

MICRONATIONALISM AS A PHENOMENON OF THE PRESENT

MIKRONACIONALIZMUS AKO FENOMÉN SÚČASNOSTI

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Abstract:

The establishment of territorial and virtual micronations, termed as “micronationalism,” relates to the last quarter century of their development. Micronationalism is a collection of thoughts supporting a varied collection of micronational activities, which are displayed by a tendency to disengage from the wider economic and political system of a particular state. In some cases it is only a kind of joke. Thereby, established micronations are trying to find ways for their own development through recognition of certain values. The paper focuses on the explanation of this phenomenon in the context of globalisation processes.

Key words:

micronationalism, micronations, microstates, globalisation

INTRODUCTION

Cyberspace represents a widespread virtual world created by modern technologies, existing in parallel with the “real” world. Although this characteristic is a subject of discussion, it is undeniable that there is a great deal of virtual communities within it. So-called micronations belong to this type of communities. However, this term often also refers to communities operating in the “real” world, which arose even before the formation of virtual networks.

The phenomenon of micronations, particularly of virtual countries, represents a research challenge for the social sciences. This is due to the fact that entities operate on the basis of other patterns than do traditional social communities. Among these challenges is the research into motivation of their creation, operation and functions, as well as its perspectives for their existence in the context of globalization and the information society. Sociology, psychology, political science, and informatics are the main participants in micronational research, but anthropology, economics, education and geography also play a role. Within the context of the study of micronations began the development of a new direction of research, which is called micropatrology.

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Micronations should be generally understood to mean low-populous social entities, in particular those that are trying to gain a state status that can have a territorial character (some have long-lasting historical traditions and seek recognition of control over a relatively large territory – most of them have arisen on private lands or artificial platforms) or a virtual character (the term *virtual country* has been established for these entities). We must remind you that some virtual countries also proclaim the continuity of their existence to certain territories; however, their formation is linked to cyberspace. Their existence is linked with uninhabited territories (the *Kingdom of Redondo*, a title linked to the homonymous island in the Caribbean, the *Gay and Lesbian Kingdom of the Coral Sea Islands* on the north-east coast of Australia, 15 micronations which lay claim to territory in Antarctica) and interior building areas (the *Kingdom of Lovely* exists in a small London apartment). An acceptable opportunity for the proclamation of independence is territory which does not, according to international law, belongs to any other country (the *Republic of Morac-Songhrati-Meads* proclaimed its existence on the Spratly archipelago in the South China Sea) or which is not a matter of controversy (the *Kingdom of Bahoudii* lays claim to the disputed territory between the states of Texas and New Mexico in the USA).

CHARACTERISTICS OF MICRONATIONS

While “territorial” micronations can rely on a relatively long history, virtual countries are a new phenomenon linked with the formation of the information society. If we focus on the characteristics of the virtual form of micronations, then it should be noted that asynchronism and deterritorialization are among their main qualities – as with all virtual communities - hence they are independent from time and geographical distances. Moreover, these communities are very heterogeneous in terms of their status as well as the demographical structure of their members (Siuda 2007, 59). As the main aim of these communities is the formation and maintenance of bonding with each other, their members are connected by close relations.

The proper definition of virtual countries is problematic. One of the representatives of micronations, Peter Ravn Rasmussen, ruler of the *Sovereign Principality of Corvina*, characterized virtual countries: *A micronation is an entity created and maintained as if it were a nation and/or a state, and generally carrying with it some, most or all of the attributes of nationhood, and likewise generally carrying with it some of the attributes of statehood. Though a micronation may well have begun as a mere drollery, it has the potential (given the evolution of a sufficiently vital national culture) to develop into a true nation, and possibly to achieve statehood* (<http://micronations.webs.com/>).

Within the J. Hagel and A.G. Armstrong typology of virtual communities, virtual countries belong in the *community of fantasy*, therefore to communities defined as a type of activity based on the life simulation of the “real” world in the form of a state, which exists only in virtual form. Despite the statehood they present, micronations are a more social and possibly cultural phenomenon than a political phenomenon.

Micronations, in general, attempt to reproduce the formal instruments of the state, such as national emblems, passports, postage stamps and banknotes, minting coins and medals, production of periodicals, publishing books and movies, etc. All of these activities can be a significant source of income for their management.

