

# Islands in the Context of Island Territories: Establishing Limits for Constructing a Typology to Classify the Islands of Macaronesia

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## **Abstract**

The Earth's surface has a vast number of island territories that vary greatly in size, to the point of complicating the process of creating categories for different land areas. This article explores the proposal put forward by Depraetere and Dahl (2007; 2018) for delimiting island areas and, mainly, to arrive at a concept of islands and their categories, in order to subsequently apply this typology to the island units of Macaronesia. In this context, it is essential to determine the limits for the islet and mainland given that the concept of the island is precisely framed by these two types of island spaces. The primary objective is to discuss the concept of the island, mainly from the perspective of the size of the territories. We also set out to explain the main reasons why certain islands are not suited to human occupation. In order to achieve these objectives, we opted for a type of methodology that favoured a literature review, adapting a model for classifying reference island areas and the processing of information from statistical sources. In terms of the results, it is worth highlighting the fact that we have kept the original proposal of 10 km<sup>2</sup> as the starting point for an island territory to be considered an island. This decision allowed for 31 islands to be counted in the entire Atlantic region of Macaronesia, three of which are currently uninhabited. This type of classification does not alter the number of islands commonly recognised in the Azores and Cape Verde, although the same is not true for others. The average size of the island units varies from archipelago to archipelago and the size of the territory, while important, is never the decisive circumstance for settlement.

## INTRODUCTION

Islands play an extremely important role on our planet, not least because, as Biagini and Hoyle (1999) point out, all above-surface land areas, regardless of their size, are surrounded by water. However, is it not too reductive, not to say erratic, to consider all these areas as islands? Reality shows that this is not the case, since the various geographical units of the earth's surface have traditionally not been categorised in the same way, as it is universally accepted that they are grouped together as continents, islands, islets or simply rocks. However, as all the forms of emerged land masses are surrounded by water, we can say that to a certain extent they share insular characteristics, albeit to a very varied degree. The expression "Insular Planet" is thus not entirely unreasonable as a complement to the broader idea of "Oceanic Planet" used, for example, by Biagini and Hoyle (1999). After all, the landscape of our planet is dominated by seas and oceans which occupy more than two thirds of its surface, turning the large continents into small islands when viewed from the universe or even the planet itself: "our planet is also an island in space" (Depraetere; Dahl, 2018, p. 47) or "the Earth, an island in the universe" (Young, 1999, p. 243).

To the question he himself poses, "Why should we study islands and archipelagos?", Godfrey Baldacchino (2023, p. 21) provides a somewhat ironic answer, stating that, by their very existence, they thus deserve to be studied. The sociologist also mentions that islands can benefit from the clarification of the island concept in official documents, by having their formal status recognised. Randal (2021), for his part, emphasises that it is not easy to determine the actual number of islands in the world due to the concept's great ambiguity. It is precisely in this context that we intend to make a contribution to island studies by seeking to clarify the concept of the island.

The initial point of this research was to problematise ontology and discuss the concept of the island. Several objectives were set with a view to finding answers, aiming further: to select and adapt a proposal for classifying island spaces; to establish a criterion for the concept of the island and its categories; to apply the typology of islands to the archipelagos of Macaronesia; and to identify the main characteristics that make an island "habitable".

The methodology used to achieve the stipulated objectives included a literature review, namely the reformulation of the

classification of island spaces proposed by Depraetere and Dahl (2007; 2018) and the statistical processing of official sources of information. To ensure a uniform criterion for the areas of the different islands of Macaronesia, we chose to collect this type of information from the four statistical authorities of each archipelago.

## COMPLEXITY OF THE ISLAND CONCEPT

Beate Ratter (2018) specifies that islands form a geographical category of their own: "For geography, islands are spatial categories of their own, just like cities, deserts, mountains, coastlines and river landscapes" (p. 2). But what exactly is an island? Porto Editora's online Portuguese language dictionary - Infopédia - provides a definition that follows the traditional line, which is more didactic in nature, and which relates the concept of an island to a "portion of emerged land surrounded by water, in oceans, seas and lakes." However, this classic definition of an island is far from a consensus among the various specialists in island studies. Patrick Nunn (1994) says, for example, that it is a useless notion that can easily be ridiculed. In reality, the major problem relates to its limits, both its maximum and minimum, since the absence of a universally accepted range sometimes creates difficulties in distinguishing it from other territories that are also completely surrounded by water, such as the islet or the mainland. In this regard, Baldacchino (2023) notes that the island is larger than a rock, but smaller than the mainland. Brunet *et al.*, (1993), in their dictionary of geographical terms, are more specific and place the island between the islet and the mainland. There is a consensus that islands lie between these two geographical concepts, but when does one end and the other begin? "No one can demonstrate where a river ends and the sea begins" (Nunn, 1994, p. 1).

