

“Ní neart go cur le chéile”¹

Sense of community and migration on the Aran Islands



Lisa Truijen & Sigrid van Dijk

¹ “There is strength in unity”

All photos are taken by the authors on the Aran Island during the fieldwork period in 2018



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Maps



Figure 1 Map of Ireland²

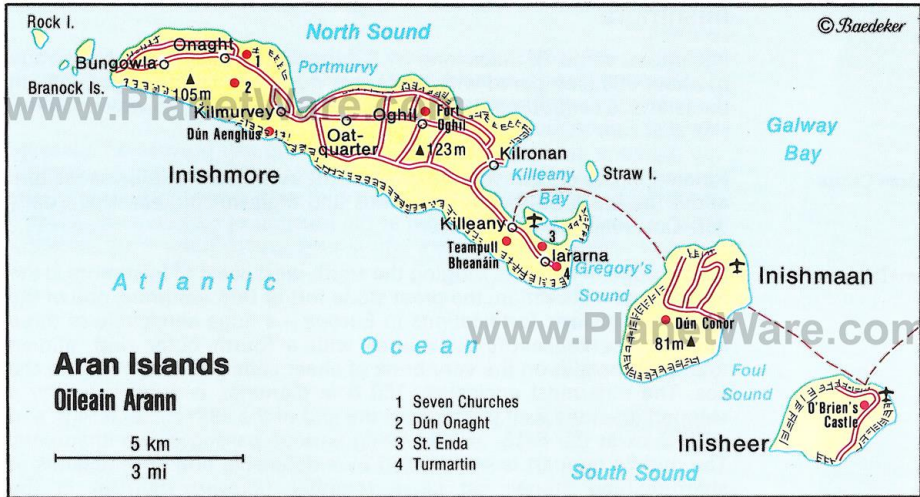


Figure 2 Map of the Aran Islands³

² <https://thefiberarchive.com/2016/04/08/history-project-the-legend-of-the-aran-sweater/screen-shot-2016-04-05-at-12-09-32-pm/>

³ <https://thevarietyoflife.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/aran-islands-map.jpg>

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Introduction

People here are relaxed. [...] Also they say it is a really nice place to bring up children here. Since they can run everywhere, go wherever they want without a car crossing by or without a chance of criminality [...]. It is a really safe and easy-going place to live. [...] Yet, during winter it is just too much, to only be here on the island. But I do like to live here. But sometimes a busy place is nice too.⁴

Islands with small communities require a certain lifestyle from the people living there, like the abovementioned quote from a resident of the Aran Islands shows. In other terms, people have to adapt to island life and island time. The small communities on these islands and the relative isolation are a combination that asks for unique authentic cultures, identities and history (Burholt et al. 2013). About 600 million people, ten percent of the world's population, are currently living on islands (King 2007, 53). Most scientists regard islands as 'special' places with distinctive characteristics (King 2007). Especially small islands were quite isolated from other parts of the world for a long time and became relatively self-sufficient. As a result, a positive attribute often ascribed to small islands is a strong sense of community and social cohesion (Burholt et al. 2013, 4). With globalisation and modernisation kicking in however, access to mobility and contact with the mainland and distant family members has become easier (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006). Despite their isolated location, islands nowadays have a high mobility of people, goods and services (Christensen and Mertz 2010). Yet, there are still very few learning and job opportunities on small islands. This leads to a decrease in the population number (Burholt, Scharf and Walsh 2013; The O'Brien Press 2017; Royle 2003). Many small island communities do not exist anymore because of complete depopulation (Burholt et al. 2013; Royle 2003, 24). There was no possibility for the people left on these islands to sustain themselves. Therefore, tragic moments went by when for example the last resident of an offshore island had to say goodbye (Royle 2003, 24).

Ultimately, small islands have to adapt their economies and communities to the modern world in order to survive (Burholt et al. 2013, 3). Small islands are dealing with globalisation, modernisation and migration in separate ways than the mainland. Although it seems that emigration is most prevalent, immigration and not to forget remigration are much more present

⁴ Interview Bary, born and raised on Inishmore, about living on the Aran Islands, 27-02-2018

than the decreasing population numbers may show. As Burholt and colleagues describe (2013) migration flows characterise small islands, they represent an important characteristic.

This thesis will focus on the relation between islands, migration and sense of community, all considering a changing world in terms of globalisation and modernisation. Little research is done to the combination of migration and a sense of community on small islands (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson, 2006). This thesis will therefore provide new insights in the study of islands considered on their own terms, which in literature is also known as nissology. In this approach to island studies, islands are the rule and not the exception and deserve to be treated in this way (Depraetere 2008). Nissology favours the islanders' own emic perspective (King 2009). We believe this is very important, because only in this perspective a local reality can be understood. As an outsider it is difficult to understand how a specific group gives meaning to a certain event, custom or tradition. We applied this emic perspective in our own anthropological research to understand both the influence of migration on these customs and traditions, and the other way around.

The specific context that is used for this research is the Aran Islands. This group of islands is located on the West coast of Ireland and consist of three main islands: Inishmore, Inishmaan and Inisheer. By investigating migration and sense of community in this specific context, we would like to add to the theoretical debate on sense of community and migration in times of globalisation and modernisation. The Aran Islands have dealt with an increasing decline in population. Moreover, the residents of the Aran Islands are well-known because of their authentic identity, and therefore kept a strong sense of community (Ashley 2001; Burholt Scharf and Walsh 2013; The O'Brien Press 2017). This makes the context of the Aran Islands extra interesting for our research topic. This research tries to investigate what the decline of the population and increasing multiculturalism does with the sense of community on the islands. Furthermore, this research will show how people deal with the effects of globalisation and increasing mobility. Globalisation is a worldwide process that we cannot counter. Everybody has to adjust to this ongoing process. Socially, this research will show how a small community which has been mostly isolated for so long, deals with these changes. Therefore, this research can be applied on a broader level. It can be applied to all isolated societies or groups that deal with a decreasing population and the interfering of global markets in their own economy, such as the fishing industry. The main research question in this study is as follows: *“How does migration influence the sense of community of the residents of the Aran Islands, and what is the impact of the existing sense of community on migration from and to the Aran Islands?”*

This research is complementary because it investigates both the influence of migration on the sense of community and vice versa. Therefore, Lisa Truijen has focussed on the sense of community on the Aran Islands and Sigrid van Dijk on the migration aspect. By living and participating in the life of the residents on the Aran Islands for ten weeks we have been able to display the emic perspective and contribute to the discourse in nissology. We lived on Inishmore, the largest island with the most inhabitants. Because there are little direct travelling possibilities between the three islands, our research is mainly focussed on this island. Most data were gathered on Inishmore.

The methodologies that have been applied during the ten weeks of fieldwork consist of hanging out, participant observation, life-stories and interviews. Small talk is the interview technique that was used to gain rapport with the residents of the Aran Islands. Followed up by semi-structured and structured interviews. Participant observation is done by going to community events and activities that happened during these ten weeks. By collecting data through fieldnotes we tried to visualize the situation and the reality on the Aran Islands concerning the sense of community and the effects of migration. To structure and organise our data we divided our main question into three subtopics. The first subtopic concerns the Aran identity that we both focus on. The concept of group identity and collective memory are used for this section. Subtopic two elaborates on the sense of community and how that is portrayed on the islands. A specific focus is aimed on the feeling of belonging that the residents of the Aran Islands have towards each other and towards the community. Lisa Truijen has gathered data for this topic. The last subtopic concerns the aspect of migration and the way in which inhabitants of the Aran Islands are dealing with it. Sigrid van Dijk has focussed on this topic.

In the upcoming paragraphs we will elaborate on the theoretical and practical, methodological foundation of our research. Firstly, we will give a theoretical framework about the concepts of group identity, sense of belonging, sense of community and migration. This last concept will be related to globalisation and to sense of community. In the second section there will be elaborated on the specific research context, the Aran Islands. The concepts used in the theoretical framework will be applied. Thereafter, the empirical chapters will be discussed. In these three chapters the subtopics will be analysed, based on the research data gathered during our ten weeks of fieldwork and the theoretical framework. Next, the conclusion and discussion will follow, in which the empirical chapters will be summarized and the research question will be answered. Also a few recommendations for further research will be done. This thesis will end with an attachment, a short summary of the research project.

Chapter 1 Theoretical framework

1.1 Group identity

(Lisa)

Group identity has been an important concept in the social sciences for quite some time. According to McClain et al. (2009, 475) most definitions in social sciences of group identification refer to: “*An individual’s awareness of belonging and having a psychological attachment to a certain group based on a perception of shared beliefs, feelings, interests, and ideas with other group members*”. Within the anthropology discipline, Harold Isaacs is one of the scientists to define group identity. In 1974 he wrote ‘Basic group identity: the idols of the tribe’ and described this basic group identity, as something:

Which consists of the ready-made set of endowments and identifications that every individual shares with others from the moment of birth by the chance of the family into which he is born at that given time in that given place. (Isaacs 1974, 26)

According to Isaacs group identity exists of eight characteristics that are ascribed at birth. These are “*the history and origins of the group, nationality, language, religion, culture, the physical body, a person’s name and the geography of one’s birthplace*” (Isaacs 1974, 27). Isaacs draws on psychologists like Erikson, and explains these characteristics as acquired by early processes of socialization. They have great power because of a universal, deep-rooted psychological and human need for a sense of belonging (Isaacs 1974, 29-30).

According to Croucher it is not strange that Isaacs’ definition of group identity comprises sense of belonging. “*Group identity always relies upon an ‘other’ and belonging to an ‘Us’ necessitates the existence and recognition of a ‘them’*” (Croucher 2003, 40). This is in line with the ideas of another anthropologist, Eriksen, who states that it is obvious that every group is defined in relation to what it is not, to its outsiders. All social identities “*have internal criteria for cohesion and solidarity articulated through the sharing of certain practices, and the communication of a difference that makes a difference to all who are not included*” (Eriksen 1995, 429). Although Eriksen talks about social identity instead of group identity, he emphasizes the important role of exclusion in creating identities. Tajfel (1982), who made the original model of social identity, states that group identity can only exist as long as it contributes to a person’s social identity. Because of this, the characteristic of social identity that Eriksen is talking about, can also be applied to group identity. The idea of securing one’s own identity by

distancing and stigmatising another is called *othering* (Grove and Zwi 2006). According to Barth (1969 in Eriksen 1995) this process of exclusion becomes even more important as the contact with outsiders increases. In the contemporary, globalising world this contact with outsiders has become much easier. The accelerating flows of people, goods and images trigger tendencies towards localization (Appadurai 1996). According to Appadurai (1996) it seems that with the open horizons of globalisation, determined endeavours towards boundary-making arise, shown in terms of belonging and exclusion. Subsequent to these ideas, the effects of globalisation should be even greater on the Aran Islands, because of the history of poor transport links to the mainland and the largely self-contained lifestyle on these islands (Burholt et al. 2013).

The general view of globalisation however is that it is drifting us apart. Everything is becoming more and more impersonal and anonymous. According to multiple authors (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson, 2006; Marsh et al. 2007) people in the Western world are increasingly focussed on the individual. Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006) argue that through this the distinction between communities and personal networks has become increasingly blurred. Marsh and colleagues (2007) however, state that although we think of ourselves as individuals, our membership to particular groups is what is most important in the construction of the sense of identity. Having a social or group identity is a fundamental aspect of being a human. These needs for social bonding, loyalty and acceptance are timeless. However, globalisation did change the sense of belonging in a certain way. According to Beck (1992, in Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006) it is far more common now to have a sense of belonging to multiple groups and have multiple group identities. Marsh and colleagues (2007) affirm to this by stating that it is possible to choose from a wide range of groups and communities to shape your own group identities. Even Eriksen (1995) admits that identities are not static anymore, they are shifting. No longer is a group identity fixed to the neighbourhood or community.

Assuming these statements and the abovementioned ideas of Appadurai and Barth, globalisation has affected the group identity and sense of belonging of the residents of the Aran Islands. Because of their exclusion from the mainland for a long time, their own community was all they knew and hereby very important. Yet, in line with the other abovementioned ideas, their range of group communities have widened because of globalisation and their group identity is no longer just simply the one of the islands. Nevertheless, to the ideas of Appadurai and Barth we could expect the sense of belonging and exclusion of others on the Aran Islands have grown with globalisation and its effects kicking in. This because the residents want to ensure their group identity and their own community (Grove and Zwi 2006).