In terms of virtual countries, their ambition is evident in their proclaimed establishment (republic, monarchy), which is presented in the naming of the micronation. In this context, efforts at highlighting the parallels with “real” countries is reflected in a form of the declaration of independence, Constitution and other legislation, formation of public authority and government institutions (head of state, parliament, government) as well as in the establishment of representative bodies in “real” countries.

One of the areas of virtual country research is its typology. Its creation is complicated by the fact that micronations arise for many diverse reasons (e.g. micronations as art projects or as a political system parody with a recessionary nature, micronations created with the aim of implementing political conception, the presentation of a certain movement or to cover criminal activity, respectively to support tourism, etc.). In some virtual countries these causes overlap.

Besides the above-mentioned division of micronations into territorial and virtual, we can find several other typologies on the internet which were created by leaders or, respectively, “citizens” of the virtual countries. One of them divides micronations into five types, according to the duration of their existence, whether they have publications, the frequency of their presence in the media, their internet presence level, and their connection to government authorities.

1. Obviously a joke; of temporary nature; one or two people involved; may concede “imaginary” status (e.g. *Ederingrijk der Vrieslanden*, *Monvainia*, *Nutopia*, *Yevolkian Free State*).
2. Serious joke; may seek serious Micronation status, but hasn’t achieved it yet (e. g. *Commonwealth of Cascadia*, *Glorious Kingdom of Thord*, *Kingdom of Freedonia*, *Laputa*, *Principality of Glennsylvania*).
3. Long-term, serious multi-person Micronation with publications, but purely local publicity (e. g. *Atlantis*, *KugelMugel*, *Republic of Morac-Songhrati-Meads*, *Republic of Tierra del Mar*).
4. Long-term, serious multi-person Micronation with widespread international publicity (e. g. *Hay-on-Wye*, *Kingdom of Talossa*, *Oceania*, *Principality of Cryopnica*).
5. Long-term serious Micronation recognised or legally challenged by a ‘real’ country (e. g. *Conch Republic*, *Principality of Hutt River*, *Principality of Seborga*, *Principality of Sealand*, *Republic of Madawaska*, <http://www.re-uniao.org/loss/archive/patsilor.htm>).

THE HISTORY OF MICRONATIONS

Before the age of the internet, micronations were originally created and functioned in the “real” world in a “territorial” form. After the creation of cyberspace, most of them took advantage of it and created their own web pages in order to present

their existence. Virtual space has gradually become a “substitution” of physical space, which was until then a necessary condition for state formation.

Among the “territorial” micronations with long-lasting historical traditions is the *Principality of Seborgana* on the northeast of Italy, which derives its nationhood tradition from 954 and renewed this tradition in 1963. Similar microstates are *Llanwrst* (a small town in Wales), *Lundy* (an island in the Celtic Sea), and the *Kingdom of Tavolara* (an island on the east coast of Sardinia). Some attempts to declare independence in the 19th century were suppressed by governments (the *Kingdom of Araucania and Patagonia*, the *Kingdom of Sedang*, respectively the *Republic of Lower California*). These types of entities were proclaimed by European immigrants in under-populated areas (the above-mentioned micronations are in the territory of today's Argentina, Vietnam and Mexico).

The most famous “modern” micronation with a territorial nature is the *Principality of Hutt River* in Western Australia. Its independence was declared by a local farmer in 1970. Other local entities are the *Kingdom of Elleore* (which arose in 1944 on an island on the homonymous archipelago of Denmark), the *Republic of Saugeais* (1947, eastern France), *Sealand* (1967, an artificial platform off the coast of UK), and the *Conch Republic* (1982, West Florida, USA).

The breakthrough in the history of micronations was the formation and expansion of the Internet. During this period, a new form of micronations was formed – virtual countries. Their genesis is linked to the year 1979, when local resident R. B. Madison established a new micronation in Milwaukee (Wisconsin, USA), the *Kingdom of Talossa*. This micronation was virtually presented in 1995 and has undergone a tumultuous development. In 2004 it reached a crisis when the mutinous *Republic of Talossa* was proclaimed. The micronation formed its own culture and traditions, and there is one of the few, which has created its own language (*Talossan language*).