Maciej Jedrusik (2011) points out that the line between island and continent has been drawn arbitrarily and mostly emphasises the upper limit. He emphasises the fact that the three largest territorial masses generally connected as islands have very different areas: Australia is 3.5 times larger than Greenland, and Greenland is 3 times larger than New Guinea.

For Stephen Royle (2001; 2014) the problem is not at the top end of the scale, but at the bottom, i.e. the differentiation between island and islander. The British geographer does not find it difficult to distinguish between islands

and continents, since according to him Australia is generally accepted as a continent, while Greenland is considered the largest island in the world. Therefore, all geographical units surrounded by water on all sides with a surface area greater than that of that island would naturally be continents, thus finding the upper limit of islands. However, for Jan Petzold (2017), the definition of an island is much more complex than it might seem at first glance, because, as Brito-Henriques (2009, p. 21) points out, “it is usually considered that above 2.175 million km<sup>2</sup> – the surface area of Greenland – we are not talking about islands, but continents, but even this is not accepted peacefully by everyone (there is the problem of Australia, whose status is controversial).” Thus, there seems to be no doubt that for such an apparently simple notion of island there is a huge divergence of opinions: “Almost it seems that the concept of island is something inherent to human consciousness” (Nunn, 1994, p. 1).

### *The introduction of the human question into the island concept*

The concept of an island as merely a natural issue, without taking aspects of human life into account, is far from consensual. Jedrusik (2011), for example, states that population is the most important factor for characterising a “real island”. Other authors discuss the notion of an island but deliberately restrict themselves to small, inhabited islands: “those patches of land large enough to support permanent residents, but small enough to give their inhabitants the permanent awareness of being an island” (Péron, 2004, p. 328). For the French geographer, it is clear that it is not a priority to define territorial limits geographically, but rather that the territory must have the necessary conditions to support the resident population with the perception that they inhabit an island. This perspective, for example, could jeopardise certain island territories of more than ten square kilometres, insofar as the relief conditions of the whole area may not be suitable for the permanent settlement of a population. François Taglioni (2011), influenced by the population ceiling used by the World Bank to define small states and using the area of the largest island in the Fijian archipelago as a spatial reference, presents a definition for small island space: “land masses surrounded on all sides by water, comprising a single piece of land less than 11,000 square kilometres and with a population of under 1.5 million inhabitants.” (p. 49). The author also adds that the minimum criterion for being an island depends on whether

it is inhabited or not, and that this is what distinguishes it from an islet. The geographer therefore considers the usual inhabitants of the island territory more important than its size.

Article 121 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea states that “an island is a natural formation of land, surrounded by water, which is uncovered at high tide” (Portugal, 1997, p. 5486-24). However, it must support “human habitation or economic activity”, otherwise these insular spaces are considered rocks and so lose their right to the Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf. As this concept does not define a minimum territorial limit, it has given rise to diverse and occasionally somewhat subjective interpretations between the different countries, since economic reasons are involved. This is the case with the Selvagens (the Portuguese sub-archipelago closest to the Canary Islands), which has led to some diplomatic disagreements between Portugal and Spain at United Nations level, where Spain argues that they are just rocks. On the other hand, Portugal argues that these are islands, as they are permanently inhabited by nature watchers/monitors (for more detailed information, see (Graça, 2014)). One of the most symbolic acts of Portugal’s recent involvement in this type of Iberian dispute is related to the surprising decision of the President of the Republic (PR) to spend the night in Selvagem Grande (2.45 km<sup>2</sup>) during a visit that took place between 17 and 19 July 2013 (Graça, 2014). This was a clear signal from the highest figure of the Portuguese state about the scientific and strategic importance of these island territories, likely with the intention of demonstrating that the largest island in the sub-archipelago had characteristics that made it habitable. Regarding this unprecedented visit to the archipelago, the official aviator João Ferreira (2014) writes: “The PR was right to visit and stay the night escorted by vessels from our squadron, in an uncontroversial affirmation of interests and sovereignty” (p. 66).