Collective memory

Part of group identity is “*the history and origins of the group*” (Isaacs 1974, 27). This is expressed in the concept of collective memory. The discourse around collective memory began with the work of Emile Durkheim. Although he never spoke of this term, he noted that every society exhibits and requires a certain sense of historical continuity with the past (Durkheim 1963). This past is according to Durkheim (1973, 277) the essential factor in creating solidarity. Collective memory can be seen as one of the elementary forms of social life in this way (Misztal 2003). Yet, collective memory is based on a vague notion of the shared past and is herewith imagined. There is no face-to-face interaction between the past and the present generations (Gross 2002). In bigger societies, like nations, unity also has to be imagined with someone’s contemporaries. It is impossible for residents in a nation to know everyone (Anderson 1989). This is a part of the reason why Anderson (1989) calls the modern nations ‘imagined communities’.

A student of Durkheim, called Maurice Halbwachs, was the first sociologist to actually use the term of collective memory and his work is seen as foundational to the discourse. In his study of national identity formation and maintenance he stressed the relevance of memory and its collective nature (Gross 2002, 344). “*While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember*” (Halbwachs 1950, 48). The individuals are the ones that remember, not groups or collectives. Being located in a specific group context, these individuals draw on that context to remember and recreate the past. “*Every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time*” (Halbwachs 1950, 84). This means that the group, for example the community on the Aran Islands, constructs the memory and the individuals in the group, so the residents themselves, do the work of the remembering. Although those who are ultimately remember are individuals, it is the society that determines what is ‘memorable’ and how it will be remembered (Gross 2002).

Collective memory can only exist in a collective, in a group, whatever size it may be. Individuals only organize and understand events and concepts within a social context. They remember them in a way that rationally orders and organizes them through the same social construction (Gross 2002). This collective memory will bind people together and will help creating a certain collective identity (Gross 2002). Group identity is, among others, constructed by narratives and traditions that are created to give its members a certain sense of a community.

1.2 Sense of belonging

(Lisa)

The idea of a sense of belonging returns in the discourse around group identity, as it can only exist when there is a recognition of a ‘them’, when there is exclusion of another group. It is therefore important to elaborate on this concept. Yuval-Davis (2006), a contemporary social scientist, wrote a lot about this concept. She makes a distinction between ‘belonging’ and ‘the politics of belonging’. ‘Belonging’ is about an emotional attachment, about feeling at home and feelings safe in a place. While the ‘politics of belonging’ entails the bigger picture and comprises the political projects that are aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways. (Yuval-Davis 2006, 197). The boundaries of the ‘politics of belonging’ are the boundaries that separate the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Yuval-Davis 2006, 204). Yuval-Davis talks mostly about this bigger picture, about how subjects feel about their location in the social world, which is generated partly through experiences of exclusion rather than about inclusion per se (Yuval-Davis et al. 2006, 526). This means that belonging only becomes activated when there is a sense of exclusion, like mentioned earlier. Another author that resembles the distinction between these two forms of belonging is Fenster (2005). She makes a difference between belonging as a personal, private sentiment of place attachment, which is built up out of the everyday life, and belonging as a more official, formal structure of membership, like in citizenship (Antonsich 2010, 4). However, as Crowley argues (1999, 22) belonging is a ‘thick’ concept. It entails more than just citizenship. A sense of belonging is not just about membership or rights and duties. It is also about the emotions that this membership raises. Nor is belonging the same as identities or identification, because these are “*about individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labelling, myths of origin and myths of destiny*” (Crowley 1999, 22). In this thesis the notion of sense of belonging will be used. Following the ideas of Crowley, we will not see this concept as just one of the two forms that Yuval-Davis and Fenster distinguish. A sense of belonging is a thick concept and entails both. Hence, we will use the conceptualization of Crowley in this thesis.

1.3 Sense of community

(Lisa)

Communities exist in different types and shapes. A community is mostly based on a shared sense of space like a geographical area or a communication platform (McMillan and Chavis 1986). Communities can be very small, like a neighbourhood, or large, such as a nation. Because of this, lots has been written about communities in the scientific discourse. In anthropology an important author on this topic is Anderson. Like mentioned earlier Anderson developed the concept of ‘imagined communities’. Although Anderson specifically writes

about nations as imagined communities, the concept can also be used on smaller scale, which is useful for our research about the Aran Islands. Tamir (1995) is one of the authors to use Andersons' ideas on a local level. He states that even on the small scale of local communities not everybody knows each other. The existence of such an imagined community relies upon shared feelings and images. In a local community the members share, amongst others, the feelings of distinctiveness and exclusivity (Tamir 1995, 426). Which is, like mentioned, also an important part of creating a group identity (Eriksen 1995; Grove and Zwi 2006). According to Tamir (1995) members of a community sustain a certain image of their community, which is based on their own perceptions and feelings. Hence, community is constructed by the shared feelings of the members. This meets with the ideas of Cohen (1985,118), who believes that *“people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent for identity”*. These ideas show that community relates to the concepts of shared feelings and identity.

In this thesis the connection between the community and a shared feeling of belonging is particularly interesting. For us, the ‘thick’ concept of sense of belonging, a general cohesion and the collective memory in the small but specific community on the Aran Islands, is what we like to examine. It is important for us that all these elements recur in the concept that we use in our thesis, to paint a thorough picture. In our point of view, the concepts that we used before are not complete. All elements recur best, according to us, in the combined definition of *sense of community* that McMillan and Chavis (1986) came up with. They see sense of community as *“a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met by the commitments to be together”* (McMillan and Chavis 1986, 9). According to their ideas, sense of community exists of four elements. The first element is membership, involving a sense of belonging with the larger collective. The second is influence, the reciprocal relationship of the individual and the community in terms of affecting each other. The third element is fulfilment of needs, the feeling that individual’s needs will be met by the resources received through co-operative behaviour. The last element is the emotional connection and support that a community entails, in which a shared history, common places and similar experiences plays an important part (McMillan and Chavis 1986, 9). All these elements are therefore included in their definition. And because group identity is, among others, created to give its members a certain sense of a community, the idea of a group identity on the Aran Islands, an Aran identity, will also be used to answer the main question.

1.4 Migration and globalisation

(Sigrid)

In the early twentieth century, anthropology was a study to investigate concepts concerning cultures in remote places. It contained ‘sedentary bias’ in which culture was portrayed as bounded, territorialized, relatively unchanging and homogeneous units (Brettell and Hollifield 2000, 97). Migration became a broad concept that is known in variety of ways. At first anthropologists were not interested in the study to migration. This perception changed in the mid-1900 when colonies started to fall and post-colonialism and twentieth-first century nation-states developed. Political institutions had to adjust to new modes of ethnic and cultural diversity (Vertovec 2007, 966). The world and its borders changed and so the perception of people changed towards different societies and cultures. People became more mobile and moved to different places, further away from home. Mobility increased and got easier during globalising processes of modernisation, such as infrastructure, transfers and communication technology. Therefore, the study of migration took its turn in the anthropology and became very popular around the late 1950 and 1960 where it took a more prominent place in the discipline (Brettell and Hollifield 2000, 97; Vertovec 2007). Through history anthropologists studied the field sites of remote villages in places as Africa, Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean. Most of these places were in rural areas or for example, small island communities (Brettell and Hollifield 2000, 148). The people of those areas lived in very isolated societies, which contributes to a unique authentic culture and identity. The Aran Islands in Ireland is one example of a community that has been isolated for a long time in their history. Through modernisation and globalisation, access to the mainland and new technologies developed but in a much slower process compared to other areas in the developing world (Burholt et al. 2013). During modernisation and globalisation, rural societies struggled with the fast-changing world around them concerning economic development, and social and cultural changes. Job opportunities and learning possibilities were hard to find in these regions. Hence, the people were forced or choose to move for different livelihood reasons (Brettell and Hollifield 2000, 97; Burholt et al. 2013).

Most reasons for migration can be found in economical, geopolitical, demographic, social and cultural fields (Blunt 2007, 685). Brettell argues that the study to migration in the discipline of anthropology should contain different aspects within different layers. “*It needs to articulate both people and process*” (Brettell 2003, 7 in Vertovec 2007, 969). By investigating these different layers in migration process a more refined theory can be established where the dynamics of diversity in societies could be better examined (Vertovec 2007, 969). Islands are a perfect example where you can find the impact of all these fields. Because of the isolation,

islands have a tight community and face different problems in economic, demographic, social and cultural fields as rural societies could have. Young people are more attracted to move, because of the lack of educational options and job perspectives on the islands (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Burholt et al. 2013; Brown et al. 2014). Skilled workers leave because there is no market for certain labour on the small islands as for example, the Aran Islands consist mostly of farming, fishing and tourism. They depend on external authorities as universities. This attracts young people to move but there is no certainty that they will return to the islands (Brown et al. 2014; Cross and Nutley 1999). Other people might be attracted to a life on a small island with a small community. Therefore, migration comes in different forms. For this research three concepts of migration will be used: *emigration*, *immigration* and *remigration*. The small Irish Island communities have an increase of tourism since the last two or three decades (Royle 2003, 25). The effect is more job opportunities besides the fishing and farming. This attracts newcomers. The other effect is the flow of people that come and visit temporarily and will have an impact on the cultural identity of Irish islands (Royle 2003, 25). Furthermore, the same anthropological concepts as that were used before as culture, identity, ethnicity and community can be applied to small island communities as well (Brettell and Hollifield 2000; Vertovec 2007).

According to Vertovec migration can have its impact on the local communities and wider societies (Vertovec 2007, 962). Because it moves in different ways from rural to urban, from region to region, from local to international. Hence, it causes an impact on the people within these territories on different levels (Vertovec 2007). The focus within anthropology of migration is on the social, cultural concepts like ethnicity and identity. Several articles have been published about the anthropology of migration. As the context about migration changed over the years so did the context about ethnicity (Vertovec, 2007, 963). Through globalisation processes ethnicity is not just something that exist within territories but goes far beyond these territories. The affect is multi-ethnic societies and the increasing diaspora's and transnationalities of ethnicities (Blunt, 2007). The following paragraph will elaborate more broadly about the concepts concerning transnationalism and diaspora's.

Foreigners who arrive within a country are classified by the policies from the government according to their circumstances: they can be for example an economic migrant, a tourist, a student, a family member or a refugee. The complexity of the situations is the fact that most people are shifting within these classifications or are in the situations of being in multiple categories (Castles 2002; Erikson 2014). Portraying the people in these classifications does not mean they will belong and stay in those categories. Therefore, the study of migration and

mobility examines how people in local places are responding to the global processes (Brettell and Hollifield 2000). This leads to what Eriksen describes as the flow of people across the world, which creates a mix mashing pot of cultures, ethnicities and identities within only just one small space (2014).

Migration and mobility thus definitely have to be asserted with the concept of globalisation. Through transnationality, multi-ethnicity and diversity the anthropological study in the approach to the concept of culture changed (Eriksen 2014). Culture is a fluid concept and has always been complex. Through the increase of globalisation culture became more a topic of debate. Instead of approaching culture as territorialized, bounded within an ethnic group at a remote place, it became clearer that culture is complex, interrelated, and paradoxical.

1.5 Migration and sense of community

(Sigrid)

Subsequent to the changing context of migration through globalisation there is also a changing effect on the communities (Vertovec 2007; Castles 2002). Immigrants who settle in the host country face the process of integration and sometimes, if the integration is successful, even assimilation. This can take over two or three generations before the whole family is assimilated to the host country (Castles 2002). In addition, transnationalism and diaspora are in that matter interrelated to the concept of sense of community, because even though families integrate they may still belong to a certain form of shared identity or community elsewhere. The Irish diaspora in United States for example has its effect on certain holidays that gets celebrated in both countries as for example Saints Patrick's Day. Moreover, quite a lot of American tourists visit Ireland considering that some of these people do have their roots in Ireland.

Transnationalism and diaspora cannot be used as the same concept, although both refer to the mobility of people (Blunt 2007, 689). Diaspora refers to the interconnection of people across the globe that belongs to the same community as in religion or nationalities. As explained before the Irish diaspora in the United States but also for example the Jewish diaspora around the globe. Furthermore, in contrast to transnationalism, diasporas do have a feeling of 'home' within the country of settlement, but still have identification with a certain group outside (Blunt 2007; Castles 2002). Transnationalism goes beyond geographic borders in terms of economy, political and cultural processes. This means it is not just about material geographies but also about the symbolic and imaginary geographies (Blunt 2007, 678). Migrants who live in two or more societies develop in that way transnational communities (Castles 2002). Some migrants have the purpose to stay permanently and others just temporarily. That is why the social and cultural characteristics are very diverse through the mobility of people and the connections with

their ethnicity, identity and cultural features (Castles 2002). Therefore, the feeling of belonging that the people had with the community they were in will not vanish just like that, even when people start to migrate.

