

RESEARCH ARTICLES

The Time-Space Regimes of Human Mobility in the North Atlantic Island Spaces (Iceland, Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, and Cape Verde)

Luis Manuel Jerez-Darias¹^a, Josefina Domínguez-Mujica^{2,3}^b¹ Geography & History, University of La Laguna, ² Geography, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, ³ IATEX, Research Institute of Text Analysis and Applications

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Throughout history the North Atlantic archipelagos have projected themselves outwards thanks to travel and the innate capacity of their inhabitants to relate to other peoples. This research aims to reveal their nodal character on the stage of global mobility, using a detailed statistical analysis of their migration trends since the 1960s. To this end, it is necessary to recognise the rhythms of the migration transition and its parallelism with the socio-economic development of the island spaces themselves. In addition, common features can be identified in their recent migration patterns in which a great diversification of origins and destinations predominates, as well as a multiplicity of motivations. With this aim, migration in these archipelagos is interpreted from a temporal and spatial perspective, redefining the historical concept of “Atlanticity,” and allowing to identify the strategic position they play in the geography of human mobility in times of global capitalism.

1. Introduction

Various classic authors of Spanish and Portuguese historiography and literature such as Antonio Rumeu de Armas (1947/1991) and Vitorino Nemésio (1944) argued that the North Atlantic archipelagos are an uncertain mixture of vulnerability and dependence, a soul space where geography is as powerful as history, a cultural entity with an inward-looking outlook that projects itself abroad thanks to travel and the innate capacity of its inhabitants to relate to other peoples (García Ramos, 2007). Following this historiography and literature legacy, Atlanticity must be understood as the ability of these island spaces to project themselves outwards through human mobility. Precisely, the subject of this study is to identify its time-space regimes. This connects with the idea that islands are not simply a backdrop or a container, but rather a construct based on dynamically intertwined spatial relations (Pugh, 2018), places of “cross-currents and connections” (Stratford

^a ljerez@ull.edu.es; corresponding author

^b josefina.dominguezmujica@ulpgc.es

et al., 2011, p. 124) or, in the words of Baldacchino (2007), where the dialectic between “openness and closure” and “paradise and prison” is played out (p. 5).

This essence of “relational isolation” (Baldacchino & Starc, 2021, p. 7) rests on the fact that the Atlantic islands have been subject to a multiplicity of migratory movements, from an initial phase of immigration resulting from colonial settlement, through an intense relationship with emigration and return migrations, to new and very varied types of immigration (Espínola & Cravidão, 2014). These processes confirm their character as relational spaces – archipelagos, (inter)dependent, identifiable, relative spaces – bounded but porous (Stratford, 2003). This relationality must be captured from a geographical perspective that links the essence of islandness with that of migration, as Russell King (2009) argued when he pointed out that it is necessary to relate the interdisciplinarity and relationality of island studies with that of migration studies.

In the context of the “mobilities paradigm” (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 208), the recognition of the trends and characteristics of migrations to and from the North Atlantic archipelagos shows that the types and sequences of migration resulted from the diverse roles that islands have played throughout history, from their peculiar productive specialisation and from their involvement in the geopolitical structure of the North Atlantic spaces. Added to this is the new type of position they acquire in the dynamics of globalisation, an era of high fluid human mobility (Domínguez-Mujica & Díaz-Hernández, 2019; Montanari & Staniscia, 2016), accompanied with other classes of mobility, consisting of commodities, capital, information, and technology (Kellerman, 2020).

The intrinsic relationship of migration with islandness has been interpreted since the end of the twentieth century from different models of socio-economic development: the MIRAB (migration, remittances, and aid bureaucracy) model (Bertram & Watters, 1985), the PROFIT (people, resource management, overseas engagement and ultra-national recognition, finance and taxation, and transportation) model (Baldacchino, 2006), and SITE (small islands tourist economies) model (McElroy & Hamma, 2010), as described by Oberst & McElroy (2007) and Espínola (2013). In the MIRAB model, mobility is linked to island development from the perspective of the economic impact of emigration remittances. In the PROFIT model, mobility is seen as a factor in the islands’ bargaining with the outside world, attracting migrants with the cyclical development of migration policies. Finally, the SITE model links mobility to tourism development and the transformation of the negative external migration balance into a balance in which immigration exceeds emigration thanks to the “tourist-worker nexus” (Bianchi, 2000; Domínguez-Mujica et al., 2011).