In reality, the introduction of the functional (economic) and demographic question goes back a long way. Russel King (1993) mentions that in the Scottish Census of 1861, in addition to the classic definition (area of land surrounded by water), an island had to be inhabited and have enough pasture to support at least one sheep!

Brito-Henriques (2009), in the tangle of island notions, emphasises the importance sometimes also assumed by the degree of remoteness from other larger islands or continents: “in the European case, EUROSTAT has agreed that an ‘island’ must have a

permanent population of at least 50 inhabitants and be at least 1 km from the mainland” (p. 22). Once again, associated with another criterion, in this case distance from continental masses, we find the housing/population issue.

We do not think that there has to be a population in order to be an island, but we do think it makes sense to talk about a more specific category, that of “habitable island”.

### *An approach to the notion of a “habitable island”*

The habitability handbook for island communities (Pleijel *et al.*, 2022) defines habitability as “the concrete core for assessing the sustainability of an island. Every sustainable society must be habitable to survive, develop, and keep its resilience” (p. 4). Its framework is divided into seven main areas (place identity, ecosystems, freshwater, energy, local economy, public service and prosperous people), under which are grouped 45 livability indicators defined by the authors. The handbook is a tool for assessing the relationship between the quality of life of the inhabitants and the sustainability of the island territory. It also provides management strategies for the different areas of action, providing tools for intervention with the capacity to act in situations that need to be adjusted. Despite the merits that this document may represent for island development, it was designed with Europe’s small inhabited islands in mind, whose more developed reality differs greatly from other regions of the world, where it may not be as effective.

Our proposal for the concept of “habitable island” differs from the previous concept (“habitability of an island”), because it only considers the combination of the natural characteristics of the island territory itself, in order to fulfil the fundamental conditions that make permanent settlement possible. The area could therefore be unpopulated, but nevertheless viable for future settlement, to the point of leading to a real island society.

We believe that any concept of an island must stem, firstly, from its classic definition – a portion of land permanently emerged and surrounded on all sides by water. A “habitable island”, in turn, is one whose territory possesses natural attributes capable of supporting the basic conditions of human life, without needing to depend exclusively on the outside world (for possibly long periods). The basic natural conditions that support habitation basically include permanent reserves of drinking water in the territory (surface and/or underground

reserves – aquifers), arable soil and morphology suitable to human activity (housing, economic and social activities and communication with the outside world, port and/or airport). Referring to a type of island with a dominant structure that makes life difficult for its inhabitants, Bonnemaïson (1990, p. 121) writes:

“The mountain islands, with their closed, steep coastlines and no ‘ports of refuge’, are therefore perceived in Oceania as prisons that drive their inhabitants to despair: they are just as difficult to inhabit as the coastal islands.”

For the French geographer, a “good island” is one that strikes a certain balance between high and low areas.

The possibility of contact with the outside world is important, as it is the islets and rocks that are associated with greater human inaccessibility, related to their small size, but also, and above all, to their sometimes “abruptly” homogeneous morphology. We would stress that this concept is more appropriate for islands in the temperate zones of the globe, since the others have climate conditions that can jeopardise the fulfilment of the aforementioned assumptions.

## **TYOLOGY FOR ISLAND TERRITORIES**

Despite the enormous complexity surrounding the definition of an island, we believe it is pertinent to try to establish the maximum and minimum limits in relation to the size of the islands’ territory. Royle (2014) points out that once an island has been defined and those limits established, the next question is to determine how many islands there are.

In order to achieve these objectives, we consider the classification proposed by Depraetere and Dahl (2007; 2018), which follows on from Depraetere (1991), to be worthy of consideration, bearing in mind the extent of the surface area of island territories. James Randal (2021) writes of the authors’ proposal that they have “probably been the most systematic in addressing this question from a statistical and positivist approach” (p. 15). This is a purely natural classification – the size of island areas – in which the authors see the planet as a “World Archipelago”: “An idea that becomes evident when looking at a globe or world map is that the emerging lands of our blue planet constitute a kind of world archipelago” (Depraetere; Dahl,

2007, p. 59), based on the (real) assumption that all emerged territories are surrounded by water.