In the second half of the 1990s, along with the rapid development of virtual networks and internet, another type of micronations began to arise which have become the most successful project within virtual communities. Making a list of virtual countries is a big problem, since these entities are not only coming into existence but also discontinue its activities. Most of them are “politically” internally unstable, which leads to their disintegration into more entities. Nowadays, the number of micronations is estimated at a few hundred.

When looking at the map, it is obvious that the largest number of virtual countries was created and is operating in a “globalised part of the world”, i.e. in the USA, Canada, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand. This process has continued to the present day and is gradually expanding, inter alia to Eastern Europe. Overall, we can claim that virtual countries in the west operate at the upper level and that they are able to set more exacting targets than simply the simulation of “real” countries in an effort to resemble them as much as possible.

MOTIVATION FOR CREATING A MICRONATION

The reasons behind the creation of a micronation are explained by several theories (McMelkor, 2013). One of them points out the influence of the internet within the context of dependence on this type of medium, whereby the creation and operation of a micronation is an attractive source of entertainment. Basically, it is escapist entertainment, hence a kind of escape from reality. Arguments against this explanation focus on its underestimation of the virtual world, which does not only serve only as a product of fun. The author also mentions the compensation theory, according to which the creation and functioning of a micronation relates to the creators' effort to replace feats that cannot be achieved in real life. This explanation is also doubted, as some micronation creator achieved significant social status in their lives.

The French anthropologist M. Augé (2008) writes that people in the present day spend more time in anonymous places where they can get rid of their identity (such places are called *non-places*). Non-places include airports and railway stations as well as hotels, for example. The internet is also one of these places. Thus, modern man lives in a deterritorialized world, a world of atomised communities, in which he feels lonely and therefore seeks alternative social contacts. As McMelkor (2013) mentions, one of the starting point is the formation of online communities with a small number of participants who belong to them. Among the most attractive communities are micronations, which fulfil the desire to recover the concept of place. In this context, we also rely on the ideas of M. Maffesoli (1988), who points out that modern people are lost in an anonymous world and therefore search for a strong point, which can be represented as a community with which they can identify. Therefore, this is a way of promoting a "tribe mentality" in the world, and *tribalization* is thus becoming a hallmark of people's socio-political life. It is reflected in the growth of microcommunities, which the author metaphorically named *tribes*.

Basically, virtual communities as well as micronations are responding to the demand of individuals for a sense of unity in a changing world, where interpersonal relationships are disrupted on the family and community levels.

The acquisition of new bonds in cyberspace can fill this gap. The development of virtual relationships within micronations (as well as other virtual communities) may lead to their transformation to arrange contacts in the "real" world, including regular personal meetings of their "citizens".

WORKING AND FUNCTIONS OF MICRONATIONS

It is very simplified to consider the establishment and functioning of micronations only as a reflection of the institutional and legal structures in the form of the imitation of a country, which is exclusively focused on the entertainment of Internet visitors. In fact, most of them carry out very diverse functions. All of them are related with the creation of their "own world", which is a primary purpose not only of the founders but also of the "citizens" of virtual countries, whereby they are often inspired by the workings of "real" states.

Virtual space, thanks to its characteristics, creates more possibilities for fulfilling the wishes of its users. One of them is undoubtedly related to the creation of the “perfect” country model, which in its virtual form provides the implementation of a number of activities for its creators and “citizens”.

P. Siuda (2007) determines three spheres of activities that can be realised by virtual countries:

1. Political sphere. Each virtual country has a constitution, state authorities and bodies of law. Analogous to the “real” world, in cyberspace there are also working republics, monarchies, democracies or dictatorships. In this context, micronations are characterised by a significant degree of instability. A “citizen” of the micronation is in generally able to gain access to public functions and contribute to virtual country policies through discussion websites.
2. Economic sphere. The financial profit is also issuing stamps, money and souvenirs. The profit also often brings acquisition of micronation citizenship. Some virtual countries develop their economic activity through the establishment of financial institutions (banks, stock exchanges), as well as companies, providing a variety of services with stock in global countries and other financial transactions. This activity, in some cases, has led to a criminal investigation and prosecution of representatives of certain micronations.
3. Cultural sphere. Such activities of virtual countries have very different forms, whereas individual micronations are developing them at different levels. They include:
 - a) interpretation of micronation’s history
 - b) establishment of educational institutions and art institutions
 - c) activities aimed at highlighting the exclusivity of micronations (mainly the formation of national symbols, as well as the delimitation of boundaries);
 - d) other activities (e.g. foundation and media activity).