The formulation of these three models and the leading role of mobility in island spaces leads us to analyse in detail the migratory trends in the North Atlantic archipelagos from the 1960s. Recognising the rhythms of the

migratory transition, the diversification of origins, contacts, and motivations and their parallelism with socio-economic development allows us to argue that these islands are nodes within much broader dynamics linking wider spatial realms and processes (King, 2009), just as the classic authors of Atlantic historiography and literature did. In this way, the statistical analysis of migration rates carried out in this study, the basis of the research developed, demonstrates that since the 1960s we witnessed a decreasing ratio of emigration, in general terms. On the other hand, the advance of global capitalism, i.e., the process of internationalisation of capital, markets, labour force, information, and communication is reflected in the increasing attraction for immigrants of diverse origins, especially as a consequence of the tourism specialization of these Atlantic spaces.

Therefore, in this study we propose to recognise the migration patterns of the North Atlantic archipelagos (Iceland, Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands, and Cape Verde) on the basis of statistical indicators on migration, comparing their dynamics, not only among themselves, but also in relation to the mainland countries or regions of reference (Denmark, Portugal, and Spain). It is necessary to ask: what is common and what is unique in the time-space regimes of human mobility in these North Atlantic island spaces? In this way, it is possible to identify the intensity of mobility, its rhythms, and its different modalities as well as the relationship between these migratory processes and the transformations caused in the patterns of human mobility in the stage of the transition to the global capitalism.

To achieve these objectives, we use a quantitative methodology based on an exhaustive repertoire of socio-demographic and socio-economic statistical data, allowing us to organise the research according to the following structure: after this (i) introduction on the relationship between North Atlantic spaces and human mobility, we deal with (ii) the sources and methodology of analysis. In a third section, by way of a presentation of the field of study, (iii) a geographical reading of the North Atlantic island spaces is given, whose peculiar geophysical conformation is based on their volcanic origin and, in the case of those located in the mid-North Atlantic, on unique biophysical conditions, which have led to the coining of the term Macaronesia. This is followed by (iv) a geodemographic analysis, with a particular focus on the sequence of migration rates in these North Atlantic archipelagos from 1960 to the present day, using a comparative perspective. The following section recognises, in the temporal scope of the 21st century, (v) the scales of mobility of these spaces, with a characterisation of their international dimension (countries of emigration and immigration) for each of them. This last geographical perspective is the one that allows a clearer appreciation of the role of the Atlantic islands in the era of global migration. The article closes with conclusions.

2. Sources and methodology of analysis

The task of collecting statistical sources for this research has been arduous, given the disparate nature of the data and the scale of these geographical domains (independent countries and regions). This has made it necessary to consult information from different statistical portals. On the one hand, data from the United Nations have been used for the per capita GDP of Iceland and Cape Verde (UNdata, 2023), and from EUROSTAT for the per capita GDP of the Azores, Madeira, and the Canary Islands (EUROSTAT, 2023). On the other hand, geodemographic data come from the Statistical Institutes of Iceland, Portugal, Spain, and Cape Verde (Instituto Nacional de Estadística (Spain), 2023; Instituto Nacional de Estatística (Cape Verde), 2023; Instituto Nacional de Estatística (Portugal), 2023; Statistics Iceland, 2023), respectively, as well as from the World Bank (2023) for some indicators for Cape Verde.

Given that only some of the aforementioned statistical portals provided information on migration balances, we proceeded to find them indirectly, using the population equation for each of the study areas. Thus, these balances were obtained using both data on the initial and final populations for the different decades of the period of analysis, and birth and death data, in order to harmonise the results. The primary data came, in the case of the Canary Islands, from the Spanish Statistics Institute (INE), which offers this information online for the entire period, and those for the Azores and Madeira were extracted from the Demographic Yearbooks available on the website of the National Statistics Institute (INE). Finally, the data on migration balances obtained were converted into migration rates to represent them adequately and allow comparisons to be made.

Regarding the geographical origin and destination of migrants, the respective population censuses of 2021 for the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, and Cape Verde (Statistical Institutes of Spain, Portugal, and Cape Verde) were used as sources. For Iceland, the information was provided by its Statistical Office (Statistics Iceland).