### Classification of Island Spaces

The classification by area and the establishment of the various types of island spaces are somewhat arbitrary, but they follow a linear relationship between the various island units. Thus, size zero starts at one square kilometre and extends to ten, Depraetere and Dahl did not consider the island areas between these two limits as islands, but classified them as giant islets. We therefore are at the end of the islet domain, meaning that the smallest islands start from ten square kilometres, a hypothesis with which we agree. Not least because if we were to use the next power (equivalent to 100 km<sup>2</sup>),

islands that have enjoyed this status since their *discovery*, such as Santa Maria and Porto Santo, would cease to be so, which would make no sense in historical terms. Nonetheless, one of the limitations of the model is the overlap between the upper and lower limits of the two categories. For example, in Depraetere and Dahl's (2007; 2018) original table, due to the way in which the 10 km<sup>2</sup> is included, it is unclear whether this value corresponds to the largest islet or the smallest size of an island, as it seems to be both the upper limit of the islet and the lower limit of the island. In order to avoid this type of uncertainty, we chose to limit the upper end of the islets "to an area of less than ten square kilometres", allowing the island classification to start from that surface area (Table 1).

**Table 1** - Classification according to the size of island areas

Spaces	Class of Area	Surface	Number of units
Continent	> 1.000.000 km <sup>2</sup>	134.860.758 km <sup>2</sup>	3 (?)
Islands	10 km <sup>2</sup> to 1.000.000 km <sup>2</sup>	7.700.000 km <sup>2</sup>	5.675
Islets	100 m <sup>2</sup> to (<) 10 km <sup>2</sup>	95.000 km <sup>2</sup>	8.800.000
Rocks	< 100 m <sup>2</sup>	2.300 km <sup>2</sup>	672.000.000

Source: adapted from Depraetere and Dahl (2007); (2018).

Randal (2021) summarises the specific methodology used by the authors to arrive at the figures presented for the different types of island spaces:

"Using a standard dictionary-based definition of 'any piece of land surrounded by water, whatever its size or distance to the closest mainland', and employing the tools of remote sensing satellite imagery, they estimated that there are 5,675 islands that range in size from ten to a million square kilometres" (p. 15).

On the other hand, all emerged land measuring less than one hundred square metres is considered to be rocks, and therefore does not form part of the islets group. Depraetere and Dahl (2007; 2018), using a mathematical extrapolation process, also suggest that there are approximately 8.8 million islets and 672 million rocks. The model presented comes in seven negative sizes (including islets and rocks) and seven positive sizes (where islands and continents are found), establishing area classes based on ranges of values raised to the power. In the case of islands and continents, it was accepted that the area value should always be expressed in kilometres with a linear value increase (10 km<sup>2</sup>, 10<sup>2</sup> km<sup>2</sup>, 10<sup>3</sup> km<sup>2</sup>, etc.). For the authors, continents begin with areas greater

than a million square kilometres (10<sup>6</sup> km<sup>2</sup>), since if it were only to the next power (10<sup>7</sup> km<sup>2</sup>), Australia would cease to be a continent and would be confirmed as an island, which would make no sense given the enormous difference in the extent of its surface compared to the lower emerged masses.

The adjustments that we will make to this classification are not so much due to the way in which the distribution of the various island spaces was laid out, since the authors were very rigorous in terms of the natural/geographical sense. However, we believe that some excesses of rigour have been committed. We therefore leave the number of continents in Table 1 open.

### Continents

Depraetere and Dahl (2007; 2018) only considered three continental masses or, rather, just two standard continents (the "Old" and the "New World") and one micro-continent (Australia). They therefore integrated Europe, Asia and Africa into the "Old World", considering the African territory to be a peninsula of Eurasia. We would therefore be looking at a supercontinent. The "New World" in fact corresponds to the American continent, although they consider South America to be a peninsula of its own. On the other hand, they excluded Antarctica and Greenland from the

model, justifying their exclusion by the fact that their surfaces are almost exclusively covered by ice caps.

