

What are Sub-National Island Jurisdictions?

Steffen Eriksen, Bert Scholtens & Stephanie Werleman

To cite this article: Steffen Eriksen, Bert Scholtens & Stephanie Werleman (2025) What are Sub-National Island Jurisdictions?, Cogent Social Sciences, 11:1, 2450294, DOI: [10.1080/23311886.2025.2450294](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2025.2450294)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2025.2450294>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



View supplementary material [↗](#)



Published online: 15 Jan 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 316



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

What are Sub-National Island Jurisdictions?

Steffen Eriksen^a , Bert Scholtens^{a,b}  and Stephanie Werleman^{a,c} 

^aDepartment of Finance, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands; ^bSchool of Management, University of St Andrews, Scotland; ^cDepartment of Research and Policy Evaluation, Central Bank of Aruba, Oranjestad, Aruba

ABSTRACT

There is no consensus about the definition and classification of Sub-National Island Jurisdictions (SNIJs). This may conflate academic and policy analysis and misguide policies to advance development. We review existing definitions and classifications of SNIJs and systematically analyze the criteria used in different studies. Our study finds several inconsistencies in existing lists of entities labelled as SNIJs. This shows it may be helpful to arrive at common ground as to what might constitute an SNIJ. We suggest to define an SNIJ as a non-sovereign populated island territory that possesses some degree of autonomy in a partnership with a parent state. SNIJs have their own identity and culture, which are distinct from the parent state. They often are former colonies and may freely move towards independence. This definition can be used as a starting point for further analysis and of SNIJs that can help study them and design policies that address their challenges.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 29 August 2024
Revised 28 December 2024
Accepted 2 January 2025

KEYWORDS

Sub-national island jurisdictions; island; definition; sovereignty

SUBJECTS

Physical Geography;
Human Geography;
Political Economy;
Comparative Politics;
International Relations;
Government


1. Introduction

Over the past decades, many islands and archipelagos undergoing decolonization have opted not to pursue full independence (Armstrong & Read, 2021; Grydehøj, 2016). Instead, many have become more or less autonomous Sub-National Island Jurisdictions (SNIJs) (see Baldacchino and Milne (2009b)). These are islands that are in a dependent relationship with a parent state while possessing some degree of domestic autonomy.

There is no clear or generally accepted classification of SNIJs. Different authors can have different purposes for their studies and analysis which might require another definition. However, we find that the purposes are not always clearly defined. Consequently, it is hard to validate and replicate such studies. If studies after SNIJs are not clear about the exact purpose and do not clearly describe what is important to decide whether or not to classify an island as an SNIJ it is not possible to validate and replicate such studies. In the words of Hein (2004), 'no programme can be meaningful, operational and monitorable if it is not clear what specific countries are being considered' (p. 4). This can be regarded as a cause for concern, as research about SNIJs is urgently required given the unique economic and developmental challenges they face, such as hampered environmental sustainability resulting from their (over)dependence on the tourism sector (see Armstrong & Read, 2020, 2021). We are concerned that research using existing lists of SNIJs might result in biases and can lack both internal and external validity due to the sometimes vague and inconsistent qualification of entities as SNIJs.

We find that the various lists of SNIJs for a significant part result from the lack of a consistent and well-constructed description of what is regarded as a SNIJ as well from the fact that the objective of the analysis of studying SNIJs is not transparent (see, e.g. Gerring (2012) and Caramani (2009)). Furthermore, we observe that the studies are not consistently applying what they suggest is their definition of SNIJs.

CONTACT Bert Scholtens  l.j.r.scholtens@rug.nl  Department of Finance, University of Groningen, Nettelbosje 2, 9747 AE Groningen, The Netherlands; School of Management, University of St Andrews, Scotland

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2025.2450294011>.

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Therefore, this paper will investigate whether studies consistently apply the descriptions provided and suggest a definition for SNIJs, which marks a first step towards establishing a consistent classification (and hence listing) of SNIJs.

We critically reflect on the literature by conducting an in-depth analysis of existing classifications. We investigate whether the lists of SNIJs can be replicated and try to find what is behind the differences and similarities between the existing classifications. Furthermore, we try to replicate the entities assigned as an SNIJ in the different studies. We establish that studies are not very clear about what is an SNIJ and that they do not consistently apply their definitions. Therefore, we think it is useful to come up with a description of SNIJs that focuses on the key identifying factors. Furthermore, we suggest defining an SNIJ as a non-sovereign populated island territory that possesses some degree of autonomy in a partnership with a parent state. SNIJs have their own identity and culture, which are distinct from the parent state. They often are former colonies and may freely move towards independence. This definition can be used as a starting point for further analysis and of SNIJs that can help study them and design policies that address their challenges.

The case of SNIJs is seldom discussed in the literature (Armstrong et al., 1998; Armstrong & Read, 1994, 2000, 2021). If it comes to islands, most of the attention is reserved for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This is a group of island states facing similar social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities. They consist of 38 UN members and 20 non-UN members. However, it is unlikely to assume that results for SIDS automatically hold for SNIJs too. Petzold and Ratter (2019) argue that the extensive attention to SIDS and the generalization of findings about these states to all other islands, including SNIJs, risks an incomplete and maybe incorrect understanding of island-specific factors. Treating SNIJs as SIDS can lead to the misconception that all islands are the same or, as Watts (2009, p. 27) writes, ‘the fallacy of assuming that there is a single universal ‘best model’ for all islands.’ Although SIDS and SNIJs share similarities (both categories contain islands), fundamental differences exist. In particular, SNIJs are non-sovereign¹ entities (University of Prince Edward Island, 2019). This means that SNIJs can get structural support from the parent state, such as military defense assurance, access to international capital markets, natural disaster relief, and social welfare assistance. In contrast, SIDS do not (or no longer) have such ties with a parent state. Moreover, McElroy and Pearce (2006) and Armstrong and Read (1995, 2000) find that SNIJs are economically more advanced socially more progressive, and demographically more mature than SIDS. Compared to SIDS, SNIJs are understudied and poorly understood, leading to potential misinterpretation of island-specific factors (e.g. the application of policy implications of studies conducted on SIDS to SNIJs without considering sovereignty) (Grydehøj, 2016; Grydehøj et al., 2021).