Immigration data were harmonised on the basis of the development of immigration rates. The turnover rate (emigration rate plus immigration rate) was also found, where possible (Iceland, the Canary Islands, and Cape Verde) to identify the mobility dimension. For emigration, information on diasporas was collected using the same sources, and the size and destinations of emigration were statistically cross-checked from the respective study areas. Both this information and that on the immigrants' countries of origin were represented by means of block graphs that make it possible to compare the origins and destinations of island migrations. For its part, the cartographic of these North Atlantic spaces was represented with the ArcGIS Map Service ([Figure 1](#)).

From a methodological point of view, we develop a statistical descriptive analysis, after harmonizing the information provided by the statistical portals of the respective countries (natural balance, migration stocks and flows, and economic and tourism indicators) to get statistical significance results.

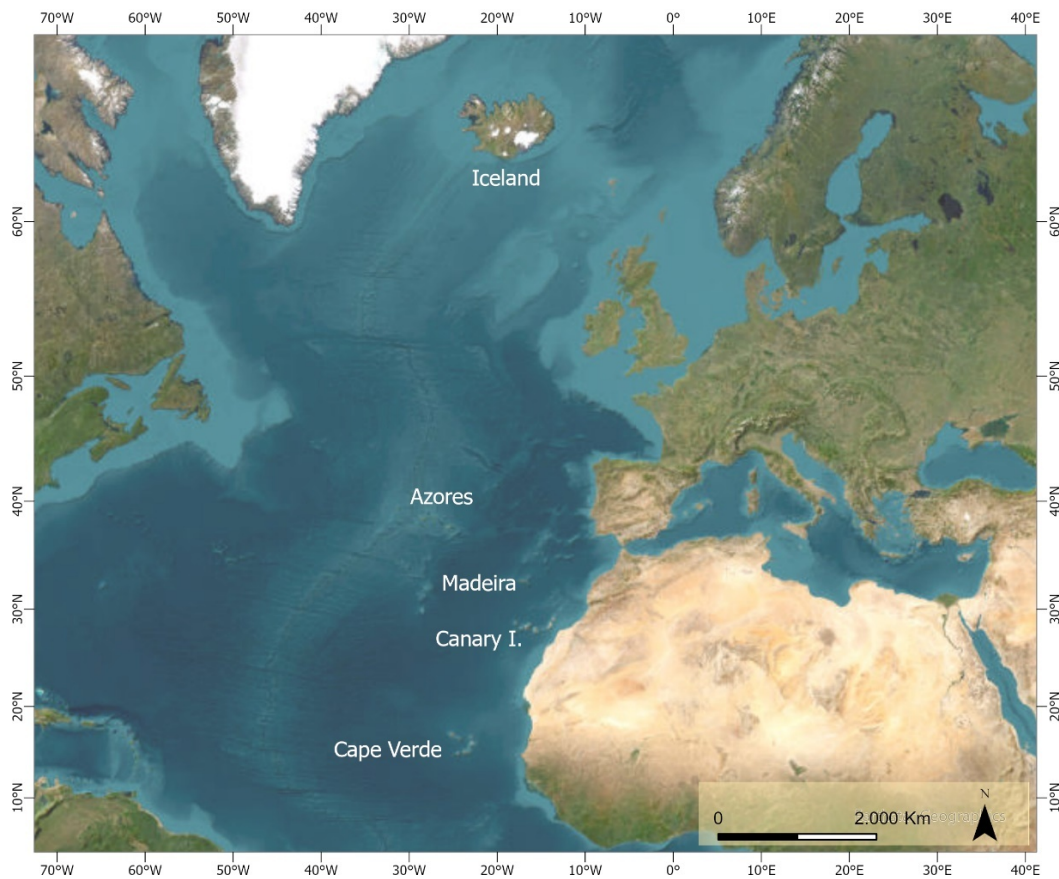


Figure 1. Archipelagos in the study area

Source: ArcGIS Map Service. Own elaboration.

3. The geographical uniqueness of the North Atlantic Island spaces

The North Atlantic island spaces share certain geomorphological and biogeographical characteristics determined by their longitudinal and latitudinal location ([Figure 1](#)).