Geographically, our position assumes that Europe and Asia form a continental whole – traditionally referred to as Eurasia. However, including Africa in it seems totally exaggerated to us, although we can understand the authors’ choice, since its separation from Eurasia via the Suez Canal is artificial and therefore unnatural. We disagree with the exclusion of Greenland and Antarctica, because although they are mostly covered by ice caps, their surfaces are situated above the mean sea level, so they are emerged lands. In fact, there is no doubt that Antarctica is a continent and Greenland, with a total area of more than one million square kilometres, falls within the group of micro-continent. Although it is not often considered as such, it is not exactly news: “Greenland, 2.2 million km<sup>2</sup> and 50,000 inhabitants, is recognised by some as the world’s largest island, by others as its smallest continent” (King, 1993, p. 16).

Thus, according to our proposal, there are four standard continents (Eurasia, America, Africa and Antarctica) and two micro-continent (Australia and Greenland), with New Guinea consigned to the position of the world’s largest island. There is no novelty in this suggestion, considering that Roger Brunet (1997) had already argued that from the surface of New Guinea we could no longer speak of islands, excluding Greenland, as he considered it to be a continuation of North America, due to the fact that during most of the year both sides are connected by ice. Furthermore, during the

period when they are not, the waters that separate them are shallow. Despite justifying this option, he nevertheless presents a definition of an island which in itself excludes the Danish territory:

“If it were necessary to specify the definition of an island, one could write: land surrounded on all sides by water, made up of a single block and whose surface is between one million square kilometres and half a square kilometre” (Brunet, 1997, p. 41).

Moreover, according to our adaptation of the classification of the continents, it is noteworthy that it makes no sense to refer to Oceania as a continent, since this position is now taken by its “former largest island”, Australia. In fact, when we talk about Oceania, we realise that the term itself refers to an “immense ocean of islands”, or rather, a mega archipelago of very contrasting surfaces.

### *The Islands (of Macaronesia)*

As implied above, the total area of an island varies between ten and a million square kilometres, a range that Depraetere and Dahl divided into five types of islands: nano, micro, standard, meso and giant island (Table 2). We have made a further adjustment to the limits of these categories, as the lower limits are now always greater than the value of the area indicated, with the exception of the nano-island, which starts at precisely ten square kilometres.

**Table 2** - The type of island, according to surface area

Type of Islands	Class of Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Surface (km <sup>2</sup> )	Number of Islands
Giga	> 100.000 to 1.000.000	4.868.996	17
Mega	> 10.000 to 100.000	1.653.299	53
Standard	> 1.000 to 10.000	674.559	219
Micro	> 100 to 1.000	337.947	1.135
Nano	10 to 100	129.128	4.251

Source: adapted from Depraetere and Dahl (2007); (2018).

We can see that the size of the various types of island varies inversely to the total number of islands in each group, while the total surface area of each group varies directly. We can see that in each column the values are arranged hierarchically, either in ascending or descending order, without any overlap between the various island groups. This has led us to some interesting facts: the 17 giant islands (around

0.3% of the total number of islands) occupy 63.2% of the total surface area considered. On the other hand, the 4,251 Nano-islands (almost 75% of the total) together only cover 0.2% of the total area. In fact, and unsurprisingly given the above, the Standard Islands category is neither the group that brings together the largest number of islands nor the group that occupies the largest surface area.