The aim of this study is to critically reflect upon the existing studies that describe and/or define SNIJs and to suggest a practical definition of SNIJs for the academic and policy debate. To this extent, the remainder of this paper is structured as follows: [Section 2](#) discusses the existing literature that defines and classifies SNIJs. [Section 3](#) describes the methods and materials applied. [Section 4](#) presents the results. Finally, [Section 5](#) concludes.

2. Existing studies

This section discusses the literature that defines and classifies SNIJs. During this process, we also need to pay attention to the ‘Partially Independent Territories’ (PITs), as some scholars (e.g. Ferdinand et al. (2020) and Korson et al. (2020)) regard these as equivalent to SNIJs. However, we want to point out that the focus of this paper is not on PITs because its definition goes beyond islands and Rezvani (2014) includes several non-islands. Consequently, we will show that the view of Ferdinand et al. (2020) and Korson et al. (2020) is not correct. Next, we report the criteria used to arrive at a classification of SNIJs.

Baldacchino (2010) and the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) describe SNIJs as non-sovereign islands. They are physically cut off from the parent state and have some degree of internal autonomy. Furthermore, they are sub-national and somehow associated with a parent state. They have a different society and culture. Furthermore, Baldacchino (2010) and the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) point out that the citizens of SNIJs usually support local politicians who are neither integrationist nor sovereigntist. The status as an SNIJ suits the interest of the island and, sometimes, also that of the parent state. In addition, the Institute of Island Studies states that most SNIJs do not wish to seek complete sovereignty or lose their

autonomous power(s). This is likely related to having a 'safety net' and sufficient local power, as noted by Baldacchino and Milne (2009a; p. 4): 'The grant of Sub-National Island Jurisdictional status (SNIJ) typically confers a solid safety net supported by a parent state, while permitting enough discretion to safeguard national identity, local culture and the general exercise of local power'. According to Stuart (2009), this degree of local power varies significantly across the SNIJs, ranging from being significantly limited to having a broad degree of autonomy.

On the other hand, Watts (2009) provides a more narrow and broken-down description of SNIJs. In their paper, SNIJs are characterized as islands or groups of islands that possess a combination of self-governance while being in a political partnership. However, Watts (2009) does not consider islands with non-constitutional or informal arrangements, indigenous island-based communities with a degree of sovereignty within another state, and islands in open confrontation or contestation with the parent state to be SNIJs.

Similar to Watts (2009), Ferdinand et al. (2020) also provide a broken-down definition of SNIJs and indicate clearly which entities are excluded. They view SNIJs as primarily small island nations that were previously colonized and that are non-sovereign but in a relationship with the parent state (i.e. the former colonial power). Moreover, they consider SNIJs to be islands that have a say in their future sovereignty status, i.e. they are free to move to independence if they want to. Therefore, islands that are not former colonies and do not possess the free choice towards independence are not classified as SNIJs by Ferdinand et al. (2020).

It shows that the scholars disagree about the specific characterization of SNIJs. Therefore, the criteria used in each study will be investigated in detail below. The investigation also includes the study of Rezvani (2014), who came up with the notion of partially independent territories (PITs). These are conceptualized and defined by Rezvani (2014, p. 21–22) as '(1) nationalistically distinct entities that are (2) constitutionally unincorporated into the core state with which they (3) divide and share sovereign power'. Ferdinand et al. (2020) and Korson et al. (2020) refer to PITs as SNIJs when reviewing the SNIJ literature and regard the two as synonyms. Given the fact that Rezvani's definition of PITs does not include the 'island dimension', we argue this view is incorrect. We will also show this in the Results section.

Table 1 provides an overview of the key features of the studies that investigate SNIJs and PITs. It shows that the amount of SNIJs identified varies considerably: the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) identifies 119, Stuart (2009) 116, Watts (2009) 89, and Ferdinand et al. (2020) 40 SNIJs, whereas Rezvani (2014) identified 66 PITs.

Table 1. Existing studies that identified Sub-National Island Jurisdictions (and Partially Independent Territories).

Study (Year)	Definition (or criteria) used	SNIJs
Institute of Island Studies (n.d.)	'These are populated, sub-national, island territories with a degree of shared rule with some metropolitan power; as well as a degree of self-rule over at least one of the four policy areas that the project will focus on.'	119
Stuart (2009)	Stuart (2009) followed the SNIJ database provided by the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.). Therefore, we assume that the same criteria apply.	116
Watts (2009)	'Thus, all together at last 89 islands or sets of islands are involved in some combination of autonomous self-government combined with formal collaboration in a wider political partnership. These comprise: 22 islands as fully fledged constituent units in federations, 10 island federacies, three island associate states, 18 islands with some form of constitutional home rule, 36 islands involved in one or more of CARICOM, the Nordic Council, SAARC, ASEAN, and the Commonwealth not already included in the preceding categories.' (Watts, 2009, p. 23)	89
Ferdinand et al., (2020)	'We start off by providing a concise overview of all non-sovereign territories worldwide, in the process arguing for a narrowing down of our total sample of 55 to 40, excluding both jurisdictions that do not have a colonial history (and hence no tradition of anticolonial sentiments) and territories that today most likely have no chance to move towards independence should they want so.' (Ferdinand et al., 2020, p. 45) Ferdinand et al. (2020) consider islands solely to be SNIJs, as illustrated by the following phrase: 'There is little drive for independence in these territories, virtually all of which are small island nations, also known as sub-national island jurisdictions (SNIJs)' (Ferdinand et al., 2020, p. 43). Moreover, the title of their paper indicates that the criteria include only islands: 'A global comparison of non-sovereign island territories: the search for 'true equality''.	40
Rezvani (2014)	'As indicated previously, PITs are (1) nationalistically distinct and (2) constitutionally unincorporated organizational forms that share and divide some (3) credible final decision-making powers (some territorial sovereignty) with a sovereign (core state). Such PITs exercise a wide range of powers over domestic jurisdiction, some foreign matters, but not external military affairs.' (Rezvani, 2014, p. 100)	66