From a geomorphological point of view, the North Atlantic archipelagos are characterised by their volcanic activity which continues today as part of the Alpine Orogeny because of the North Atlantic mid-ocean ridge system that extends from Iceland to Cape Verde (Nunes & Benton, 2023). The rift faults that cut the Atlantic ridge are responsible for the volcanism of Iceland and the Azores, while Madeira, the Canary Islands, and Cape Verde are located in the interior of the African plate (Carracedo et al., 2008), specifically, at its continental edge, where age-progressive chains are formed (Civiero et al., 2021).

From a biogeographical point of view, these archipelagos correspond to two completely different areas: Iceland, which, given its latitude, has an intermediate climate between the oceanic subarctic and the tundra, and the Macaronesian region (Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, and Cape Verde) has a subtropical climate. In the former, endemism is extremely low, although birch forests stand out, accompanied by other associated shrub

Table 1. Evolution of GDP per capita at purchasing power and of tourists at borders (2002-2022) in Iceland, Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands, and Cape Verde

Years	Iceland		Azores		Madeira		Canary Islands		Cape Verde	
	GDP	Tourists	GDP	Tourists	GDP	Tourists	GDP	Tourists	GDP	Tourists
2002	30.759	248.580	11.700	256.142	12.900	839.840	17.491	12.338.339	1.417	152.032
2003	44.565	308.768	12.100	313.406	13.400	866.798	18.206	12.689.483	2.179	178.379
2004	58.637	348.533	12.600	346.694	14.400	853.216	18.737	12.660.638	2.678	184.738
2005	70.355	361.187	13.200	368.960	15.100	875.419	19.523	12.750.781	2.780	233.548
2006	72.372	398.901	13.900	383.649	15.800	919.169	20.323	13.155.402	3.182	280.582
2007	95.120	458.999	14.500	382.156	16.400	978.631	21.050	13.219.349	4.109	312.880
2008	83.627	472.672	15.200	357.383	16.900	1.025.289	21.049	13.071.973	5.154	333.354
2009	57.354	464.536	15.000	381.658	16.300	924.022	19.810	11.469.194	4.613	330.319
2010	57.452	459.252	15.400	382.154	16.600	852.274	19.878	10.432.046	4.247	381.831
2011	66.264	540.824	15.100	364.425	16.700	897.102	19.574	12.000.324	4.914	475.294
2012	58.825	646.921	14.400	370.896	15.400	870.641	18.732	11.767.792	4.200	533.877
2013	66.187	781.016	14.800	396.449	15.800	955.215	18.532	12.187.823	4.559	552.144
2014	72.529	969.181	14.900	506.155	16.200	1.022.997	18.559	12.924.434	4.525	539.621
2015	58.732	1.261.938	15.500	625.941	16.700	1.103.916	19.079	13.301.251	3.208	569.387
2016	69.997	1.767.726	16.200	768.084	17.500	1.276.549	19.609	14.981.113	3.365	644.429
2017	84.914	2.195.271	16.800	840.523	18.800	1.395.981	20.438	15.975.507	3.696	716.775
2018	82.600	2.315.925	17.600	975.721	19.400	1.395.023	20.943	15.559.787	3.821	765.696
2019	78.447	1.986.153	18.500	292.892	20.200	1.382.987	21.251	15.115.709	3.915	819.308
2020	69.816	482.108	17.200	627.146	17.500	493.015	17.199	4.631.804	3.450	207.125
2021	72.590	687.691	18.300	1.031.090	19.300	909.958	18.990	6.697.165	3.458	169.068
2022	75.260	1.696.785	21.096	1.174.549	23.675	1.772.776	22.303	14.617.383	4.098	835.945
(r)	0,5		0,8		0,7		0,6		0,4	

Source: UNdata (2023). Per capita GDP at current prices and tourists' arrivals at borders. Statistics Iceland; Serviço Regional de Estatística dos Açores; Direção Regional de Estatística da Madeira; Instituto Canario de Estadística (ISTAC); Instituto Nacional de Estatística (Cape Verde).

species, albeit greatly diminished due to the enormous decline of the island flora represented, since the 9th century, by the effects of colonisation (Wasowicz et al., 2014).