Figure 1 - Location of the Macaronesian archipelagos

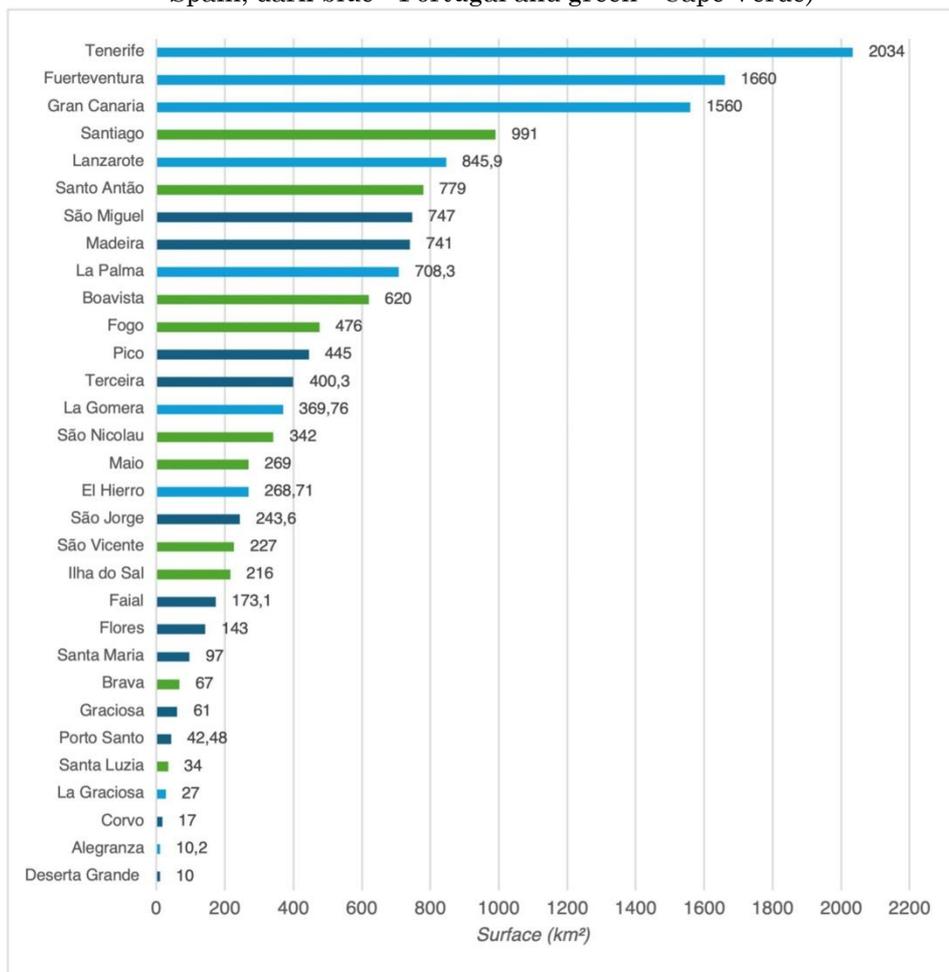


Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Applying this island typology to the four archipelagos that make up the Macaronesia region (Figure 1), two from Portugal (Azores and Madeira), one from Spain (Canary Islands) and the Cape Verde Islands, we can see that from ten square kilometres upwards, a total of 31 emerged territories classified as islands can be found in this Atlantic macro-region (Graphic 1), of which three are uninhabited islands: Madeira’s Deserta Grande (10 km<sup>2</sup>), the Canary

Islands’ Alegranza (10.2 km<sup>2</sup>) and Cape Verde’s Santa Luzia (34 km<sup>2</sup>). Although the first two are the smallest islands, Santa Luzia is larger in area than the other two inhabited islands: Corvo (17 km<sup>2</sup>, 384 inhabitants) and La Graciosa (27 km<sup>2</sup>, 731 inhabitants). In fact, for an island to have permanent inhabitants, the size of the area is not the only determining factor; there are other types of underlying reasons.

Graphic 1 – The hierarchy of Macaronesian island sizes (islands are organised by country: light blue - Spain; dark blue - Portugal and green - Cape Verde)



Source: Statistical organisations of each archipelago: SREA (2012); DREM (2023); ISTAC (2024); INE-CV (2016).

All the islands mentioned above fall into the smaller category, but the region has four more nano-islands, with Santa Maria (97 km²) in the Azores being the largest of this subset, which also includes Porto Santo, Graciosa and Brava. However, Macaronesia is dominated by micro-islands, which make up 61% of the total in this group, and vary greatly in size from the Azorean quasi-nano-islands of Flores (143 km²) and Faial (173 km²) to Cape Verde’s quasi-standard island of Santiago (991 km²). The complete absence of mega-islands and giant islands means that the standard islands are the largest Macaronesian territories. There are only three islands in this category, all in the Canary Islands: Tenerife (2034 km²), Fuerteventura (1660 km²), and Gran Canaria (1560 km²). In fact, the units in the Spanish archipelago tend to be larger, while those in Cape Verde are very concentrated at the micro-island level and the Portuguese ones have the most islands with small areas.