Cooperation between the “management” and “citizens” of virtual countries takes place in all three spheres, in which projects, goals, and objectives are realised. For micronations, it is significant that without the contribution of “citizens”, they cannot operate effectively.

THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF MICRONATION COOPERATION

Over the past two decades, leaders of microstates founded several organisations which connect these entities. We can consider this development a response to the fact that micronations are not accepted in the *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation* (UNPO), which is designed for internationally unrecognised territorial or ethnic units. Its member subjects have their own authentic culture and long-term real history. Therefore, in the future, they have the opportunity to become independent countries, recognised by the international community.

The institutional cooperation of micronations is linked to the maintenance of correlations between them. *The League of Secessionist States* (LOSS) was founded in 1980 and has dozens of member entities. After the development of the Internet and the following virtual micronational boom, the *League of Micronations*, the *Commonwealth of Micronations*, the *United Micronations*, the Micronation Union, the Organisation of United Micronations, the Splendid Micro-Union of Microstatia, and the Organisation of Active Micronations were founded. These organisations have their own governing institutions, the recruitment of new members is according to predefined principles, and their activity is regulated by the Charter.

The proclaimed goals of these organisations are strengthening cooperation, understanding and trust, maintaining friendly relations and “intermicronational harmony” support in connection with the settlement of arguments. In this context we are speaking about “intermicronational law” (<http://microcom.fateback.com/>).

Meanwhile, several summits of microstates’ representatives have been also organised and this issue has become the subject of several conferences, television programs, movies and exhibitions. In recent decades, several books have been published. As early as 1979, E. Strauss’ book *How To Start Your Own Country*, dedicated to the creation of micronations, was published. In 2000 F. O’Driscoll published *Ils ne siègent pas à l’ONU*. In 2006, the Lonely Planet publisher published a guide aimed at micronations with the title: *Micronations: The Lonely Planet Guide to Home-Made Nations*, in which 32 micronations are analysed.

RELATIONSHIP OF “REAL” STATES AND MICRONATIONS

In 1933, the *Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States* was signed, according to which an entity aspiring to statehood status must possess the following qualifications: a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and a capacity to enter into relations with the other countries. The Montevideo Convention states that statehood is independent of recognition by other states. Regarding the content of the *declarative theory of statehood*, if the entity fulfils this four mentioned conditions and declares independence, it can become a nation. However, governments of “real” countries are not based on the principles of the Montevideo Convention. In recognition of independence, they promote the use of the competitive *constitutive theory of statehood*, according to which a country must be recognised by the international community in order to be considered legitimate. Following this logic: “a nation is only recognised as a nation if other nations that have been recognised by other nations recognise it” (Ryan – Dunford – Sellars 2006, 6).

Within the framework of discussion of the acceptance of micronations in the international sphere, the Montevideo Convention is interpreted differently. Defenders of the legitimacy of micronations argue for the presence of a permanent population (the above-mentioned Convention as mentioned Convention does not specify the minimum number) and also for a government that is able to enter into relations with other nations (micronations). “Territorial” micronations basically satisfy the condition of disposal of the defined area. In the case of virtual states, territory can be defined as the places where are target points of micronation members’ activities. In this regard,

the problem of recognition of virtual countries lies in international law. Most countries are based only on a server, through which they realise their activities in the form of web pages, virtual forums, chats, etc.

In most cases, “real” countries ignore the existence of micronations, or treat them as their characteristic type of folklore or as a harmless hobby. Some of them are even a welcomed source of income for the local economy, particularly in tourism revenues. In recent decades there has been a violent state intervention against the self-proclaimed independence of micronations in only two cases. In 1968, Italian authorities suppressed the “autonomy” of the *Republic of Rose Island*, and in 1972 the forces of Togo occupied the Republic of Minerva. These micronations declared independence on artificially created islands in the Adriatic Sea and in the Pacific Ocean, respectively.