Table 1 highlights the variation in definitions. It also reveals that the criteria employed in the studies differ in terms of clarity and subjectivity. The number of SNIJs identified by the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) and Stuart (2009) is much higher than that in the other studies. Watts (2009) argues this is because these studies include islands undergoing constitutional change, islands that have a non-constitutional arrangement in place that leads to the association with the parent state, indigenous island-based communities with some sovereignty, and islands in open contestation with the parent state. Watts (2009) does not classify these islands as SNIJs and arrives at a much lower number. Ferdinand et al. (2020) produce the lowest number of SNIJs, based on the previously mentioned exclusion of islands that do not possess a colonial past and do not have a say in their future constitutional arrangement. They argue that this exclusion results from their idea that these islands do not fit the classic model of linkages (i.e. history of colonialism) between the parent state and the non-sovereign jurisdiction.

In the next section, we explain how we will compare the different definitions and the resulting classification of SNIJs.

3. Methods and materials

3.1. Analysis of Sub-National Island Jurisdictions' inclusion across existing studies

We use a Venn diagram to illustrate the overlap in SNIJ classifications in the literature. Unfortunately, we need to exclude the study by Watts (2009), as it does not state which territories it considers to be an SNIJ. With the four remaining studies, there are fifteen different combinations of 1, 2, 3, or 4 studies. Furthermore, we calculate a similarity measure that gives the ratio of total matches to the total population (Sokal & Michener, 1958; Zubin, 1938). The measure is based on the four values from the cross-tabulation between the two studies' classifications. In our study, we employ the 'simple matching coefficient' due to the binary nature of the data.

To construct the Venn diagram, we need to adjust each study's list of islands (Table 2). This is because some studies recognize a group of islands as one SNIJ while others recognize each island within that group as a separate SNIJ. For example, Stuart (2009) identifies the Bailiwick of Guernsey as one SNIJ. In contrast, the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) recognizes each island within that bailiwick as an SNIJ (namely Guernsey, Alderney, Herm, and Sark). Similarly, the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) recognized Comoros (i.e. Grande Comore, Moheli, Anjouan, and Mayotte) as one SNIJ whereas Stuart (2009) recognized Grande Comore, Moheli, Anjoan, and Mayotte as separate SNIJs. Moreover, we adjust for double counts by Rezvani (2014). Secondly, we adjust for entities that are fully independent. To be specific, Rezvani's (2014) list of PITs contains both past and current PITs, detailing their specific period of

Table 2. Number of Sub-National Island Jurisdictions.

	Institute of Island Studies (n.d.)	Stuart (2009)	Rezvani (2014)	Ferdinand et al. (2020)	Total
Original count	119	116	66	40	
First adjustment	124	119	62	42	160
Second adjustment	123	118	48	42	146
Third adjustment	123	118	35	42	133

Note. From the original count to the first adjusted count, the following changes are applied to the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.): partition of Comoros, Guernsey, Saaremaa & Hiiumaa, and Zanzibar (Unjuga), Pemba, and Mafia.

From the original count to the first adjusted count, the following changes are applied to Rezvani (2014): the double counts of Hong Kong, Northern Ireland, South Sudan, and Vojvodina were eliminated.

From the original count to the first adjusted count, the following changes are applied to Ferdinand et al. (2020): partition of St. Helena, Ascension, and Tristan de Cunha.

From the first to the second adjusted count, the following change is applied to the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.): elimination of the Netherlands Antilles.

From the first to the second adjusted count, the following change is applied to Stuart (2009): elimination of the Netherlands Antilles.

From the first to the second adjusted count, the following changes are applied to Rezvani (2014): elimination of Australia, Canada, Crimea, Eritrea, Irish Free State, Kosovo, Malta, Memel-Klaipeda, Netherlands Antilles, New Zealand, Newfoundland, Rhodesia, South Africa, and Suriname.

From the second to the third adjusted count, the following changes are applied to Rezvani (2014): elimination of Aosta Valley, Basque Country, Catalonia, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Gagauzia, Galicia, Gibraltar, Kurdistan, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, Trentino-South Tyrol, and Vojvodina. See the [Supplementary Information](#) for the lists of entities included.

existence. From this list, we exclude the PITs that ceased to exist, including those that graduated to a sovereign status as indicated by membership at the UN. However, past PITs also include, for example, the former Netherlands Antilles, which was dissolved and did not graduate to a sovereign status. We want to repeat that Rezvani's PITs are not meant to capture SNIJs, but that we include them because other studies – like Ferdinand et al. (2020) and Korson et al. (2020) – use PITs as synonymous with SNIJs. Third, we filter the sample for entities not being an island. An island in this regard is a piece of land surrounded by water (Baldacchino, 2013; Jędrusik, 2011). After these adjustments, we end up with 133 SNIJs (see Table 2).

3.2. Classification of sub-national island jurisdictions

We examine the criteria used to classify SNIJs. This examination is to inform about the homogeneity of the criteria in the literature. As such, it can help explain the differences across the SNIJs mentioned in the different studies.

Table 3 sets out how we convert the definitions of each study into determinants. This allows us to analyze each determinant's (lack of) inclusion across the existing studies using a table. The analysis will be performed by listing the determinants and subsequently using a dummy variable for its inclusion in a particular study's criteria (has a value 0 if the determinant is not included and a value 1 if it is).