In other words, according to Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006, 290) boundaries become blurred and the networks and communities become more extended. Because of the out-migration in extraction industries and agriculture industries, migrants started to fill up the missing places. Thereby an increase in the mobility for education and job opportunities came along (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006, 291). This risk of extending communities and networks happens also on the offshore islands of Ireland and therefore on the Aran Islands. According to Burholt and colleagues (2013) and Royle (2003) islands have to find a way to stabilize their population, since the outflow of people increased. The authentic shared identity and collective memory could get lost when newcomers settle and make new identities and memories, but they also want to put a halt to the fast decline in the population on the islands (Burholt et al. 2013; Royle 2003). In addition to that Christensen and Mertz (2010), argue how human migration and mobility has its affect to the islands livelihood. As for example when the economic market changes, people may need to move if the place where they live is not going to sustain them anymore (Christensen and Mertz 2010, 282).

Economical aspects can lead to migration but besides the economical elements social elements play a role as well. Another reason within migration concerning sense of community is that the strong community ties can cause people to migrate. Sometimes closed and isolated societies, as small islands seem to have this, claustrophobic atmosphere. This may lead to the intention of migration. Partly because of the lack of opportunities and the insecurity of growing further in life, people seek their wishes elsewhere (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006, 292). Trough globalisation people are also familiar with other places and can read and learn about those places. This could give a boost to the intention of migration (Castles 2002). That is why globalisation and migration are intertwined with the shifting communities and the sense of community.

Besides the push factors, communities do have a big pull factor. If people move it is not sure what this will do with the balance and stability of the population in the community and in this case on the islands (Burholt et al. 2013). The local identity and culture could be a reason to stay. This is where collective memory plays a role because of the isolation people had to count on each other, which creates a specific band and history with the place. According to Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006) this should decline the migration intentions from the islands. The strong community can hold people together and therefore decline the migration outflow. People

in small communities and small islands want to keep the features that belong to a small community. The peace, quiet and scenery what small islands give are for some residents a reason to stay (Burholt et al. 2013, 6). Furthermore, the safety in a small community with a strong social cohesion is easier to control, which is not easy to find elsewhere (Burholt et al. 2013, 7). That is why it could increase the remigration. The fact remains that young people migrate from the small island communities because there are not that many options for them. This does not have to follow into a spiral of a decreasing population. People may return eventually. The Aran Islands have a stable population at the moment, which they like to keep by exploiting their heritage for tourism, which will hopefully keep the young people on the island (Royle 2003, 26). This causes the effect of a more diverse population on the islands concerning nationalities since mobility developed. It helps to sustain the islands by welcoming newcomers, even though there is an impact on the sense of community and cultural identity (Royle and Scott 1996, 114).

Chapter 2 Context

2.1 Our specific context

(Lisa, Sigrid)

Like mentioned in the introduction, the Aran Islands exist of three main islands, Inishmore, Inishmaan and Inisheer, together extending over twenty-five kilometres across the mouth of Galway Bay, Ireland (The O'Brien Press 2017). About 1251 people live on the Aran Islands, of which around 800 on the largest one, Inishmore (Burholt et al. 2013, 3). In the summer season, visitors and mostly tourists raise this number considerably (The O'Brien Press 2017). During our research of ten weeks of fieldwork, we lived on Inishmore, in the small settlement of Gort Na g'Capall. This village is about four kilometres from the islands' main settlement, Kilronan, where almost 300 people reside. The other two islands can be accessed by boat from Inishmore during tourist season. The ferry to Inishmaan takes about fifteen minutes and to Inisheer twenty-five minutes. In the winter season, there is no inter-island boat, which means that people have to transfer in Rossaveel (main harbour in Galway Bay) to the other ferries that will take them to Inishmaan or Inisheer. This takes a lot of time, up to an hour and a half. This is why our research mainly focusses on Inishmore. There are certain events that get celebrated by all the three islands together; most of these take place on Inishmore.

2.2 Sense of community on the Aran Islands

(Lisa)

According to the O'Brien Press the Aran islands are well-known because of “*their grey rock ledges (...), their harbour memories of ancient Ireland, the history and traditions of Gaelic culture, and the spirit, songs and stories of an island people*” (The O'Brien Press 2017, 6). All of these can contribute to the sense of community. Even travel sites sell a vacation on the Aran Islands as a true Irish experience⁵.

By 1892 the population of the Aran Islands was just under 3000, and the islands had almost no economic or political value for Ireland (Ashley 2001, 8). Because of poor transport links to the mainland, a largely self-contained lifestyle existed. The residents of all small Irish islands were almost self-sufficient. The collective memory of the residents of these islands constructed a particular islander identity, a set of social norms to which people adhered (Burholt et al. 2013). This relative isolation of, among others, the Aran Islands so far, had preserved the Irish language, when it began to decline with speed in big parts of Ireland (Ashley 2001). Nowadays the Irish language is still the dominant language on the Aran Islands, although the

⁵ <http://www.aranislands.ie/>

residents are bilingual with English as their second language (The O'Brien Press 2017). Based on anthropological research, Ashley (2001, 9) suggests that these residents in the nineteenth century were endowed with nationalist and racial significance. They were the true Irishmen and women, freed from British dominion. Haddon and Browne (1891, in Ashley 2001) created the idea that the residents of the Aran Islands were a pure Irish folk, which could act as a model for the rest of Ireland. This continued in the twentieth century. As stated in the O'Brien Press (2017) the Aran Islands were still a traditional Irish rural settlement.

Yet, at the end of the twentieth century a change took place on many small Irish islands. Through modernisation and globalisation transport to and contact with the mainland got easier. There was more regular access to healthcare and food (Burholt et al. 2013). Nowadays, if residents choose for further education or better job opportunities on the mainland, this no longer means abandoning all hope of later return or total disconnection from family (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006), as it did before (The O'Brien Press 2017). Modernisation on small Irish islands happened quicker and later than on the mainland. According to Burholt and colleagues (2013) the cultural traditions and cohesive communities on the islands are more recent and could last much longer than on the mainland. The O'Brien Press (2017) claims that, on the Aran Islands, this resulted in a historical record, in which the past and the present are bound together.

In social sciences modernisation and globalisation are however also associated with a decline in traditions on islands, for instance the economic traditions (Burholt et al. 2013). In order to survive the small Irish islands had to adapt their economies and communities to the modern world (Burholt et al. 2013). On the Aran islands this mostly resulted in tourism (The O'Brien Press 2017). According to Royle and Scott (1996, 114), there is an awareness amongst scientists that increased contact with outsiders could affect an islands' cultural heritage. This could put pressure on the maintenance of an islands' social and cultural identity. With more emigration and tourists coming over, the interaction with locals declined (Burholt et al. 2013).

A positive attribute often ascribed to small islands is the sense of community and social cohesion (Burholt et al. 2013, 4). Because of their relative isolation, self-sufficiency and collective memory, the sense of community is extra strong. But with the contemporary globalisation and its effects, these characteristics seem to vanish. As the discussion about these effects is still going on, it is not clear what is actually happening. The idea of a true, pure Irish folk is still used to describe the Aran Islands in books (The O'Brien Press 2017) and on the internet⁶.

⁶ <http://www.aranislands.ie/>

2.3 Migration on the Aran Islands

(Sigrid)

All Irish islands had to deal with a decreasing population over the last hundred years (Burholt et al. 2013, 3). This means that people are moving away from the small islands in search for more opportunities at the mainland of Ireland or other places. The islands are familiar with the migration flow, although the migration flow needs to be stable to have a balanced population (Burholt et al. 2013, 1). Some of the offshore Irish islands had to say goodbye to their last resident (Royle 2003, 24). Table 1 shows the decline of population specifically related to the Aran Islands wherein the last counting took place in 2011. As is visible in table 1, the population seemed to decrease over the years but the last counting shows a small increase of residents living on the Aran Islands.

Total Aran Islands	1841	1901	1946	1956	1966	1981	1991	2002	2006	2011
Both sexes	3521	2845	1968	1678	1612	1368	1322	1280	1225	1251
Female	-	-	-	-	748	611	612	613	583	591
Male	-	-	-	-	864	757	710	667	642	660

Table 1 Population statistics of the Aran Islands (Central Statistics Office⁷)

Royle (2003, 24) states that in 1841, there were 35,937 people living on 106 of the offshore islands of Ireland. More than a hundred years later only 51 of the islands were inhabited (Royle 2003, 24). An explanation to the decline of inhabitants can be searched in the economic, political and social dependency. Most islands live from farming and fishing but other economical options are hard to find, even though since the last twenty years the tourism industry has risen (Burholt et al. 2013, 3; Cross and Nutley 1999, 317).

According to Eriksen (2014, 106), tourism is one of the blooming economical businesses of this age. The Aran Islands learned to take the advantages of that and are nowadays not only depended on the farming and fishing industry but also on the tourism industry, which should provide more job opportunities. Eriksen (2014, 106) argues that in the last fifty years, tourism steadily grew till one of the largest economic sectors in the world. This means for the Aran Islands that the ways and possibilities for people to spend their holidays on the islands became a lot cheaper, due cheap transfer and an increase of accommodation facilities. This is how people find creative ways to sustain for themselves and to stay on the islands. The tourism industry has been built around the idea of a holiday destination and a local community at the

⁷ Central Statistics Office 2014, Statbank, cso.ie

same time (Eriksen 2014, 109; Royle 2003). That is why the Aran Islands are a perfect combination. The collective memory and cultural identity that the Aran Islands share is a huge pull factor for the tourism industry. Besides the Aran Islands are changing in times of modernisation but the impact only started a couple decades ago, which makes the islands unique in the way that the older generation remembers the days of no cars, no electricity or running water (Burholt et al. 2013, 6).

Furthermore, islands have to manage their natural resources as human mobility and organise their sustainability in order to make sure they can survive and produce for their own (Christensen and Mertz 2010, 282). That is what the Aran Islands do as well. They have a bigger advantage when they can sustain for themselves to reduce transfer cost for example. The developments in the economic markets bring competition to sectors as the fishing and the farming industry (Brown et al. 2014; Burholt et al. 2013; Christensen and Mertz 2010). Suddenly the people were confronted with globalising processes and markets that were rapidly modernising. The people had to adapt to these modernisations to keep up. To reduce the influence of globalisation on the offshore islands of Ireland, people could become more self-sufficient again as that they had before the intervening of the globalising and modernising markets (Burholt et al. 2013, 6).

To emigrate from the islands is most attracted to young people. There are no universities on the islands, which already gives an extra boost to emigrate. This means that the Irish islands are aging (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Burholt et al. 2013; Cross and Nutley 1999). The young people who want to grow further in life and have ambitions and dreams cannot always fulfil those dreams on an island and in a small community. The question remains as once people moved away if they would consider moving back and returning to the community and the island life.

The opposite attracts elderly to stay on the islands or elderly who would love to move to one of the islands. The historical attachment, heritage and the culture of the Aran Islands makes it attractive to stay, because of its unique authentic culture that is hardly to compare to other places on the mainland of Ireland. Furthermore, Burholt and colleagues (2013) describes how islands attract particular type of residents. An island life would be ideal for retirees because of the quietness and the tranquillity, which is more difficult to find elsewhere. Besides the social cohesion in a small community can be very strong and therefore according to Burholt and colleagues (2013, 6-7) findings, the residents in these small islands community experience more safety and security. People help each other out during illness or difficulties. The same counts for crime, there was hardly any crime on the islands, although this has been changing during

the increasing transfer possibilities. First the boat staff knew who arrived or left the islands, but in the present days more strangers come visit and so the crime from the mainland could move to the small islands (Burholt et al. 2013, 7). The concerns about the migration flows may have grown but there are definitely important reasons for people to stay.

Chapter 3 Aran Identity

3.1 Introduction

(Lisa)

In this first empirical chapter the Aran identity, the specific group identity for the residents of the Aran islands, will be explained. The Aran Identity entails “*the history and origins of the group, nationality, language, religion, culture, the physical body, a person’s name and the geography of one’s birthplace*” (Isaacs 1974, 27). The question is how the residents of the islands incorporate this identity.