CONCLUSION

The virtual country, as a product of the Internet in the age of globalisation, brings the perspective of creating new communities in a deterritorialized world, in which traditional communities are integrating into society and the feeling of anonymity is increasing amongst individuals. Micronations can be seen as an attempt to peacefully manifest the sovereignty of their “citizens”, while not in conflict with existing “real” states which have the traditional monopoly on sovereignty at their disposal. In the virtual world, social relations predominate over economic relations, hence micronations are a type of cultural project.

In this regard, the multidimensional educational impact of micronations on their “management” and “citizens” is emphasised (see Siuda 2007, 64 and on). In this regard, all three spheres of micronations’ activities provide knowledge and experiences. In the cultural sphere, informal education is essential because it can be used in the “real” globalised world of an information society by members of these virtual communities.

Some experts consider micronations to be a future model of public organisation that will function as a community of people who consider themselves to be members of one entity. It will not be based on one’s place of birth and resulting geographic identity, but rather on the basis of similar thinking, intellectual interests, and aims.

In this respect, several advantages of virtual countries are mentioned. It is said that their management is simpler, whereby it is possible to count on the expression of opinion across the entire civil community when solving problems. It is also more possible to control the government. Each person, as a user of the Web network, can choose their citizenship among a large number of virtual communities. Creating a new community is easier, since those who are interested in acquiring citizenship need only a referendum.

The problem lies in reconciling the cooperation of virtual states with currently functioning “real” states. It is possible that micronations will be a type of “subsidiary” countries with virtual territory, whereby the current country system will fulfil the function of ensuring observance of the law and the safety of their physical territory. This is, however, only a question regarding future developments.

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WEBSITES OF MICRONATIONS:

- <http://www.kingdomoftalossa.net/index.cgi>
<http://www.seborga.net>
<http://www.hutt-river-province.com/>
<http://www.reuniao.org/loss/archive/patsilor.htm>

WEBSITES OF ORGANIZATIONS ASSOCIATING MICRONATIONS RESPECTIVELY INFORMATION SERVERS:

- <http://www.theloss.org/>
<http://lom.4t.com/>
<http://microcom.fateback.com/>
<http://www.unitedmicronations.org/>
<http://micronationunion.webs.com/>
<http://oam.50.forumer.com/index.php>
<http://www.freewebs.com/spum/>
<http://www.unitedmicronations.org/>
<http://micronations.wikia.com>

SUMMARY

Kyberpriestor predstavuje rozsiahly virtuálny svet, vytvorený modernými technológiami, ktorý existuje paralelne s "reálnym" svetom. Táto charakteristika je síce predmetom diskusie, nesporné však je, že v jeho rámci existuje veľké množstvo virtuálnych komunit. Medzi takéto komunity patria tzv. mikronárody. Tento pojem však často označuje aj komunity, fungujúce v "reálnom" svete, ktoré vznikli ešte pred sformovaním virtuálnych sietí. Fenomén mikronárodov, obzvlášť virtuálnych štátov predstavuje výskumnú výzvu pre spoločenské vedy.

Pod pojmom mikronárody rozumieme spravidla málopočetné sociálne entity, usilujúce o získanie postavenia štátu, ktorý môže mať teritoriálny charakter (niektoré majú dlhé historické tradície a usilujú o uznanie kontroly nad relatívne veľkým územím, viaceré vznikli na súkromných pozemkoch, resp. na umelo vytvorených platformách) alebo virtuálny charakter (pre tieto subjekty sa ustálilo používanie pojmu virtuálny štát). Kvôli presnosti je však potrebné pripomenúť, že aj niektoré virtuálne štáty reklamujú nadväznosť svojej existencie na určité teritórium, ich vznik je však spätý s kyberpriestorom.

Kým niektoré "teritoriálne" mikronárody sa môžu opierať o relatívne dlhú históriu, virtuálne štáty sú novým fenoménom, ktorý je prepojený na vznik informačnej spoločnosti. Ak sa sústredíme na charakteristiku virtuálnej formy mikronárodov, potom je potrebné zdôrazniť, že medzi ich hlavné znaky – podobne ako u všetkých virtuálnych komunit - patria asynchronickosť a deteritorialita, existujú teda nezávisle od času a geografických vzdialeností. Mikronárody sa spravidla usilujú reprodukovat' formálne atribúty štátu, ako sú štátne symboly, vydávanie pasov, poštových známok a bankoviek, raženie mincí a medailí, produkcia periodík, knižných publikácií a filmov atď. Všetky tieto aktivity môžu byť významným zdrojom príjmov pre ich činnosť.