Table 3. Criteria of existing studies that identified Sub-National Island Jurisdictions (and Partially Independent Territories), were converted into testable determinants.

Study (Year)	Definition (or criteria) used	Determinants (D)
Institute of Island Studies (n.d.)	'These are populated, sub-national, island territories with a degree of shared rule with some metropolitan power; as well as a degree of self-rule over at least one of the four policy areas that the project will focus on.'	D1: Populated D2: Sub-national D3: Island territory D4: Shared rule with some metropolitan power D5: Internal autonomy (self-rule)
Stuart (2009)	Stuart (2009) followed the SNIJ database provided by the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.). Therefore, we assume that the same criteria apply.	Stuart (2009) followed the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.). Therefore, the same determinants apply.
Watts (2009)	'Thus, altogether at least 89 islands or sets of islands are involved in some combination of autonomous self-government combined with formal collaboration in a wider political partnership. These comprise: 22 islands as fully fledged constituent units in federations, 10 island federacies, three island associate states, 18 islands with some form of constitutional home rule, 36 islands involved in one or more of CARICOM, the Nordic Council, SAARC, ASEAN and the Commonwealth not already included in the preceding categories.' (Watts, 2009, p. 23)	D1: Island territory or set of islands D2: Some combination of autonomous self-government D3: Formal collaboration in a wider political partnership
Rezvani (2014)	'As indicated previously, PITs are (1) nationalistically distinct and (2) constitutionally unincorporated organizational forms that share and divide some (3) credible final decision-making powers (some territorial sovereignty) with a sovereign (core state). Such PITs exercise a wide range of powers over domestic jurisdiction, some foreign matters, but not external military affairs.' (Rezvani, 2014, p. 100)	D1: Nationalistically distinct D2: Constitutionally unincorporated D3: Share and divide territorial sovereignty with a core state D4: Wide range of power over domestic jurisdiction D5: Some power over foreign matters D6: No power over external military affairs
Ferdinand et al., 2020	'We start by providing a concise overview of all non-sovereign territories worldwide, in the process arguing for a narrowing down of our total sample of 55 to 40, excluding both jurisdictions that do not have a colonial history (and hence no tradition of anticolonial sentiments) and territories that today most likely have no chance to move towards independence should they want so.' (Ferdinand et al., 2020, p. 45) Ferdinand et al. (2020) consider islands solely to be SNIJs, as illustrated by the following phrase: 'There is little drive for independence in these territories, virtually all of which are small island nations, also known as sub-national island jurisdictions (SNIJs)' (Ferdinand et al., 2020, p. 43). Moreover, the title of their paper indicates that the criteria include only islands: 'A global comparison of non-sovereign island territories: the search for 'true equality''.	D1: Non-sovereign (island territory) D2: Colonial history D3: Ability to move to independence

3.3. Replication of SNIJ classifications

Next to the classification, we aim to replicate the existing classifications of SNIJs (and PITs). We do so by comparing the determinants in each study, for each listed SNIJ, against publicly available information. If an SNIJ shows the presence of a specific determinant, then a value of '1' is assigned for that determinant. If not, then '0' is assigned for that particular determinant. If the SNIJ concurs with all the determinants of a specific study, it is concluded that the territory is indeed an SNIJ according to that particular study. This process is repeated for all studies (apart from Watts (2009), due to the lack of a list of SNIJs).

We also replicate the classification by Rezvani (2014), although the criteria are not very precise. In particular, Rezvani (2014) specifies that PITs are 'nationalistically distinct' because they have distinct populations, but did not describe what is to be considered a distinct population, leaving the interpretation open (D1). Here, we evaluate their D1 in Table 3 with the help of the ethnic distinctiveness of the population. In other words, we consider it to be 'nationalistically distinct' if the population is ethnically distinct. This is explained by Riegl et al. (2019), who also evaluate nationalistically distinctiveness. They assert that an entity is ethnically distinctive if there is a majority ethnic group (>50 percent). Furthermore, Rezvani (2014) does not indicate what is considered to be a 'wide range of power over domestic jurisdiction' (D4) and 'some power over foreign affairs' (D5). PITs that have some or no power over their foreign affairs receive score 1 for this dimension. PITs that have significant control over their foreign affairs receive score 0. We mostly use the CIA World Factbook to evaluate this criterion (see the Supplementary Information – Tables SI.5, SI.7, SI.9, SI.11 – for specific sources). The CIA World Factbook specifies whether an SNIJ holds the responsibility for foreign affairs or if this is in the hands of the parent state. If the CIA World Factbook states that the parent state is responsible for foreign affairs, we score this criterion with a 1 and 0 otherwise.

3.4. Data

We use the CIA World Factbook as the primary source of information where possible. Complementary sources are the Encyclopedia Britannica, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the SNIJ database by the Institute of Island Studies. Furthermore, we utilize specific sources if the necessary information is not available in the previously mentioned sources (see Supplementary Information; Tables SI.1-11). These materials are used to arrive at the results in the next section. We present the Venn diagram, and a similarity measure relating to the different studies' classification of SNIJs. We also present the analysis of the criteria regarding classification as SNIJ by previous studies. Furthermore, we discuss the replication attempts regarding the classifications.

4. Results

4.1. Classification of Sub-National Island Jurisdictions

To find out about the congruency of existing SNIJ classifications, we use a Venn diagram and a similarity measure. Figure 1 is the Venn diagram showing how the SNIJs in the different studies (i.e. different sets) relate to one each other. It shows this association for the list that was constructed after three adjustments. Thus, it includes the partition of groups and corrects for double-counting, corrects for entities that used to be partially independent, and controls for the non-islands classified as PITs by Rezvani (2014).

From Figure 1, we derive three important results. First, the figure illustrates a lack of homogeneity across the existing classifications or sets of SNIJs. In particular, only 14 SNIJs (10.5 percent of all 133 entities) are classified as SNIJs in all four studies (intersect 15). It shows that most of the intersection is in the combination of the Institute of Island Studies and Stuart. These two studies have 109 SNIJs in common (82.6 percent of all entities).