3.2 Distinctive for the Aran Islands

(Lisa)

According to the residents of the Aran Islands there are certain aspects of life and certain character traits that distinguish them from other residents of Ireland in general. These aspects are also important for this research because they are part of the group identity of the islanders. Moreover, this identity can influence their sense of community. According to Croucher (2003, 40) this is not a strange thing, “*group identity always relies upon an ‘other’ and belonging to an ‘Us’ necessitates the existence and recognition of a ‘them’*”. This is in line with the ideas of another anthropologist, Eriksen, who states that it is obvious that every group is defined in relation to what it is not, to outsiders. This will be elaborated in this section.

Something that distinguishes the Aran Islands from the rest of Ireland is the self-contained lifestyle on the islands. To go to the hairdresser, the dentist or just to buy something else than groceries, the residents have to go to Galway. The travel takes two hours back and forth. They also have to go an entire day. During the winter there is just one ferry in the morning and one in the evening. So, the people would be gone all day long. As Keira, a middle-aged primary school teacher on Inishmore explains to me: “*any other place you live, you can drive out of. There is a very defined boundary here [...] this piece of land is where your life happens, where everything happens*”⁸. Also, there are little distractions on the island, there is no cinema or other place to go to. Moreover, everywhere you go you will see people that know you. Because everybody knows each other, the impossibility of an escape or distraction and the fact that you share everything just with the people that you grew up with and the little community, feelings on the islands are felt more strongly. Like this quote from the current priest on the three islands shows.

⁸ Interview Keira, 27-03-2018.

When there is moment of joy on the island, everybody celebrates. Because you know it spreads out throughout of the whole island. If there is a tragedy on the island it goes the whole end of the island. [...] Because on the mainland it would spread, and it would just keep going. But on the island, it just has nowhere to go you know. So, things like tragedies and moments of joy are. [...] They are a bit more intense.⁹

Furthermore, multiple participants explained that there are certain character traits that are particularly strong among the residents of the Aran Islands. These character traits are easy-going, patient and tolerant. This is partly because there is not as much to do on the islands and there are less stimuli than in a big city. Less pressure is put on the people of the Aran Islands. The people are more one with nature and even depend on it. For example, the cargo boat with all food and supplies can only come in if the weather is good enough. If there is a storm supplies cannot be delivered for a few days. People are more dependent on each other, which makes them tolerant towards others and patient. It is like Tamir (1995, 426) stated, in a local community the members share, amongst others, the feelings of distinctiveness and exclusivity. The resident's belief these are character traits exclusively extra strong for them. This is according to Tamir (1995) one of the shared feelings and images that makes a strong imagined community.

3.3 Traditions

(Sigrid)

In addition to the distinguished characteristics and the isolation of the island, the traditions of the Aran Islands are mostly related to the way of living on the islands. Besides some holidays that include the saints in the Irish culture and on the islands, the traditions are fishing, farming and knitting of the Aran sweaters. The holidays are part of the community events, which will be further elaborated in the following empirical chapter. Other Irish traditions are Irish music, Irish dancing and Irish sports. Furthermore, one of the most important and present traditions is the Irish language. This will be further elaborated in the next paragraph. According to Eriksen (2014) a successful tourist destination would be a small community with an authentic culture where traditions play a huge role. As Royle (2003) also explains is how the Aran Islands, like most of the offshore islands at the west coast of Ireland, use their cultural heritage in benefit for tourism. Inishmore and Inisheer have been very successful in accomplishing to be a tourist destination. Inishmaan gets some tourists but cannot live from the profit; they rely more on the

⁹ Interview priest Mellan, in his thirties, lives on the islands for four years, 16-03-2018.

traditional way of life as fishing and farming. Because tourism is an important source of income for the islanders of Inishmore, it is possible that therefore traditions are an important cultural element to keep alive for the tourism industry. Royles' argument to sustain cultural heritage and traditions to attract tourists is something Eriksen describes as the perfect holiday destination. Since the rise of tourism on the Aran Islands the traditional fishing industry had a big downfall. Alannah, an Aran born resident, explains it as follows:

Since the fishing industry dropped, the tourism industry increased a lot over the years. For example, thirty years ago 80% of the work on the Aran Islands consisted of fishing of which 10% consisted of tourism and 10% of other things. Now it seems that the percentages are still the same but the fishing and tourism has swapped.¹⁰

People who visit the Aran Islands should not expect a community that sustains themselves from the old traditional way of life, consisting of fishing and farming. That is simply not enough.

Other tradition on the Aran Islands are part of the famous Irish music. The children on the islands learn Irish dancing, singing and playing music. Some of them compete in national dance competitions, where they get great results. Furthermore, the Irish singing is not that popular anymore. One singing teacher comes from a smaller Aran Island to visit Inishmore and to teach singing. She is the only teacher who can do this because it is a very unique way of singing, which requires a lot of practise. Children nowadays have more distraction through Internet and technology according to some of the parents. This could cause a lack of interest in the old ways of Irish music and dancing. But according to the students and the schools most of the children are interested in music or otherwise Irish sports as Gaelic football, hurling and handball¹¹. The children however have to leave the island most of the time to play matches or for practise. This shows how the isolation can be a problem for them to participate in sport events. As a teacher of the primary school explains: *“But still you do manage. In the second level school here, they would travel a lot for sports. [...] We have some World Champions on the island like the World handball champions”¹²*. All the three islands play together as one

¹⁰ Interview Alannah, 23-03-2018.

¹¹ Handball: The Irish handball is different from the more common know European or Dutch handball. It is similar to squash, which is played with two players and a small ball is smashed against the wall. But where in the Netherlands they use a racket to smash the ball they use their hands in Irish handball. It is a very old game that gets played in Ireland and is visible on the islands as well. Old stone walls of approximately three meters broad and two meters tall are standing on several places on the island. There are no observations of children playing this game on the old stone walls, but there is a gym hall on Inisheer where they play inside.

¹² Focus-group interview with a primary school class of ten children in Eoghanacht, 20-03-2018.

team, which is an important aspect of the Aran identity. The collective feeling of exclusivity as Tamir describes can be shown by the local sport events.

Also, the Catholic faith still plays a significant role in the lives of the residents of the Aran Islands. Even for some of the children it is still very important. We observed a young, male resident, aged nineteen, who made a cross sign every time he passed a religious symbol. Many Aran residents go to the church. According to the priest of the three islands: *“people go to church from time to time [...] you would have a core people who would go regularly. And then you would have others who would come at occasions”*¹³. It is a prominent place for the people to meet and come together. The community arranges a lot of volunteer work to help the priest. And because the priest has to do the masses on all three islands, the residents sometimes come together to pray without him. However, in most parts of Ireland the Catholic tradition is still very strong. So, it cannot entirely be seen as something just for the Aran Islands.

A last tradition to which attention must be paid is the knitting of Aran Sweaters. This tradition is very old and goes far back into the history of the islands. Currently, the Aran stich is very popular all over the world and sweaters are sold very well. The sweaters were originally knitted by the women for their husbands on sea. The story goes that certain stiches based on religious symbols developed because the fisherman wanted protection on sea. Other stiches were inspired by the life on the islands like the diamond stich, that represents all stone walls¹⁴. On the island of Inishmore at least five Aran Sweater shops can be found. For such a small island this is a lot. The sweaters are mostly knitted for the tourists, and some residents do not even see it as a real tradition anymore. Like Maeve, the librarian on Inishmore explained: *“Knitting is not the same anymore. It was very time consuming. Now, I think it is more a hobby. The people now are knitting more as a hobby than as work”*¹⁵.

These traditions all combine and reinforce each other in some ways. The Catholic Church gives the opportunity to come together but also music is an opportunity to come and play together. McMillan and Chavis argue that the emotional connection and support that a community entails strengthens the sense of community (1986, 9). Through these community activities, experiences and history can be shared. In addition, the Irish language still gets spoken during the miss in the church, which keeps the language alive and useful for many residents on the islands.

¹³ Interview priest Mellan, 16-03-2018.

¹⁴ <https://www.aransweatermarket.com/about-aran-sweater-market>

¹⁵ Semi-structured interview with Maeve, 21-03-2018.

3.4 The Irish language

(Sigrid)

The most important tradition of the residents of the Aran Islands is the Irish language, however it is questionable to describe it as a tradition because it is still the first language of the people in this region of Ireland. It is part of their history and heritage but in the same way described as a tradition. Isaacs argue that history and origin, which contains the Irish language, is part of the group identity (1974, 27). The Irish language is interwoven in the lives of the Aran residents. According to Anderson (1989) the language is an important factor to create ‘imagined communities’. The strong sense that the people have with the Irish language can be seen as a form of ‘imagined community’. The Irish speaking regions put a lot of effort in sustaining the language. Therefore, they do not know each other but they need each other to keep the language alive. That is also the reason why the children in the schools get their lessons in Irish, whereas English is just one of the subjects they get taught. It is with great consciousness that the Aran Islands choose to teach in Irish. The government funds the Irish speaking schools and initiatives to keep the Irish language sustained and so the schools can set up programmes that will help to improve the Irish language¹⁶. The islands however cannot do without the English language, because of the tourism industry and because most of the resources are in English. It is to the people themselves to sustain this language and to put the effort in it, to not let the Irish language be distinct. The youth, who do not live with their parents anymore, like the students, still come home in the weekends. They speak mostly English with each other, but there is only a thin line in speaking Irish or English. They switch from one to the other in just words and phrases in only one conversation¹⁷. Eventually the main language that gets spoken indoors with the family is Irish. Nowadays children are growing up with both the languages and soon enough they learn that English will get you further in life concerning career opportunities. All the resources are in that matter in English as literature and applications. As Keira explains: “*So, in the schools everything is taught in Irish except from English as a subject [...] it is a very mixed situation in the homes of the children.*”¹⁸

The secondary schools on the main land offer their students a scholarship programme or some call it a ‘transition year’, which will allow them to follow one year at the secondary school on Inishmore, Inishmaan or Inisheer. The children who come in from the mainland will stay with host families on the islands for a full year. This programme has a definite purpose. The programme is very popular and successful for the Aran Islands and the Irish speaking

¹⁶ Interview principal Michael, 08-03-2018.

¹⁷ Observation notes, 08-02-2018.

¹⁸ Informal conversation Keira, 30-03-2018.

regions. Even though there is tourism and every person who works in the tourism will have to speak English, the Irish language is something the islanders appreciate and protect. The Irish language means a lot because it is not only their first language, it is what the history of the island is and it belongs with the other historical features. It belongs to the identity of an Aran born resident. As Mistzal (2003) explains a language as the Irish language is in that way part of the collective memory and therefore an important asset to the social life of the people on the Aran Islands. The scholarships programme on the secondary school is from great value to maintain the language. The students who follow one year of secondary school on the island get a very unique experience of Irish speaking and island life. The teachers and the principal (Michael) of the secondary school in Kilronan, explains why it is valuable for a student from the mainland to follow one year in Irish on the Aran Islands.

It is a great experience but as well in the experience in the development of a young person. It is also a very important language, because the Irish language is a minority language and it is struggling to stay alive. The scholarships will give them a great appreciation. Wherever they go they will always have that appreciation of doing their year in Irish and get all their education in Irish for one year. And nothing else can give them lack of appreciation and that of course widens a web at the time. It is a small number but sometimes it widens out in a very wide web of people. When they go back to their schools in other parts of the country how that appreciation is widened to a far wider community. The scholarships are important and not just for the development of young people but it is very important for our language and what we find to do to preserve the language.¹⁹

Because of the passion that this principal has with the Irish language he can transfer it to the younger generation. For most people it is something they would not think about daily but they also couldn't live without it. A part of their identity will disappear when the island will not be speaking Irish anymore.

3.5 Collective memory

(Lisa)

As explained before a key point in Isaacs's definition of group identity is "the history and origins of the group", or expressed differently, collective memory. As explained in the

¹⁹ Interview principal Michael, 08-03-2018.

theoretical framework, collective memory can only exist in a collective, in which the individuals do the work of remembering and the society as a whole determines what is ‘memorable’ (Gross 2002). The shared history of the Aran Islands is not equally important for all residents. It differs a lot between the islands and between the residents of each island. Especially to the older people the history and the achievements of their ancestors mean a lot. However, there are certain symbols and habits that are important for many of the residents, although they may not always be aware of it. One of these is fishing. There is a symbol pictured on some Aran Sweaters, on the ferries from Rossaveel and painted on the wall of a house in Kilronan, Inishmore. The symbol displays three men carrying a currach, an old traditional fishing boat from the islands. It symbolizes the demanding work and tough times of the residents of the Aran Islands. However, the fishing went down a lot in the latest year through new European rules. It does no longer mean much to the younger residents of the Aran Islands. They do not see this picture as a symbol, do not read anything into it. Like Dorean, a middle-aged woman, born and raised on the island, said: *“oh it used to be a symbol for the Aran Islands, yes. But not anymore”*²⁰. Yet, the fishing played a very important role in the history of the islanders and this has not been forgotten by the community. Like mentioned in the theoretical framework, individuals draw on their specific group context to remember and recreate the past. *“Every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time”* (Halbwachs 1950, 84). Even if not every person in the community on the Aran Islands really remembers the fishing, for example because they are too young. It is the community of the islands as a whole that makes it memorable.