It is also worth considering this model of island classification within the Macaronesian

macro-region, related to the fact that some of the islands considered in the typology do not usually have this status at regional/national level. The islands of Deserta Grande, in Madeira, and Santa Luzia, in Cape Verde, although they have no permanent inhabitants and their areas are administratively part of the municipalities of other islands in the archipelagos, are usually recognised as islands, whether this can be verified in the information provided by official bodies or simply on the maps representing those archipelagos. However, the same is not true of the Spanish islands, as historically only seven islands were recognised as belonging to the Canary Islands archipelago. Nevertheless, the 17 September 2024 edition of the newspaper *El Día* (Cruz, 2024) includes an article about La Graciosa, which in 2018 was recognised as the eighth island of the Canary Islands. However, it failed to obtain administrative autonomy since it is still part of the municipality of Teguiise, in Lanzarote. Alegranza, on the other hand, has not undergone any kind of change and continues

to enjoy the status of an island in the Spanish archipelago. However, Roger Lovegrove (2012) refers to the nine Canary Islands, including it: “the roughly circular island of Allegranza” (p. 24).

## CONCLUSION

The main aim of this article is to discuss ideas on the notion of an island, with a view to making it more specialised. This type of concept is more concrete than that of island space, for instance, revealing greater complexity due to there being no real universal acceptance when it comes to establishing the boundaries with islets and continents.

Another aim of this research was to quantify and analyse the size of the Macaronesian islands. In this light, the lower limit is the most relevant, as the island unit with the largest surface area is no greater than 2,034 square kilometres. The minimum island limit of half a kilometre used by Brunet (1997) seems to us to be insufficient, particularly to support a human society. On the other hand, we disagree with the exclusively demographic criterion proposed by Taglioni (2011), as we believe that the island is primarily a natural concept. Furthermore, seen through this lens, the territories of three Macaronesian archipelagos (the Azores, Madeira and Cape Verde) would only be considered islands from the time of the European settlements of the 15th century, which would be nonsensical.

In order to clarify this, we used the classification proposed by Depraetere and Dahl (2007; 2018), which, as well as determining these boundaries very precisely, presents different types of island according to the size of the areas.

Our analysis led us to accept that, to be an island, it must have an area of between ten and a million square kilometres; outside this spatial range are the islets and rocks, with smaller areas, and the continents, with larger areas. This is why Greenland becomes the smallest continent, even though it is more than twice the size of the upper limit. Naturally, the same is true of Australia, which has a considerably larger area. It therefore no longer makes sense to consider Oceania a continent and New Guinea gains the status of the world’s largest island.

Considering this type of classification, it is possible to count a total of 5,675 islands, more than two thirds of which are classified as nano-islands, with areas of less than a hundred square kilometres, while above one hundred

thousand square kilometres we only find seventeen islands (giants), including New Guinea, but which together occupy more than 60% of the area occupied by the islands. A negative correlation was detected between the number of islands and the total area of each group, which also includes the intermediate types micro (<1000 km<sup>2</sup>), standard (<10,000 km<sup>2</sup>) and mega (<100,000 km<sup>2</sup>).

We chose to apply this model to the four archipelagos that make up Macaronesia, concluding that with this classification this Atlantic macro-region has thirty-one islands, the vast majority of which are micro-islands and only three are standard islands, its largest ones. The use of this criterion does not entail any change to the traditional islands of Cape Verde and the Azores. The Canary Islands, however, see Alegranza included as the ninth island of the archipelago, while in Madeira, both Selvagem Grande and Bugio (3 km<sup>2</sup>, in the Desertas Islands), which are usually known as islands, are assigned to the islet group, although not considered rocks. Another observable fact is that there are currently three uninhabited nano-islands, one per archipelago, with the exception of the Azores. Although this is not a fundamental principle for classifying a particular island space as an island, there is no denying the importance that the existence of a population represents for these territories. With this in mind, the concept of a “habitable island” was presented, setting out the main requirements that a territory must fulfil in order to make settlement, in the form of a society, feasible and sustainable.

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### AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Paulo Espínola: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Writing – original draft. Fernanda Cravidão: Supervision; Validation.

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**DATA AVAILABILITY:** The data that support the findings of this study can be made available, upon reasonable request, from the corresponding author [Paulo Miguel Picanço Espínola].



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