Second, most SNIJs are identified by the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) and Stuart (2009). This results from the highly similar criteria applied in these two studies. However, there is still a fraction of SNIJs about which the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) and Stuart (2009) disagree, namely 17.4 percent (24 entities). This discrepancy may be related to factors other than the criteria enforced, e.g. year of study, and a broader set of islands upon which the researcher tested their criteria (see also Ferdinand et al.

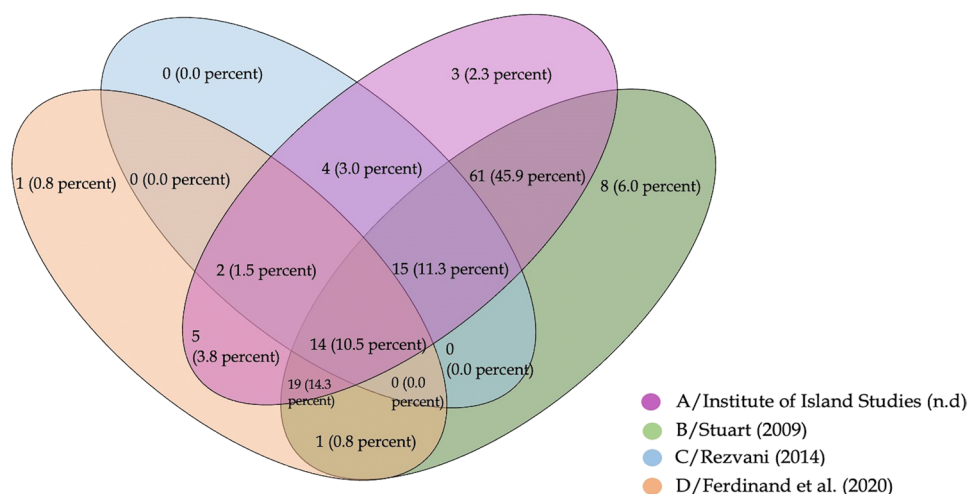


Figure 1. Venn diagram regarding the relative degree of connectedness of the SNIJ and PIT studies.

Table 4. Matching coefficients for similarity between pairs of studies.

First adjustment	Institute of Island Studies (n.d.)	Stuart (2009)	Rezvani (2014)
Stuart (2009)	0.8562		
Rezvani (2014)	0.2875	0.2437	
Ferdinand et al. (2020)	0.4625	0.4188	0.5500
Second adjustment	Institute of Island Studies (n.d.)	Stuart (2009)	Rezvani (2014)
Stuart (2009)	0.8425		
Rezvani (2014)	0.2574	0.2603	
Ferdinand et al. (2020)	0.4178	0.3699	0.6027
Third adjustment	Institute of Island Studies (n.d.)	Stuart (2009)	Rezvani (2014)
Stuart (2009)	0.8189		
Rezvani (2014)	0.3383	0.2857	
Ferdinand et al. (2020)	0.3609	0.3083	0.6617

Note. The similarity measure represents the total matches to the total population between two studies. The first adjustment corrects for the partition of groups and double-counted Partially Independent Territories. The second adjustment corrects for partition of groups, double-counted Partially Independent Territories, and past Partially Independent Territories. The third adjustment corrects for the partition of groups, double-counted Partially Independent Territories, past Partially Independent Territories, and non-island Partially Independent Territories.

(2020)). However, our analysis suggests that the criteria mentioned in the studies cannot be the only factor that drives the variation across existing classifications of SNIJs.

Third, we observe that all four studies include at least one SNIJ that another study does not classify as such. In the case of Rezvani (2014), this is mainly related to their inclusion of past SNIJs as well as non-island entities. SNIJs uniquely classified by the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) are Cape Breton Island, the Greek Islands, and the Isle of Wight. SNIJs uniquely classified by Stuart (2009) are the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Hasava, Ho'aïdo (Hokkaido), Manus, New Britain, New Ireland, North Maluku, and Tamil Eelam. Ferdinand et al. (2020) is the only study classifying French Guiana as an SNIJ. We must note, however, that French Guiana is not typically considered as an island. Therefore, it might have been misclassified in the list of Ferdinand et al. (2020).

In relation to the existing literature on descriptions and classifications, we deduce that the discrepancies among current classifications of SNIJs are also likely related to problematic sources of data and missing data (see e.g. Gerring (2012)). The latter is a common challenge in island studies (Armstrong & Read, 2000; Zhang et al., 2024). Moreover, the consideration of too many variables in existing classifications might have also resulted in classifications that are 'too large to be useful' (Elman, 2005, p. 2009). It appears that this issue affects both the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) and Stuart (2009). Some entities in their classification have very little in common except for being island territories.

Table 4 presents the similarity measures among the studies, which informs about the congruency between the different classifications. The table shows weak to modest similarity across the studies as the average similarity is 46%. The highest similarity is found between the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) and Stuart (2009), where the proportion of matches between the two studies is more than 80%. We conclude that Figure 1 and Table 4 provide convincing evidence for the need for a more consistent classification of SNIJs.

4.2. Determinants of Sub-National Island Jurisdictions' classifications

To help explain the results in Table 4, we investigate the determinants that were used to arrive at the classification of an SNIJ. As such, we try to find out about the homogeneity of previous definitions (see Table 3). To this extent, we convert the criteria of each existing study into determinants. In their most basic form, the determinants are dummy variables that take the value of '1' if the study uses that particular determinant as a criterion and '0' otherwise. Table 5 reports the results of this calculation.