Another important part of the collective memory and the history on the Aran Islands is the farming and all stone walls, that belong to this. On all three islands there are many stone walls and the view from any place on the islands will look like showed in figure 3.



Figure 3 Stone walls, Inishmore. 06-02-2018.

²⁰ Informal conversation Dorean, 07-04-2018.

Literature, found in the library on Inishmore, describes this landscape and the meaning of it to the residents of the Aran Islands:

The cultural landscape of Aran is a unique combination of the forces of humankind and nature. [...] The inhabitants of the islands have constructed much of the soil cover over the centuries and enclosed the small fields with walls, so closely together that the landscape is intensively marked by the activities of the community. [...] This kind of response to the natural environment reflects a community living in close contact with natural forces, a relationship with the natural world that is rare in contemporary life. (Laheen 2010, 134)

This building of walls goes back to three and a half centuries and derives from the building of the ancient forts from the Bronze Age that can be found on the Aran Islands. According to Dorean and her husband²¹, the stone walls can still be seen as a symbol of the islands. The farmers had to cut out all the stone to make the ground fertile. Partly because they had to make boundaries (there are few trees on the islands, so they had no wood for this), and partly because they just had to leave the stones somewhere, they built these stone walls. It was demanding work and took a lot of time. The walls still have to be rebuilt sometimes. Dougall, Dorean's husband, and a farmer himself, explained that *"in this sense the cultural landscape is maybe like a monument of the community, in which we remember the struggle of the people that had to combat adverse conditions"*²². It is a way to connect with their ancestors, *"to really connect into the ancient stories, traditions and spirituality of the place"*²³. These quotes show that the collective memory on the Aran Islands binds people together and helps creating a certain collective identity, a group identity.

As said, not all residents are interested in the history of the Aran Islands. Many parents do not even bring their children to the many ancient forts or other cultural heritage sights on the islands. Like this boy from Inishmore, aged eight, said *"I have never been to Dun Aonghasa. [...] It is more incentive for tourists. They are coming in and want to see everything in once."*²⁴ Yet, as the symbols show, a collective memory can exist without people realizing it. Moreover Maeve, originally from the islands, told me that it is important for the residents of the Aran Islands to keep the history alive. To keep the history of *"their parents and their grandparents*

²¹ Informal conversation Dorean, 07-04-2018.

²² Interview Dougall, 08-04-2018.

²³ Interview Delany, 04-03-2018.

²⁴ Focus-group interview with a primary school class of ten children in Eoghanacht, 20-03-2018.

*that have lived here [...] the things that they did, alive.*²⁵” Priest Mellan, also confirms this. He is not originally from the island, but he has noticed that people understand that it is their forefathers and mothers that built everything. So, it is theirs in a certain way, they need to take care of it. Like mentioned in the theoretical framework, individuals draw on their specific group context to remember and recreate the past. “*Every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time*” (Halbwachs 1950, 84). This delimited space is extra strong on the islands because of their defined boundaries. Also, modernisation on the islands happened quicker and later than on the mainland. Because of this the cultural traditions and cohesive communities on the islands are more recent and could last much longer than on the mainland (Burholt et al. 2013). This makes the residents of the Aran Islands a perfect group to gain a strong collective memory.

The collective memory on the Aran Island, the fact that everything on the islands is felt more intensely, the traditions and the Irish language that exist on the islands all contribute to a strong group identity on the Aran islands, an Aran identity. As priest Mellan puts it for people who have emigrated from the islands:

*The roots would still be very, very strong for those people. Even those who have gone for a long time, they would still be very much connected. [...] As islanders. They have a particular view of life, and of family and place, you know. Which is their view, the island view.*²⁶

As stated theoretical framework, globalisation and modernisation made that it is far more common now to have multiple group identities. People can choose from a wide range of groups and communities (Marsh et al. 2007). A group identity is no longer fixed to the neighbourhood, to the material geography, it is also about the symbolic and imaginary geographies (Blunt 2007). Like explained, no longer the feeling of belonging that people had with a community just vanishes as they migrate. Just as the quote from priest Mellan shows. In the next chapter we will elaborate on this sense of belonging that residents on the Aran Islands have. Also, the interaction and participation of the residents will be discussed. As a sense of community is more than just a group identity.

²⁵ Interview Maeve, 21-03-2018.

²⁶ Interview Priest Mellan, 16-03-2018.

Chapter 4 Community involvement

(Lisa)

4.1 Introduction

This second empirical chapter will elaborate on the involvement of the residents of the Aran islands in the community. It will focus on the community activities and events that take place on the Aran islands, the participation of the residents in and the opinion about these activities. Furthermore, the feeling of belonging of the residents will be addressed. According to the definition of McMillan and Chavis (1986) of sense of community, used in this thesis, these topics all contribute to the degree of a sense of community.

4.2 Community activities

The fourth and last element in the definition of sense of community of McMillan and Chavis (1986, 9) is the emotional connection and support that a community entails, in which a shared history, common places and similar experiences play an important part. As described in the first empirical chapter the collective memory on the Aran Islands contributes to this element. The common places and similar experiences however, cannot be forgotten. For the Aran Islands these parts of the element can be found in the community activities and events that take place. In these activities and events, the residents of the islands have the chance to come together and gain similar experiences. As stated by McMillan and Chavis this would contribute to their emotional connection and support.

According to the residents of the Aran Islands and the observations that have been done there are fairly little activities and events organised on the islands. Although not everybody agrees with this statement and there are differences noticeable between the three islands, there are not many opportunities for people to meet. This is especially the case during the winter. Upward from April, when the tourists season starts and particularly during the high season in June, July and August, more activities are organised. This was already noticeable in the short time period of our fieldwork. In the end there was more live music in the pubs, more people on the streets and there were more festivities organised. A fifteen-year-old girl living on Inishmore explains it as follows:

I like living on the island. In the summer it is busy and there are many things to do. The winters however can be long. My dad lives in Galway so I am away every other weekend and that is helpful. [...] In the summer I just hang out with my friends a

*lot. We just go cycling or hang out on the playground. [...] In winter not so much because it gets dark really early, I just stay at home.*²⁷

Like her, many others mentioned that the winter on the Aran Islands can be long and boring, but the summers are busy and nice. The most frequently given cause for this change is tourism. During the summer more, activities are organised to attract tourists. However, what also plays a part is the greater amount of youth on the islands around this time. Most children go to the mainland for college or university after they have finished second level school on the island. Yet, in summer, during their vacations, they come back home to help with the tourists. Even seasonal workers from Eastern Europe come to the islands. It changes the liveliness on the islands. On Inishmore *“The population number will be over 750, however in the winter it will only be 650, many people leave in the winter”*²⁸, like multiple residents mentioned. There are activities organised during summer for the children and tourists. There are swimming lessons, a lot of cycling and more practice for the Gaelic football. On the contrary, most activities that are not for youth or tourists are cancelled. An example of this is the yoga class. As Mia, one of the two yoga instructors on Inishmore said: *“the number of people that joins the class will only go down from now on, as the season starts”*²⁹. This is because everybody gets busy. The essential working industry on the Aran islands is tourism. So, during summer many residents start working and have no time left. This data is consistent with what is described previously in the context. A rising tourism industry increases the contact with outsiders. As is shown in all the activities that are organised for the tourists. However, with this, according to Burholt and colleagues (2013), the interaction with locals declines. Like the quote from Mia shows. Yet, because of the tourism and all the work that it brings, more residents return to the islands and do attend the activities. Therefore, no unilateral conclusion can be drawn.

For islands that are mostly dependent on themselves it can be difficult to give people different opportunities in sports or courses. There have to be residents living on the island that are able to coach or teach them. Even if there is somebody like that, or no teacher is needed, there still has to be someone that takes responsibility and organises them. According to among others, Keira and Delany, there were much more activities being organised ten years ago. Like Delany, who lives on Inishmore for over fifteen years now, says: *“[...] and there would be something on every single night. There were art classes, there was music, there was dance,*

²⁷ Informal conversation with a 15-year-old girl, 24-03-2018.

²⁸ Interview Bary, 27-02-2018.

²⁹ Participant observation yoga lessons, 09-04-2018.

*there was drama. And now nothing*³⁰. Nobody knows exactly what the cause of this decline is. Several factors are involved, like the closing of certain places that used to reunite the residents, like a local pub, and the emigration or death of residents that arranged many of the activities. Important is that most residents believe that the number of activities on the islands can be different in ten years again.

The activities that do take place on the Aran Islands, like live music on Saturday nights in the pubs, Irish lessons or dart nights are poorly visited. This differs per season, per island and per activity, but overall there are not many residents that participate in the activities. The pubs are mostly filled with tourists. Often the same residents participate multiple times. The other residents are busy with their own things and especially during winter, stay inside. As Mia says about Dorean, about the yoga lessons: *“It is a shame that she does not come more often, she stays inside too much”*³¹. Many residents do not have a certain meeting place, to talk or hang out. Generally, the local supermarket and the streets serve as meeting points. Like this vignette based on several observations shows:

*You only have to be in the supermarket for five minutes to see that this is an important place to meet for the residents. While shopping generally does not take very long, especially because the local supermarket is pretty small, the residents take their time. They chat with one another over the groceries or talk with the cashier for quite some time. “Have you been to the new café?” “How is your wife doing?”*³²

4.3 Community events

Next to the activities that are organised, there are also certain community events that take place on the Aran islands. These are bigger events that take place only once a year and not consistently like the activities. Although there are not many activities on the Aran Islands and not many residents visit these activities, the events that take place are well visited. Almost for all residents these events are an important way of meeting other residents and an expression of joy. One of these notable events is ‘Lá Fhéile Phatrún’, which means something as ‘the festive Patron day’. On this day all three islands come together to celebrate. There are lots of things going on, like a market and a competition in curraches, the old traditional boats from the Aran Islands. When

³⁰ Interview Delany, 04-03-2018.

³¹ Informal conversation Mia, 19-02-2018.

³² Hanging out in the local supermarket on Inishmore, on multiple occasions.

I ask a participant if he can name certain events distinctive for the Aran Islands, he answers: “*Only this one [...] However, it is a big one. And all people come to this.*”³³ Other big events are Saint Patrick’s Day, the Red Bull cliff diving and bonfire night. On bonfire night every little village on each island lights their own bonfire to celebrate Saint John. The wood will be collected from April, while the event takes place at the end of June. It is an event that brings the people together. The annual event of Saint Patrick’s Day is the only event that we have participated in on the islands. On Saint Patrick’s Day residents from each island get together to celebrate. There is a little parade with classes from all the schools and some families. Afterwards there is a celebration in the community hall. Restaurants and pubs are filled with people that normally join little activities³⁴. It is a day in which everybody gets together to celebrate.

Many of these events, like ‘Lá Fhéile Phatrún’ and bonfire night, are important traditions for the Aran Islands as well. They are events that go way back into the history of the islands and mean a lot to the residents. The events do contribute to the fourth element of McMillan and Chavis (1986, 9) to gain a strong sense of community. A shared history is celebrated on these events, and the residents are in common places and gain similar experiences. These events will thereby contribute to the emotional connection and support that a community entails. Moreover, the emotional attachment shows that the residents have a certain sense of belonging, as is explained in the theoretical framework. According to Yuval-Davis (2006) the concept of ‘belonging’ entails feeling at home and feeling safe in a place. Likewise, Fenster (2005) thinks of belonging as a personal sentiment of place attachment that is built up out of everyday life. In this case, this feeling is built up out of all activities and events on the Aran Islands.

4.4 Sense of belonging

The first element in McMillan and Chavis (1986, 9) their definition of sense of community is: “*a feeling that members have of belonging*”. It entails a membership, involving a sense of belonging with the larger collective (McMillan and Chavis 1986, 9). As explained in the theoretical framework a sense of belonging is seen as a ‘thick’ concept in this thesis. A sense of belonging is not just membership, it is also about the emotions that come with this membership. On the Aran Islands a sense of belonging can be found to a high degree.