Mikroštáty pôvodne vznikali a fungovali v "reálnom" svete v "teritoriálnej" podobe v období pred rozšírením internetu. Po vytvorení kyberpriestoru prevažná časť z nich využila internetové stránky pre prezentáciu svojej existencie. Virtuálny priestor sa postupne stal "náhradou" fyzického priestoru, ktorý bol dovtedy nevyhnutnou podmienkou pre vznik štátu.

Najznámejším "novodobým" mikronárodom s teritoriálnym charakterom je Principality of Hutt River, ležiaci v Západnej Austrálii. Jeho nezávislosť bola vyhlásená v roku 1970 miestnym farmárom. Ďalšími takýmito útvarmi sú Kingdom of Elleore (vznik v roku 1944, ostrov na rovnomennom ostrove v Dánskom súostroví), Republic of Saugeais (1947, východné Francúzsko), Sealandia (1967, umelá plošina neďaleko pobrežia Veľkej Británie), Conch Republic (1982, západná Florida, USA). Prelomom v histórii mikronárodov bol vznik a rozšírenie internetu. V tomto období sa sformovala nová forma mikronárodov – virtuálne štáty. Ich zrod je spätý s rokom 1979, keď bol v meste Milwaukee (Wisconsin, USA) miestnym občanom R. B. Madisonom mikroštát Kingdom of Talossa, ktorý bol vo virtuálnej sieti prezentovaný v roku 1995.

Vytváranie virtuálnych spoločenstiev a teda aj mikronárodov je podľa viacerých odborníkov reakciou na dopyt jednotlivcov po pocite súdržnosti vo svete, kde dochádza k uvoľňovaniu a pretrhávaniu medziľudských vzťahov na úrovni rodiny

a lokálnych komunit. Nadobudnutie nových väzieb v kyberpriestore môže vyplňať túto medzeru. Mikronárody možno považovať aj za pokus o pokojnú manifestáciu suverenity ich "občanov" bez konfliktu s existujúcimi "reálnymi" štátmi, ktoré disponujú tradičným monopolom na suverenitu. "Reálne" štáty vo väčšine prípadov existenciu mikronárodov ignorujú, alebo traktujú ich ako svojský druh folklóru alebo ako neškodný koníček. Niektoré z nich sú dokonca vítaným zdrojom príjmov pre miestnu ekonomiku, hlavne z výnosov cestovného ruchu.

Niektorí odborníci považujú mikronárody za budúci model štátnej organizácie, ktorá bude fungovať ako spoločenstvo ľudí, ktorí sa považujú za príslušníkov jedného celku a to nie na základe miesta narodenia a z neho vyplývajúcej geografickej príslušnosti, ale na báze podobného myslenia ich "obyvateľov", vychádzajúceho zo zhodných alebo podobných intelektuálnych záujmov a cieľov. V tejto súvislosti sa spomínajú viaceré výhody virtuálnych štátov. Hovorí sa o ich jednoduchšom riadení, pričom pri riešení problémov je možné počítať s vyjadrení názoru celej ich občianskej komunity. Zároveň je možné prehľadnejšie kontrolovať vládu. Každý jednotlivec, používateľ internetovej siete, si môže vybrať svoje občianstvo medzi veľkým počtom virtuálnych spoločenstiev. Vytvorenie novej komunity je jednoduchšie, keďže na to postačuje "referendum" záujemcov o jej občianstvo. Problém spočíva v zladení fungovania virtuálnych štátov so súčasne fungujúcimi "reálnymi" štátmi. Je možné, že mikronárody budú ich akýmisi "dcérsnymi" štátmi s virtuálnym teritóriom, pričom dnešná forma štátu bude plniť funkciu zabezpečovania dodržiavania práva a bezpečnosti na svojom fyzickom teritóriu. To je však už otázka budúceho vývoja.