE STUDIES AND COMPARABILITY RATIONALE: examples of "more-than-islands"

Traits in common — transition, sustainability, intangible heritage

Remote connection nodes

Still both central and marginal.
Need for a trans-scalar perspective

Economic & social history

Not fully devoted to tourism;
emerged as a resource only
a few decades ago

Strong intangible heritage

Reinforcing sense of place,
belonging and identity;
different meanings by producer

Linguistic landscapes in transition

Community cohesion drivers

Languages as drivers of cohesion in a
newly multi-cultural context



Lacking minority-language status

Icelandic and Tabarchin face uneven
pressures and risk of extinction



Community-driven initiatives

Reinforce linguistic knowledge and
cultural vitality in multicultural societies



Productivity & permeability

Both languages show resistance toward foreign
influences and frequent assimilation phenomena



Socio-cultural sustainability at risk, caused by:

Commodification risk

Commodification of language in tourism
(Heller et al. 2014)

Localistic pride & cultural interest

Fostering within local communities
(Castillo-Villar & Merlo-Smoni 2021; Lonardi et al. 2020)

RESEARCH METHODS

This research will follow a **constructivist approach** where knowledge is gathered during the study, that will therefore be flexible and dynamic (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2011; Sarantakos, 2013; Charmaz). Based on the assumption that **identity and languages** cannot be considered in their fixity, but are the result of continuous, **iterative performativity**, a "discursive construction with material consequences" (Smith, 2006, in Harvey, 2008), and that research always implies an interaction between researcher and the area of study, where the nature of the observed changes as a consequence of the "entanglement of the observer within any process of meaning-making" (Barad, 2007), the positioning and reflexivity of the researcher into the field will be taken into deep account (Farhana 2006).

"The moment the insider steps out from the inside she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. [...] She is, in other words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference and that of reminding 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at." (Trinh T. Minh-Ha, 2004)

RESEARCH OUTLINE

For the purposes of this research, the two localities will be examined from 2023 to 2026. 2023 is the year of the very first contact of the researcher with both places, and 2026 marks the end of the data collection.