³³ Interview Bary, 27-02-2018.

³⁴ Participant observation, Inishmore, Saint Patrick’s Day, 17-03-2018.

Despite the limited community activities on the Aran Islands, the residents believe that they are a very close community. A community in which “*everybody knows everybody*”³⁵. Or like Keira, a primary school teacher, mentions: “*it is lovely that we all know one another and in one sense it is like a big family, and we do care for one another*”³⁶. This has partly to do with the fact that all three islands have a small community, in which most people go or went to school together. Also, the islands are partly excluded from the mainland, because travelling to other parts of Ireland can only be done by boat or plain and takes quite some time. This means that the residents of the Aran islands are more dependent on each other and therefore will get to know each other only better. This is in line with what Burholt and colleagues (2013) describe, that small islands are often ascribed a cohesive community and strong social cohesion, because of their relative isolation and self-sufficiency. The fact that residents are constantly waving when they are driving or walking down the streets, shows that they indeed know everyone. It supports the argument of a cohesive community, which strengthens the sense of belonging on the Aran Islands. Furthermore, residents just know where other residents live, in which house. The houses on the Aran Islands have no number, and most streets do not have a name. The houses are only distinguished by postal codes. Residents just describe their house and the route towards it whenever anybody not from the island needs to know this. These empirical data are not in accordance with the theoretical framework, in which is stated that even on small scale of local communities not everybody knows each other (Tamir 1995). Tamir (1995) believes that there are only imagined communities that rely upon shared feelings and images. Members of a community sustain a certain image of their community, which is just based on their own perceptions and feelings. This could still be true for the community on the Aran Islands. The residents do believe they know everybody and do feel like a close community, yet it might be impossible even on such a small scale to really know everybody and not just the name.

According to the residents everybody knowing everybody has two sides. The good side is that people help each other out and they are working together in great ways. As Einne, the librarian on Inisheer explains it: “*We know each other all right. There is a good community spirit we work together. We help each other out.*”³⁷ Examples are the charity projects that run on the islands. These charity projects exist to raise money that goes back into the island, in the community hall, in the environment or in the Gaelic football club. This could be linked to the third element of McMillan and Chavis their definition of sense of community. This element is

³⁵ Mentioned in multiple interviews and informal conversations.

³⁶ Interview Keira, 27-03-2018.

³⁷ Interview Einne, 13-03-2018.

fulfilment of needs, the feeling that individual's needs will be met by the resources received through co-operative behaviour (McMillan and Chavis 1986, 9). Through the co-operative behaviour of a community charity project for the local Gaelic football club, a resident has the opportunity to join the team and travel to all the competitions with them, because he does not have to pay everything himself. Another example of the residents helping each other out is this story that Delany told me about the help she gets from her neighbours:

I would say during the last couple of days, with the storm, they called in. My neighbours are elderly. And my neighbour called in, and I said, oh are you calling in on all the old people. I helped him. [...] or, like with a practical thing, if I need something practical, I will call my neighbours. Like, Yesterday, my heating system did not work. A man from the other side of the island he has a leg that is..., he is disabled. He came over, he had a look at it, he tried to fix it. He phoned me just before you came, and he said, another neighbour on the island has a boiler. It could cost 1300 euros. And this man, he said I will give it to her for 100 euros. So...³⁸

This quote shows the help that people give each other on the islands. This is in line with the findings of Burholt and colleagues (2013), who found that residents on small islands communities often experience more safety and security, because people help each other out during difficulties. This shows how strong the social cohesion and sense of belonging is.

However, a con of knowing each other is that there can be a lot of gossiping. Also, like Keira mentions: “*if you do have a fall out with somebody it is very difficult. [...] So, if you do have a difficult time with somebody, well inevitably you'll be meeting them, or meeting their family or friend*”³⁹. This also affects another element of the sense of community on the Aran Islands. The second element of McMillan and Chavis (1986), influence is affected by the fact that everybody knows each other on the Aran Islands. There is a reciprocal relationship of the individual and the community in terms of affecting each other. If somebody does not like someone else the individual can affect the whole community. The fight can escalate very easily.

The sense of belonging is especially strong between the original residents of the Aran Islands. For the people that immigrated to the island it is more difficult to involve in the community. The original residents of the Aran Islands, the ones that were born there, call the outsiders, the ones that immigrated, ‘blow-ins’. This nickname is not always used in a nasty

³⁸ Interview Delany, 04-03-2018.

³⁹ Interview Keira, 27-03-2018.

way, but it does have a stigma. However, it is not being used as much as it used to. Because of the declining population number, it is also important to attract new people to the island. Moreover, the original residents have always been very friendly and helpful if you ask them. Like Keira, married into the island, told me: “*people are made to feel very welcome. [...] I think that is the general experience*”⁴⁰. However, you do need to go to the people. They do not come to you, everybody is busy doing their own thing. Like Margie, born on the island and a librarian, tells me: “*There is a closed-door policy here, I guess people try to protect the old traditions and their own*”⁴¹. Also, like Delany, a ‘blow-in’ herself mentioned: “*I would say that they would consider me part of the community. But I would never be fully part of the community. Because you are just not from here.*”⁴²” A reason for this is that all the original residents went to school together in very small classes and have most of their family living on the island. Other people are very easily seen as outsiders. Another reason is in line with Royle and Scott (1996, 114) their idea that contact with outsiders can affect an islands’ cultural heritage. This puts a lot of pressure on the maintenance of an islands’ social and cultural identity. The original residents will try to protect themselves from this influence (Royle and Scott 1996). In the case of the residents of the Aran Islands, by not fully accepting people into their community and keeping them at a certain distance. This is reflected in the idea of localization of Appadurai (1996). In which with the open horizons of globalisation, determined endeavours towards boundary-making arise, expressed in terms of belonging and exclusion. In this case, the exclusion of ‘blow-ins’. Besides, exclusion is, as explained in the theoretical framework, just part of what constructs a local community (Tamir 1995). The shared feeling of exclusion or *othering* (the idea of securing one’s own identity by distancing and stigmatising another) is part of what secures a group identity or a strong community. The experiences of the immigrants on the Aran Islands display this. The original residents exclude these newcomers from the community to a certain degree, because they do not share the same history and traditions. Although most original residents of the Aran Islands would not admit to this exclusion, or are not aware of it, *othering* is happening to a certain extent.

⁴⁰ Interview Keira, 27-03-2018.

⁴¹ Interview Margie, 22-02-2018.

⁴² Interview Delany, 04-03-2018.

Chapter 5 The role of migration

(Sigrid)

5.1 Introduction

The decreasing population had its effect on the economic, social and cultural characteristics of the Aran Islands. Brettell and Hollifield (2000) argue about the impact of globalisation and modernisation in rural societies. The response of globalising processes on the migration and mobility of people on the Aran Islands will therefore be discussed. Furthermore, this empirical chapter will elaborate on the issues around migration, which concerns *immigration*, *remigration* and *emigration*.

5.2 Population stability

For the islands survival, the population number is an important element to keep facilities and schools open. It is therefore important to have a stable population. As Burholt and colleagues (2013) argue the migration flows on the offshore islands on the coast of Ireland need to be stabilized to have a stable population. The Aran residents are aware of the migration jumps during their history. Alannah for example has left the island when she was younger. She moved to Australia and after spending a couple years in Australia with her children, she returned. She explains that it is not an unusual situation for the islands to have differences in population over the years.

People have left for years. I do not think it is going up. It is steady. There have always been jumps; there was a jump in the fifties and a jump in the eighties. It seems stable now though. The school seems to have the same kind of level of students as when mine children started school [...].⁴³

Most of the islanders agree with the population as being stable at the moment. There are some concerns, but also optimistic point of views towards the future of the islands survival. The biggest concern would be the schools. The schools need a certain number of students in order to retain enough teachers. This will be further discussed in the following paragraphs. Optimistic are the islanders because until so far, every year they manage to keep the population stable and some families have decided to return to the island for the upcoming year. All the three islands face the dilemma of young people moving out but a lot of different nationalities are moving in.

⁴³ Interview Alannah, 23-03-2018.

As a woman from the cafeteria explains: “*You could say 1/3 of the island is an immigrant. When you walk in the supermarket there are many nationalities*”⁴⁴. She sees the diversity as a positive impact on the island because it does help to stabilize the population.

5.3 Diversity and immigration on the Aran Islands

Many different nationalities have been counted, as for example, Americans, Australians, Canadians, Italians, French residents and so on. A couple years back Alannah counted approximately forty different languages.⁴⁵ Many of the residents have migrated from other places in the world. Globalising factors play a role in the cultural diversity of the islands. It is easier to be mobile and move back and forth between countries. Some families are from two different nationalities, which will bring two different identities. According to Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006, 290) networks and communities become more extended and boundaries become blurred. Social and cultural characteristics are very diverse through the mobility of the people. This is in line with Blunts’ argument where she states that ethnicity crosses borders and goes beyond these borders (Blunt 2007, 687). The schools on the Aran Islands are a perfect example where a lot of ethnicities come together. The children get taught in Irish but also learn to grow up with the English language as is discussed in the third chapter. However, some of the children have a parent from another country as well with another foreign language, which could give them three languages. Especially in the primary school this is visible as a woman in the restaurant explained to me: “*I think there are like ten children in that class [...] probably eight of them have a parent not from here I believe*”⁴⁶. This does not mean they all speak a third foreign language, because in consideration a lot of the nationalities on the island are from America or Australia, which are English, speaking countries. What happens is that children get an identity from their parents’ background but also a new identity through learning the Irish language and to be part of the island community.

The children do get to know the social and cultural characteristics of the island fast by learning and participating at school. For the parents who are not from the Aran Islands it can be a more difficult process because they do not speak the Irish language. The integration process is different for everyone. Several factors play a role. Some people are from Ireland and already speak the Irish language, which gives them a huge advantage. Other people marry an Aran born resident and automatically have a connection to the island. But for others who have no

⁴⁴ Informal conversation woman cafeteria, Inishmore, 13-02-2018.

⁴⁵ Interview Alannah, 23-03-2018.

⁴⁶ Informal conversation woman restaurant, Kilronan, 23-03-2018.

connection to the island, the integration process is more of a challenge. Different issues come across for immigrants or as they get called ‘blow-ins’.

Integration

The previous chapter explained the stigma with newcomers as ‘blow-in’. Although the islanders are not excluding the ‘blow-in’ deliberately, for some newcomers it feels difficult to get included in the community. A multicultural society with many nationalities can be difficult for the newcomers to integrate and ultimately assimilate to the society as Castles (2002) argue. Castles explains that it can take two or three generations before the whole family is assimilated to the new society. The Aran Islands are a small community where the theory of Castles can take place on a micro level. Maggie and her family for example moved to the Aran Islands three years ago. They are the defined ‘blow-in’ because she is from New York and her husband is from Guatemala. They had no connection to the island or the people and started a complete new life on Inishmore. As she explains: “*people were very welcoming and friendly to us when we moved here [...] but there is this inner circle of islanders where we just do not feel part of yet*”⁴⁷. The social relations on the island can be portrayed as circles in the way Maggie describes. There is this inner circle of Aran born residents who have a very tight band with each other and like to keep their traditions and culture as it is. Around that circle is a broader group of people as for example Aran born residents who are married to a ‘blow-in’ or people who just live on the island for over twenty years now. The outer circle would be the one where Maggie is in now. The newcomers, the real ‘blow-in’ who have not lived on the island long enough to get closer to that inner circle.

For parents or single newcomers, it can therefore be difficult and a challenge to integrate fully. This is partly because the language is a barrier in the integration process. The Irish language gets most spoken in the inner circle and belongs to the distinctiveness and the strong sense of community of the Aran Islands. This is in line with Tamir, who states that local communities share feelings of distinctiveness and exclusivity (1995, 426). The Irish language makes the social inner circle exclusive and is therefore hard for outsiders to be part of. For the children it is easier because they will learn the Irish language through school and the children are very helpful to each other. A fifteen-year-old girl moved back with her family as a child and puts it like this:

⁴⁷ Interview Maggie, 08-03-2018.