Table 5 shows that there are very different patterns of inclusion across the studies. This implies that the criteria used across SNIJs classifications are far from homogenous. An exception is 'the territory is sub-national', which holds in all five studies. This suggests they all agree that for a territory to be an SNIJ, it must be associated with a parent state, making it non-sovereign. Furthermore, 'the territory is populated' is required by the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) and Stuart (2009). We assume that for a territory to be sub-national and to be able to exercise its internal autonomy, it must be populated in order to be classified as an SNIJ. Despite SNIJs often being referred to in the existing literature as having a degree of internal autonomy, not all studies agree that it is a necessary condition. Ferdinand et al. (2020) explicitly did not require a degree of internal autonomy as a prerequisite. This is inconsistent with the other studies. It is not clear why Ferdinand et al. (2020) exclude territories with internal autonomy that cannot move towards independence (e.g. Hong Kong and Macau), while they include an island without internal autonomy (i.e. Norfolk Island). Consequently, their criteria seem to be conflicting with some of the characteristics of an SNIJ.

Table 5 also shows that 'the territory is an island or group of islands' shows up in all studies, except in Rezvani (2014). This partially explains their differences and highlights again that Rezvani's PITs are not necessarily islands. This is not a surprise as Rezvani (2014) did not include geographical factors in the definition of PITs. Therefore, previous research (e.g. Ferdinand et al. (2020)) that used PITs as a synonym for SNIJ seem not to realize the inappropriateness of interchangeable usage of these two terms. Furthermore, Rezvani (2014) is the only study that explicitly requires that the territory is nationally distinct, constitutionally unincorporated, has some power over foreign affairs, and has no control over military affairs. In contrast, the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) suggests that SNIJs are

Table 5. Determinants of the studies that identified Sub-National Island Jurisdictions (and Partially Independent Territories).

Determinant	Studies					Count
	Institute of Island Studies (n.d.)	Stuart (2009)	Watts (2009)	Rezvani (2014)	Ferdinand et al. (2020)	
The territory is populated	1	1	0	0	0	2
The territory is sub-national ^a	1	1	1	1	1	5
The territory is an island or group of islands	1	1	1	0	1	4
The territory has a degree of internal autonomy ^b	1	1	1	1	0	4
The territory is nationalistically distinct	0	0	0	1	0	1
The territory is constitutionally unincorporated	0	0	0	1	0	1
The territory has some power over foreign matters	0	0	0	1	0	1
The territory has no power over external military affairs	0	0	0	1	0	1
The territory has a colonial history	0	0	0	0	1	1
The territory is able to move to independence if it wants to	0	0	0	0	1	1
Count	4	4	3	6	4	

^aOr the territory has a wider political partnership (Watts, 2009). The sub-nationalism is indicated by Rezvani (2014) as sharing sovereignty with a core state. Ferdinand et al. (2020) refer to this sub-nationalism as the island being non-sovereign.

^bWatts (2009) refers to this internal autonomy as 'autonomous self-government'. Rezvani (2014) describes this determinant as the territory having a wide range of control over domestic affairs.

granted enough discretion to maintain national identity and local culture, indicative of being 'nationalistically distinct' to some degree. The University of Prince Edward Island (2014n.d.) argues that SNIJs may develop international relations on their own. Therefore, SNIJs can have some power over foreign affairs, in line with Rezvani (2014). Some scholars argue that SNIJs get military defense provisions from the parent state (McElroy and Mahoney, 2000, as cited in Baldacchino & Milne, 2009a). This resonates with the criteria of Rezvani (2014). Lastly, we find that the constitutional arrangements of SNIJs vary considerably (see Baldacchino & Milne, 2009a; Ferdinand et al., 2020). Therefore, we conclude that not all SNIJs are necessarily constitutionally unincorporated.

Ferdinand et al. (2020) require that an SNIJ has a colonial history and can freely move to independence if desired. This is why they disqualify Hong Kong and Macau as SNIJ. They exclude territories from their list that do not have a colonial past (for example, Jeju). However, despite being the only study having these criteria, we find that others also suggest that SNIJs are often former colonies: 'In many cases, special jurisdictional features enjoyed by such islands have arisen in the context of colonialism' (University of Prince Edward Island, 2020n.d., para. 3). Baldacchino and Milne (2009b) argue that most SNIJs have no urgency to become independent, suggesting that most SNIJs possess the freedom to move towards complete independence.

The results in Table 5 suggest that the classifications of SNIJs are different partly due to the variation in the criteria applied (see, e.g. Gerring (2012)). The analysis shows that the general idea seems to be that an SNIJ can be defined as a populated island (or group of islands) in a relationship with a parent state. They have varying degrees of internal autonomy: from being entirely constitutionally integrated to having significant levels of autonomy in internal affairs. In addition, most SNIJs can be distinctive (in terms of national identity and culture) vis-à-vis the parent state. Moreover, most SNIJs are former colonies that can move towards independence if desired. Finally, some SNIJs have some degree of control over foreign affairs, and almost all receive military protection from the parent state. We use these findings to arrive at a more consistent definition of SNIJs (section 5).

4.3. Replication of existing classifications

We replicate the existing classifications of SNIJs (and PITs) using the method described in section 3.3. However, we could not replicate all: With the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.), Bioko did not comply with the study's criteria it has no internal autonomy. The same holds for British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), Jan Mayen, Lofoten, Macquarie Island, Norfolk Island, Novaya Zemlya, and St. Eustatius. Additionally, the BIOT, Jan Mayen, and Macquarie Island do not have permanent residents. This suggests that the Institute of Island Studies (n.d.) did not consistently follow its own criteria. This also occurs with Stuart (2009), where Bioko, British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), Jan Mayen, Lofoten, Macquarie Island, Novaya Zemlya, Tamil Eelam, and Norfolk Island, have no internal autonomy. In addition, BIOT, Jan Mayen, and Macquarie Island do not have permanent residents, while Hasava is not an island. With Ferdinand et al. (2020), we find that French Guiana does not comply as it is not an island. None of the studies explains why these discrepancies would have occurred.