*When we moved back here I did not speak the language at all because I lived in Australia, but the children were very helpful, they helped me in class [...] they were very nice to me. It is a small class where you are in, so I guess that helps. [...] It is a difficult language but I learned it quite fast over time.*⁴⁸

Also, Maggie is very fond of the way the children help each other out with everything. *“They seem more grown up here on the island, I am so impressed of how they hang out and help each other in school but also outside school.”*⁴⁹

Therefore, according to the theory of Castles where the second or third generation would be assimilated to the new society and in this case, community could be applied. The language seems to be the most important key element to connect with the inner circle. The children grow up with this language and can pass it on if they would stay on the island. So, a new generation grows up and shares a childhood and a unique language on these islands even though their parents may not be from the Aran Islands.

Immigration issues

Subsequently to integration there are different issues around immigration on the Aran Islands. Basic aspects as facilities, housing, cars, hospitals and food supply will be different on an island compared to the mainland. Hence, people need to be informed about what island life on the Aran Islands contains. Some people try to build a house on a piece of land but this is mostly not approved because of the heritage of the land. The stone walls and some of the flora and fauna that is visible in the land are historical and protected heritage. Even for Aran born residents it is not easy to build a new house. When a house is for sale people have to prove what their plans are and why they want to live on the island. According to Royle and Scott (1996, 114) the cultural heritage, of in this case an island could be affected by increased contact with outsiders. This is exactly what the Aran Islands try to avoid. Appadurai (1996) also states that with the globalisation kicking in, determined endeavours towards boundary-making arise, shown in terms of belonging and exclusion. The islands are looking for people who want to stay permanently and so the houses that are for sale will not accept every buyer. The people are afraid that the newcomers will use it as a holiday home or to rent it out. Kelly from the tourist office also mentioned: *“I do not want to walk around the island and see it turn into some holiday*

⁴⁸ Informal conversation 15-year-old girl, 24-03-2018.

⁴⁹ Interview Maggie, 08-03-2018.

resort”⁵⁰. The people of the island are very careful in that way of whom they let in and live on their island.

Some of the ‘blow-ins’ had a very difficult time finding a house. Especially when there is no family on the island, housing is one of the biggest issues that prohibit people to move to the island. The story of Maggie explains really well how difficult it is to find housing. She explains it as follows:

It was difficult to find accommodation. We were living in an apartment at first and there were five of us and a dog. It was a shoebox of an apartment. We had a king size bed and we could not put it in the bedroom so it was in the living room. And we had to move the couch in one of the bedrooms. And all of our boxes and everything we just... it was so tight. The first priority was to find a home. And it was so difficult. As you know. Luckily first months in we had a girl work for us and she was only three or four days with us. She gave us the contact of her aunt and I went over to see the house. And I just asked could we move in today I do not care. She said well I have to paint the walls, I said leave the walls. Our kids are going to draw over it anyway, do not even paint. So that was difficult. We brought our car over not realising there is no patrol here only diesel. There is no information. In that way I think as a newcomer that can be better. It is easy information to give, information is free.⁵¹

The Aran residents do want to preserve their cultural heritage and are cautious about letting people into their inner circle. All these factors play a role in immigrating to this community and to live on the island. This is something people need to take in counter because the island searches for an asset, someone who could help or at least will not disturb the preservation of the Irish language, their culture and heritage.

5.4 Emigration

Island life attracts a certain kind of people who can deal with the isolation and the small community. The nature is rough, the isolation can be problematic and the number of job openings is severe. As the context already addressed, the biggest group of people that leave the islands is the youth (Brown et al. 2014; Cross and Nutley 1999; Royle 2003). Emigration finds

⁵⁰ Interview Kelly, 24-03-2018.

⁵¹ Interview Maggie, 08-03-2018.

its reasons in economic and social fields. Higher educational options are only available on the main land of Ireland. Hence, teenagers who just finished their secondary school level leave the island for colleges in other places in the country. The principal (Michael) talks about how this is a dilemma for the future of the island. As Michael puts it:

*We educate them to go after what they really want and really the work is not here when they qualify for engineer or as lawyers you know. The opportunities are not on the island. It definitely is an issue going forward how do we address that; how do we bring people back?*⁵²

With this question the principal addresses the problem with emigration on the Aran Islands. The secondary school offers the scholarship programs as is described before, to attract students from the mainland where thirteen students attended for the year of 2017/2018.⁵³ It benefits the island in the way that these students get to know the place and tell people about this place, which could lead to newcomers in the future. Attracting the students happens most of the time by just mouth-to-mouth commercializing, which tells a lot about the experiences of the students who participated. But the main reason to have a programme like this is also the fact that otherwise the schools will not have enough students. Schools need a certain ratio of students to have a certain number of teachers.⁵⁴ If the number of students keeps declining Michael also explains that he is afraid that it could turn into a snowball effect. But it has not occurred yet and small things can make big differences as he explains it.

*I do not think that it will happen (snowball effect), somehow it always manages to come around again. You might have numbers going up in a couple years. We might go up to seventy students.*⁵⁵

In the theoretical framework Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006) discuss another reason to migrate. The Aran Islands have a lack of opportunities and especially for young people there can be an insecurity of growing further in life. Therefore, people can be attracted to move out and seek for more leisure and other wishes elsewhere. As Bjarnason and Thorlindsson explain

⁵² Interview principal Michael, Kilronan, 08-03-2018.

⁵³ Interview Alannah, 23-03-2018.

⁵⁴ Interview principal Michael, Kilronan, 08-03-2018.

⁵⁵ Interview principal Michael, Kilronan, 08-03-2018.

it, a small community can have a claustrophobic atmosphere (2006, 292). The children on the islands know they have a lot of freedom as the previous chapters explained. They experience the summers as fun and nice where the winters are long and boring. Jenny for example moved with her daughter to the island when her daughter was very young. Now her daughter moved out because:

[...] we moved back and then by her third year my daughter, Nancy, had cabin fever and she wanted off the island it was so 'fucking' small. And we were on an island. So, island living suits a certain personality.⁵⁶

As Jenny explains island life is not meant for everyone and so it will only attract a certain kind of people. A lot of people also explain it as, when you are a child it gives you a lot of freedom but when you get older you want to go into the big wide world⁵⁷. It is understandable because the educational options and job perspective are severe. Some people do miss the island life and decide to return.

5.5 Remigration

Aran born citizens find different reasons to return, which can be found in economic, social and cultural fields. For an Aran born citizen it is a place where they grow up and have family and friends living. The big pull factor would be the family ties and the connection to the island. The environment and the people give a good quality of life for them. The biggest group of returning are the elderly and young families who want their children to grow up in a safe environment. Another pull factor would be the Irish language. Jenny is not an Aran born resident but moved back to the island after she left it because of a cultural reason. She found it very important to let her daughter, Nancy, get in touch with the Irish language. She could go to an Irish school on the island.

The main problem of the ability to return would be the job perspective on the islands as is discussed before. However, Alannah explains: “*Some people come back so they can either work here or start a business here so they have work*”⁵⁸. She explains that people need to find a creative solution if they want to return to the island and find an income so it is possible for them to stay. Mia and Jenny, for example, both opened a yoga studio. The other islanders are

⁵⁶ Interview Jenny, 15-03-2018.

⁵⁷ Multiple informal conversations.

⁵⁸ Interview Alannah, 28-03-2018.

very happy with these new businesses. They both offer workshops during the year and in the tourist season, where tourists are just as welcome as the islanders.

Not all the reasons for returning are as joyful and happy. Some people did not have a choice and had to return, for example because of illness, disabilities, debts or personal tragedies. As described before, finding housing is very difficult unless you know people or have family members living on the island. This story is about a woman from the United States and her husband who is from the Aran Islands. In the United States they had a perfect life where they did not need to worry about finances. A tragedy occurred where her husband got into an accident and became disabled. He lost his job because of it and the insurance did not cover the health cost. They ended up in a poor financial situation. Therefore, they decided to move back to the birthplace of her husband, which was Inishmore where they could have a life with less financial costs.⁵⁹ In the theoretical framework Burholt and colleagues (2013) portray the Aran Islands as lovely, quiet, and peaceful. Although, many people on the island seem to enjoy these qualities but not every citizen could agree with that perception. Some people do not like the quietness and the isolation of the island but had no choice of living there.

The migration flows for the Aran Islands raise some concerns about the decreasing population. Still many people are optimistic and do not see the decrease going down any further. Due to the immigration, which brings new nationalities to the island and the remigration, the population has remained stable. The newcomers can become an asset to the community and the preservation of the culture as for example by passing on the Irish language.

⁵⁹ Informal conversation with woman of Jewellery shop, 23-03-2018

Conclusion

The residents of the Aran Islands have lived relatively isolated and with a largely self-contained lifestyle for a long time. The effects of globalisation and modernisation happened a lot quicker and in a later period, than on the mainland. With better transport facilities and easier contact, there came more regular access to healthcare and food. On the Aran Islands this also resulted in a new work industry, tourism. In this thesis we have addressed the relation between small communities, migration and sense of community considering a changing world because of globalisation and modernisation. Following upon ten weeks of fieldwork and a literature research we can now try to answer our research question: *“How does migration influence the sense of community of the residents of the Aran Islands, and what is the impact of the existing sense of community on migration from and to the Aran Islands?”* To structure this conclusion, we will focus on both parts of our research question separately and combine them afterwards.

The influence of migration on the sense of community

First, we will focus on the first part of our research question, on how migration influenced the sense of community. On the Aran Islands exists a certain Aran Identity that the residents incorporate. The Aran identity is shaped through the history and historical features on the islands. This includes the Irish language, which shapes the social aspect of being an Aran resident. Before globalisation and modernisation changed the job perspective on the islands, fishing and farming were the main prospects of living. Generations passed with profound knowledge of how to work the land and to have a sustainable livelihood. As an Aran born resident the traditional way of life with the Irish language and the Irish cultural features as dancing, music or singing belonged to the collective memory of the islands. However, the fast-growing tourism industry affects the dynamics of the Aran Identity, as in in line with the ideas of Royle and Scott (1996, 114). They state that increased contact with outsiders puts pressure on the maintenance of an islands' social and cultural identity (Royle and Scott 1996; Royle 2003). On the Aran Islands this can be seen in, among other things, the fact that the farming and fishing are less important now there is work in the tourism industry. Also, the English language becomes more and more important and sufficient on the islands. Children know from a very young age that it will give them more opportunities if they are fluent in the English language. Yet, many islanders are aware of the fact that the Irish language is an extinctive language that needs to be protected by the people who still know how to speak it and many of them do try to protect it. Irish is still spoken in the schools and in almost every home. This is

the same, although for a lesser extent, for the other traditions on the islands. Contradictory, however, tourists are attracted to the Aran Islands because of the true, Irish experience that can be found here (The O'Brien Press 2017). Traditions like, knitting of the Aran sweaters, Irish singing and dancing seem to be preserved especially for tourists.

There are fairly little activities and events organised on the islands. This while according to McMillan and Chavis (1986), in these activities and events, the residents of the islands have the chance to come together and gain similar experiences, which would contribute to their emotional connection and support. All of which add to a stronger sense of community. Yet, for islands that are mostly dependent on themselves it can be difficult to give people different opportunities in sports or courses. Most activities are organised during the summer, especially for the tourists and young residents that return for the summer. Many normal, weekly, activities however, stop during the summer because the residents are working too hard in organising things for the tourists. This is in line with the ideas of Burholt and colleagues (2013) that the interaction with people of your own declines when there is more contact with outsiders. Yet, because of the tourism and all the work that it brings, more residents return to the islands and do attend the activities. Also, there are some big events organised on the Aran Islands that are very well visited by the residents. The events go way back into the history of the island and mean a lot to the residents. A shared history is celebrated during these events, and the residents are in common places and gain similar experiences. They contribute to a strong sense of community (McMillan and Chavis 1986).

Brettell and Hollifield (2000) state that there is an impact on migration in communities through globalising and modernising processes. This is shown on the Aran Islands through the increase of different nationalities. Hence, the Aran Islands developed into a multicultural community. The people of the Aran Islands try to search for a certain kind of people that will not harm their identity and culture. They try to find people who want to stay permanently instead of temporarily. Since the tourism industry increased, the islanders are more aware of protecting their island from this industry as well. This means that they try to avoid that their island will turn into a holiday resort. The people that like to live on the island are a certain kind of persons, because island life is not for everyone. This results in that newcomers will contribute to the maintenance of the identity, cultural heritage and the Irish language on the Aran Islands. In addition, the migration of newcomers is necessary for the islands population stability and so the community has to adapt to the arrival of more outsiders.