The replication of Rezvani (2014) is excluded as nearly all PITs (93.5 percent) could not be replicated from the study's criteria (see also Riegl et al., 2019). This is not a surprise given the different nature and purpose of Rezvani's concept of PITs. Exceptions are the Cook Islands, Guernsey, and Niue. Therefore, it appears Rezvani (2014) too did not systematically arrive at the list of PITs. Most of this non-replicability results from the PITs not being constitutionally unincorporated. This is the case for, for example, Sint Maarten. Moreover, a significant portion (namely 40.4 percent) of the PITs are not 'nationalistically distinct'. Besides, for some PITs, we do not find sufficient evidence to suggest that they 'share and divide territorial sovereignty with a core state' (for example Liechtenstein), that they possess some power over foreign affairs (such as San Marino), or that they do not have power over military affairs (for example, Kurdistan). In addition, we want to point out that none of the latter three entities is an island. However, most PITs comply with the third (i.e. 'share and divide territorial sovereignty with a core state'), fourth (i.e. 'wide range of power over domestic jurisdiction'), fifth (i.e. 'some power over foreign matters'), and sixth determinant (i.e. 'no power over external military affairs'). Therefore, 'sharing and dividing territorial sovereignty within a core state' (i.e. the third determinant) appears to be a typical characteristic of PITs.

According to Baldacchino (2010), 'sub-national' means that the island continues to be associated with a sovereign state, similar to the criterion (i.e. the third determinant) by Rezvani (2014). Adhering to the fourth determinant suggests that a wide range of power over domestic jurisdiction (i.e. internal autonomy) also is a core characteristic of PITs. Lastly, compliance with the fifth and sixth determinants demonstrates that most PITs do not have full control over foreign matters nor military affairs. Therefore, even though most PITs do not comply with the criteria imposed by Rezvani (2014) and PITs were never meant to proxy for SNIJs, these results suggest some congruence between PITs and SNIJs.

To sum up, it shows that we were not able to fully replicate the studies' lists of SNIJs (or PITs) from their criteria. This adds to the confusion as to what is or is not an SNIJ.

5. Conclusion

Many islands and archipelagos undergoing decolonization have chosen to keep legal ties with a parent state, and not to pursue full independence (Armstrong & Read, 2021; Grydehøj, 2016). They have been classified as more or less autonomous Sub-National Island Jurisdictions (SNIJs). Several studies have proposed different totals and members of the SNIJ category. To a large extent, this can be related to the different purposes of such studies. However, there can also be imprecision in the definition and description of what constitutes an SNIJ and inconsistency in the application of these. This would hamper academic and policy research. We find that there is no clear, or generally accepted definition, of the SNIJs. This is illustrated by the fact that some studies claim there are 40 SNIJs, where others arrive at more than 100. Therefore, the aim of this study is to critically reflect upon the existing studies that describe and/or define SNIJs and to suggest a practical definition of SNIJs for the academic and policy debate.

To this extent, we systematically investigate existing classifications and definitions of SNIJs and try to quantify the qualifications for the SNIJs. The analysis reveals several interesting observations. First, there is considerable variation across the existing classifications of SNIJs in the literature, despite some of them following the same criteria. Second, existing research that used partially independent territories (PITs) as a synonym for SNIJs is biased due to the inclusion of non-island entities. Third, replicating previous studies shows inconsistencies between the lists and the criteria imposed. As such, we conclude that none of the existing classifications of SNIJs applies a consistent selection of the entities, raising doubt as to whether the classifications are accurate and, hence, useful.

Based on this analysis, we advocate the development and use of a more consistent definition of SNIJs. In particular, we suggest defining an SNIJ as a populated island in partnership with a parent state, making them non-sovereign, with a degree of internal autonomy that may vary across the SNIJs. For specific research or policy purposes, such a definition can be amended. As a consequence, several lists or categories of SNIJs are feasible. However, such analysis will depart from common ground and would allow for both validation and replication, improving their credibility and use.

The main implication is that it is possible to envision that future research and policies can be more effectively and efficiently targeted, as they can be based on a more consistent basic and common understanding of SNIJs. It allows for more research on SNIJs and can contribute to the design of policies that are specifically targeted at (subgroups of) SNIJs.

Note

1. While the SIDS and SNIJ can be distinguished through a binary classification of sovereignty, some might argue that there exists a 'spectrum of sovereignty'. In this sense, sovereignty is seen as a matter of degree within the binary classification. See, for example, Alberti and Goujon (2019).

Authors' contribution

(All authors have read and approved the final work in the author contribution statement)

Stephanie Werleman: Data curation, Visualization, Investigation, Writing – Original draft preparation. Steffen Eriksen: Methodology, Validation, Writing – Editing. Bert Scholtens: Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing- Reviewing and Editing.

Disclosure statement

No potential competing interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

We received no specific funding for this research. We did not reproduce material from other sources.

About the authors

Dr Steffen Eriksen is associate professor at the University of Groningen and specializes in development economics and finance.

Prof. Dr Bert Scholtens is full professor at the University of Groningen and part-time Finance professor at the Business School of the University of Saint Andrews.

Mrs. Stephanie Werleman is Phd student at the University of Groningen and economic researcher at the Central Bank of Aruba.

ORCID

Steffen Eriksen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4962-5816>

Bert Scholtens  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5774-5191>

Stephanie Werleman  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8650-0553>

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, BS, upon reasonable request.

References

- Alberti, F., & Goujon, M. (2019). A composite index of formal sovereignty for small islands and coastal territories. *Island Studies Journal*, 15(1), 3 – 24. <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.96>
- Armstrong, H., de Kervenoael, R. J., Li, X., & Read, R. (1998). A comparison of the economic performance of different micro-states, and between micro-states and larger countries. *World Development*, 26(4), 639–656. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X\(98\)00006-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(98)00006-0)
- Armstrong, H. W., & Read, R. (1994). Micro-states, autonomous regions, and the European Union: Harvey W. Armstrong and Robert Read. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 1(1), 71–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/096977649400100108>
- Armstrong, H., & Read, R. (1995). Western European micro-states and EU autonomous regions: The advantages of size and sovereignty. *World Development*, 23(7), 1229–1245. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(95\)00040-J](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(95)00040-J)
- Armstrong, H. W., & Read, R. (2000). Comparing the economic performance of dependent territories and sovereign microstates. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 48(2), 285–306. <https://doi.org/10.1086/452459>
- Armstrong, H. W., & Read, R. (2020). Size and sectoral specialisation: The asymmetric cross-country impacts of the 2008 crisis and its aftermath. *Journal of International Development*, 32(6), 891–921. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3482>
- Armstrong, H. W., & Read, R. (2021). The non-sovereign territories: Economic and environmental challenges of sectoral and geographic over-specialisation in tourism and financial services. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 28(3), 213–240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776421999775>
- Baldacchino, G. (2010). *Island Enclaves: Offshoring Strategies, Creative Governance, and Subnational Island Jurisdictions*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Baldacchino, G. (2013). Only ten: Islands as uncomfortable fragmented polities. In G. Baldacchino (Ed.), *The Political Economy of Divided Islands: Unified Geographies, Multiple Polities*. (pp. 1–17). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137023131_1
- Baldacchino, G., & Milne, D. (2009a). Success without sovereignty: exploring sub-national island jurisdictions. In G. Baldacchino and D. Milne (Eds.), *The case for non-sovereignty: Lessons from sub-national island jurisdictions*. (pp. 1–10). Routledge.
- Baldacchino, G., & Milne, D. (2009b). *The case for non-sovereignty: lessons from sub-national island jurisdictions*. Routledge.

- Caramani, D. (2009). *Introduction to the comparative method with boolean algebra*. SAGE Publications. <https://books.google.com/books?id=qcg5RIKguFQC>
- Elman, C. (2005). Explanatory typologies in qualitative studies of international politics. *International Organization*, 59(02), 293–326. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3877906> <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818305050101>
- Ferdinand, M., Oostindie, G., & Veenendaal, W. (2020). A global comparison of non-sovereign island territories: The search for ‘true equality’. *Island Studies Journal*, 15(1), 43–66. <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.75>
- Gerring, J. (2012). Mere description. *British Journal of Political Science*, 42(4), 721–746. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123412000130>
- Grydehøj, A. (2016). Navigating the binaries of island independence and dependence in Greenland: Decolonisation, political culture, and strategic services. *Political Geography*, 55, 102–112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2016.09.001>
- Grydehøj, A., Bevacqua, M. L., Chibana, M., Nadarajah, Y., Simonsen, A., Su, P., Wright, R., & Davis, S. (2021). Practising decolonial political geography: Island perspectives on neocolonialism and the China threat discourse. *Political Geography*, 85, 102330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102330>
- Hein, P. (2004). Small island developing states: Origin of the category and definition issues. In UNCTAD (Ed.), *Is a Special Treatment of Small Island Developing States Possible?*. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ldc20041_en.pdf
- Institute of Island Studies. Island Studies. (n.d). *Jurisdiction Project (2004–2007)* | Retrieved November 5, 2021, from <http://islandstudies.com/research/jurisdiction-project/>
- Jędrusik, M. (2011). Island studies. Island Geography. but What is an Island? *Miscellanea Geographica*, 15(1), 201–212. <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10288-012-0012-7>
- Korson, C., Poaouteta, S., & Prinsen, G. (2020). Triangular negotiations of island sovereignty: Indigenous and customary authorities-metropolitan states-local metropolitan authorities. *Island Studies Journal*, 15(1), 67–88. <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.112>
- McElroy, J. L., & Mahoney, M. (2000). The propensity for political dependence is island microstates. *Insula*, 9(1), 32–35.
- McElroy, J. L., & Pearce, K. B. (2006). The advantages of political affiliation: Dependent and independent small-island profiles. *The Round Table*, 95(386), 529–539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358530600931285>
- Petzold, J., & Ratter, B. M. W. (2019). More than just sids: Local solutions for global problems on small islands. *Island Studies Journal*, 14(1), 3–8. <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.77>
- Rezvani, D. (2014). *Surpassing the sovereign state: the wealth self-rule, and security advantages of Partially Independent Territories*. Oxford University Press.
- Riegl, M., Doboš, B., & Bečka, J. (2019). Independent territories revisited? The concept of partially independent territories (PITs) and the role of such territories in the international system. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 7(3), 406–420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2018.1486226>
- Sokal, R. R., & Michener, C. D. (1958). A statistical method for evaluating systematic relationships. *University of Kansas Science Bulletin*, 28, 1409–1438.
- Stuart, K. (2009). A listing of the World’s populated sub-national island jurisdictions. In G. Baldacchino and D. Milne (Eds.), *The case for non-sovereignty: lessons from sub-national island jurisdictions*. (pp. 11–20). Routledge.
- University of Prince Edward Island. (n.d). *Call for papers | UNESCO Chair in Island Studies and Sustainability*. Retrieved November 9, 2021, from <https://projects.upei.ca/unescochair/call-for-papers/>
- Watts, R. (2009). Island jurisdictions in comparative constitutional perspective. In G. Baldacchino & D. Milne (Eds.), *The case for non-sovereignty: lessons from sub-national island jurisdictions*. (pp. 21–39). Routledge.
- Zhang, Y., Li, H., Li, D., Hou, X., Guo, P., & Guo, J. (2024). Evolutionary dynamics of island shoreline in the context of climate change: Insights from extensive empirical evidence. *International Journal of Digital Earth*, 17(1), 2329816. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17538947.2024.2329816>
- Zubin, J. (1938). A technique for measuring like-mindedness. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 33(4), 508–516. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0055441>