The impact of the sense of community on migration

The second part of the research question involves the impact of the strong sense of community on the migration flows on the Aran Islands. The residents of the Aran Islands describe their community as very cohesive. Everybody knows everybody. This has two sides, a bad side, with a lot of gossiping and the impossibility to avoid someone and a good side in which people help each other out and collaborate in many areas. The residents experience more safety and security because of this, what corresponds with the findings of Burholt and colleagues (2013). There exists a reciprocal relationship of the individual and the community in terms of affecting each other on the Aran Islands. People expect to get something back from the community when they invest in it. Which is a part of McMillan and Chavis (1986) their definition of a strong sense of community. Furthermore, it can be said that most residents of the Aran Islands have a very strong sense of belonging towards the community. As explained by Crowley (1999) sense of belonging involves not just membership, it is also about the emotions about feeling at home, that come with it. The residents on the Aran Islands feel a member of the larger collective, as can be seen in the previous points. They feel at home in the community, it is their community, something that according to Tamir (1995) automatically comes with exclusion.

On the Aran Islands this is reflected in the not fully accepting of 'blow-ins', immigrants. The sense of belonging on the islands is especially strong between the original residents. Immigrants are welcomed and get the help they need if they ask for it. They are appreciated for having new input to the sustainability of the cultural heritage and are needed because of the declining population number. Yet, outsiders almost never become a full member of the community. The original residents always keep them at a certain distant. This is in line with the idea of localization of Appadurai (1996), in which with globalisation and modernisation, determined efforts towards boundary-making arise, expressed in terms of belonging and exclusion. Also, it is in line with the findings of Royle and Scott (1996) that contact with outsiders puts a lot of pressure on the maintenance of an islands' social and cultural identity. The residents are very cautious of letting people into their social inner circle of their community. The people do not exclude immigrants deliberately, but it takes a lot of time for relations to grow. Many of the Aran born residents have related on the islands and generations of families have lived there. This makes the kinship ties even stronger.

The strong sense of community and the isolation makes it hard for residents to find new friends on the island. The schools have different age groups in the same classroom. Many children attend school with their brothers and sisters. Therefore, the sense of community can have a claustrophobic atmosphere as Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006, 292) discuss. This

leads to an increase of emigration. Many young people are leaving the island for more educational options and leisure in other parts of the country or abroad.

Mutual effect

In conclusion, because the globalisation and modernisation happened quicker and later than on the mainland, there is still a very cohesive community with strong cultural traditions on the Aran Islands. But partly through migration processes, tendencies towards exclusion and localization arise. The residents feel that they need to protect their strong cultural and social heritage. Although activities and traditions may have declined in the last couple of years, the residents are very aware of the fact that it is important to preserve them. And although the population has been declining in the last couple decades it is stable at the moment. Newcomers bring new input to the island and its sustainability, which also affects the preservation of the traditions on the island. The networks and communities of the residents become more extended and boundaries become blurred as Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006, 290) discuss. Through the newly mobility of the residents of the Aran Islands, social and cultural characteristics are very diverse. For example, the children of the newcomers learn the Irish language through the school and participate in island events. For the original residents this could lead to a positive effect in protecting their cultural characteristics, as the Irish language. A new generation will learn about the cultural heritage and features of the island and could pass it on to the following generation. In this case a group identity is no longer fixed to the material geography. The feeling of belonging that people had with a community does not vanish as easily anymore as they migrate. And because of, among others, the strong collective memory, the traditions and the cohesive community with a strong sense of belonging it is not easy for the residents of the Aran Islands to let their identity go. As the return migration shows, the islands have a particular view of life, *“which is their view, the island view”*⁶⁰.

This research can be applied to many rural areas that face the same dilemma of migration processes wherein young people move to urban centres for educational options, job opportunities and leisure. This is in line with the findings of Brettell and Hollifield (2000) wherein they explain how people are forced or choose to move from rural areas to urban centres when globalising processes hit the rural area. The Aran Islands, however, do have a certain attraction to people that will find creativity in the landscape and business opportunities concerning tourism, farming or fishing. In this rural area, immigration also takes place. The

⁶⁰ Interview Priest Mellan, 16-03-2018.

most dramatic change in the last decades on the islands is even the change in the multi-ethnic diversity. Many different nationalities have found a home on the Aran Islands wherein every one of them is just as important to keep the island sustainable and to make a good livelihood. Ethnicity crosses borders and goes beyond these borders as Blunts' findings argue (2007, 687). This can be seen on the Aran Islands. With a globalising world the mobility increased, which caused a new stream of people who were able to reach the island. Some of the residents live both on the island and on the mainland, they live in two places. The improved ferry and air services make it a lot easier to move back and forth. Newcomers or 'blow-ins' are very welcome and appreciated for having new input to the sustainability of the cultural heritage, which is an important aspect for integrating to this small island community. Yet, it is difficult for them to become a full member of the community. There seem to be tendencies towards localization on the Aran Islands. Because of globalisation and modernisation more strangers, as in tourists and immigrants, come to the islands. Also, more original residents leave. Because of this, residents try to protect themselves through boundary-making endeavours, expressed in terms of belonging and exclusion. Hence, there is a dilemma in attracting new people to the island. It takes a lot of effort and time for newcomers to become part of the inner circle wherein the sense of belonging is so strong for the Aran born residents. As a result, the newcomers create their own social circle of community.

Discussion

Our research question does not have a one-sided answer. Multiple factors play a role in the processes around migration flows and in the strength of a sense of community. It is never just the migration that affects the sense of community or the other way around, there are always multiple factors involved. For further research, some questions can be further elaborated. This thesis had its focus on Inishmore but as residents also described, the Aran Islands cannot be seen as one settlement. The three islands differ a lot, as we noticed. Inishmore is the biggest island and is therefore the most touristic island. The tourism on Inisheer increased a lot over the last couple years and gets also very busy during the summers, because it is so close to Doolin. Inishmaan is however missing out on the tourism industry. Their income is still depending on the traditional way of life as farming and knitting. Although there are some Bed and Breakfasts on the island, it cannot sustain them enough throughout the entire year. Inishmaan missed out on the welfare that the other two islands gained with the globalisation and modernisation process and even stronger feelings towards their traditions remained. Therefore, we cannot give a complete and extended answer about all three islands that are part

of the Aran Islands. Our focus is on Inishmore and the vision of Inishmore is positive, there are enough prospects for welfare, as in the tourism industry. This could be different concerning Inisheer, and very different concerning Inishmaan. A broader image should be made to compare all three islands separately.

Another discussion point for this research is that we could not experience the summer season on Inishmore. We left when the tourist season was about to start. We have heard many stories in our interviews about how crazy the summer gets with the ferries and visitors coming to the islands. The population on the islands (Inishmore and Inisheer) almost doubles during the summer season. But no observations could be done of how the tourism season really looks like. All the information concerning this subject that is used in this paper is retrieved from interviews. This makes the research less reliable. For a more reliable and complete answer to the research question additional fieldwork should be done during the summer season.

A last recommendation for further research concerning the Aran Islands would be the diversity on these islands. We have found that the diversity on the Aran Islands has grown rapidly in the last couple of years. However, there was no time in our research to really focus on this aspect. Yet, the diversity does influence the sense of community on the islands. Thereby, especially a focus on the differences between the three islands is important, because globalising and modernising processes have not affected the islands all in the same way. This is also true for the mobility of the three islands. The multicultural communities on the three islands are therefore not the same. A specific research concerning multiculturalism would give more insight in the demographic transition on the Aran Islands.

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Appendix 1: Summary

This research tried to answer the following research question: *“How does migration influence the sense of community of the residents of the Aran Islands, and what is the impact of the existing sense of community on migration from and to the Aran Islands?”*

The Aran Islands near the west coast of Ireland have faced the issue of a decreasing population over the last hundred years. Through migration flows in a globalising world the Aran Islands had to adapt to the modernisation, which happened a lot quicker for small communities than on the mainland and urban centres in Ireland. Formerly, the Aran Islands were quite isolated for many years. Therefore, they kept a strong social cohesion and a profound sense of belonging. The islands share a common history with a unique authentic culture, which consists of traditions as fishing, farming and the Irish language. This collective memory in combination to the strong social cohesion and sense of belonging creates a great sense of community on the Aran Islands.

The collective memory on the islands also creates an identity that the Aran residents incorporate through their traditions and cultural heritage. The most important feature of the Aran identity is the Irish language. The islanders and the schools put a lot of effort in the maintenance of the language. Yet, the islanders cannot manage without the English language because of the increasing tourism. Further traditions on the island are farming, fishing and knitting of the Aran sweaters. These traditions have decreased sincerely over the last twenty years when tourism started to increase. The tourism industry on these islands is built around the idea of a small community with an authentic cultural characteristic (Eriksen 2014; Royle 2003). The Aran Islands benefit from their cultural heritage in this way and keep up some traditions especially for the tourists.

Activities and events organised and celebrated on the Aran Islands also contribute to gaining a strong sense of community, as they involve people being in common places and gaining similar experiences (McMillan and Chavis 1986). Moreover, the events go way back into the history of the island and mean a lot to the residents and a shared history is celebrated. Contrary, there are fairly little activities organised on the Aran Islands. Most activities are organised during the summer, especially for the tourists and young residents that return in this season. Many weekly activities however, stop during the summer because the residents have to work too much. This shows how increased contact with outsiders can reduce the interaction with locals, as in line with the findings of Burholt and colleagues (2013).

The Aran Islands have very cohesive communities. This has two sides, a bad side, with a lot of gossiping and the impossibility to avoid someone and a good side in which people help each other out and collaborate in many areas. The residents experience more safety and security because of this, what corresponds with the findings of Burholt and colleagues (2013). Furthermore, most residents of the Aran Islands have a very strong sense of belonging towards the community. They feel at home and feel a member of the larger collective, as can be seen in the previous points. This comes according to Tamir (1995) automatically with exclusion. On the Aran Islands this is reflected in the not fully accepting of 'blow-ins', immigrants. Immigrants are appreciated for having new input to the sustainability of the cultural heritage and are needed because of the declining population number. Yet, outsiders almost never become a full member of the community. The original residents always keep them at a certain distant. This is in line with the idea of localization of Appadurai (1996), in which with globalisation and modernisation, determined efforts towards boundary-making arise, expressed in terms of belonging and exclusion. Contact with outsiders puts a lot of pressure on the maintenance of an islands' social and cultural identity (Royle and Scott 1996). The residents do not exclude immigrants deliberately, but it takes a lot of time for relations to grow.

On the others side, for the original residents the strong sense of community and the isolation on the Aran Islands can also have a claustrophobic atmosphere as Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006, 292) discuss. This could explain the emigration numbers over the years. The biggest push factors are still the lack of job opportunities and educational options on the islands. Therefore, youth has to emigrate if they want to follow a higher level of education. Some of the people who have left the islands return eventually. Young families with children find it very pleasant to live on the Aran Islands because it gives a great freedom to the children's upbringing. Yet, returning to the island will only be possible if people find a way to sustain themselves. That is why the islanders also have learned to be creative in finding a solution to get an income by starting a business or work online.

Concluding, because the globalisation and modernisation happened later and quicker than on the mainland, there is still a very cohesive community with strong cultural traditions on the Aran Islands. But partly through migration processes, tendencies towards exclusion and localization arise. With a globalising world the mobility increased, which caused a new stream of people who were able to reach the island. The improved ferry and air services make it a lot easier to move back and forth. Because of globalisation and modernisation more strangers, as in tourists and immigrants, come to the islands. Also, more original residents leave. Because of this, residents try to protect themselves through boundary-making endeavours, expressed in

terms of belonging and exclusion (Appadurai 1996). The residents feel that they need to protect their strong cultural and social heritage. Although activities and traditions may have declined in the last couple of years, the residents are very aware of the fact that it is important to preserve them. And although the population has been declining in the last couple decades it is stable at the moment. Newcomers bring new input to the island and its sustainability, which also affects the preservation of the traditions on the island. This could lead to a positive effect in protecting the cultural characteristics for the original residents. A new generation will learn about the cultural heritage and features of the island and could pass it on to the following generation. In this era a group identity is no longer fixed to the material geography. The feeling of belonging that people had with a community does not vanish as easily anymore as they migrate. And because of, among others, the strong collective memory, the traditions and the cohesive community with a strong sense of belonging it is not easy for the residents of the Aran Islands to let their identity go.

Important to remember is that this research question does not have a one-sided answer. Multiple factors play a role in the processes around migration flows and in the strength of a sense of community. It is never just the migration that affects the sense of community or the other way around, there are always multiple factors involved.