The second is known worldwide for its outstanding endemic biodiversity, the highest of any other insular region within Europe: “Macaronesia has long been regarded as a floristic crossroads, a group of very old (i.e., paleoendemic) Tethyan-Tropical ferns, and trees of “continental” origin have been able to survive the generally dramatic climate deterioration of the Pliocene-Pleistocene” (Fernández-Palacios, 2011, p. 18).

To these physiographic considerations must be added a brief historical description of these island spaces, given that we are talking about two independent countries (Iceland since 1944 and Cape Verde since 1975) and three outermost regions of the European Union, recognized by the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam that entered into force in May 1999 (Asín Cabrera, 2005). Furthermore, some considerations related to economic development through indicators such as GDP per capita at purchasing power and the tourism movement at borders complement the description ([Table 1](#)).

Iceland, the northern island of the countries covered in this study, achieved independence by proclamation in 1944 during Nazi Germany's occupation of Denmark. From that date onwards it consolidated a solid economic structure that today rests on three major pillars: fishing, aluminium smelting, and

tourism. Its economy made it a very prosperous Nordic country with a high per capita income, high life expectancy, and low unemployment. After the financial collapse of its economy in 2008, the country further boosted its specialisation in tourism and the number of foreign visitors increased significantly until 2019, exceeding 2.5 million. Subsequently, there was a significant reduction in 2020 and 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Duhs, 2021). Parallel to the growing tourist attraction, the number of foreign-born residents grew, with the small exception of the contraction caused by the 2008 crisis and the pandemic.

Cape Verde, a nation at the heart of the central Atlantic Ocean, the southern archipelagic grouping of our study area, achieved its independence in 1975. The election of a constituent assembly and the drafting of a constitution led to the creation of a National People's Assembly, which ruled the country under a single-party regime in the early years of its history. In the 1990s, a new political context favoured the development of a market economy that led to some income diversification. Today, the country's economic structure is dominated by services linked to trade, transport, tourism, and public administration. Despite this, the country has a large annual deficit, which is financed by international aid and the many emigrants who contribute financial remittances (20% of GDP). Recently, members of the diaspora returning to Cape Verde have become more involved in the country's development. The status of immigrant investor is one more tool added to other initiatives taken by the government to encourage the participation of Cape Verdeans abroad in the economic development (Leandro et al., 2023).

As for the outermost regions of the Azores, Madeira, and the Canary Islands, their status as Portuguese and Spanish territories, respectively, links them to the historical development of these countries; however, they have maintained a strong singularity as areas of crossroads and contact between Europe, Africa, and America. Their historical dependence on primary sector activities (agriculture, livestock, and fishing) gave way without interruption to the development of tourism, as these islands remained unaffected by the transformations brought about by the industrial revolution, beyond the impact it had on their transport infrastructures and on the development of ports and health tourism. Tourist specialisation has been responsible for the break in the historical trend towards emigration, although much more markedly so in the Canary Islands, since in Madeira and the Azores the immigration rate is still lower than that for emigration.

In short, in the last years of their history, the volcanic and erosive landforms of these islands and their peculiar climatic and biogeographic nature have turned them into a tourist destination of worldwide importance, which has allowed the diversification and strengthening of their economy and reinforced their attractiveness for populations of very diverse origins (Dóniz-Páez & Becerra-Ramírez, 2022). The comparison between indicators of the GDP and tourists' arrivals at borders (PEARSON positive values) corroborates the recent trends in the evolution of the economic specialization

[Figure 2](#)

Figure 2. Migration rate (%) according to population equation calculations

Source: Population and Natural Population Movement. Statistical Institutes of Iceland, Portugal, Spain, and the World Bank.

of these island spaces, despite that in Iceland and Cape Verde, the correlation between both indicators is less prominent. Interpreting the attraction of these archipelagos for a large number of migrants is only possible from this perspective.

4. The temporal regime of mobility in the North Atlantic Island spaces since 1960

As can be seen in [Figure 2](#), the migration rate of the North Atlantic archipelagos shows large disparities.

In the 1960s, negative values of the migration rate were recorded, and they were very marked in the case of Azores and Madeira. In the 1970s, the Canary Islands already registered positive rates, while Iceland did so a decade later and Madeira in the early years of the 21st century. The Azores, on the other hand, considerably reduces the negative sign in the same period (-0.2%)

and, from that moment onwards, in the decade 2011-2020, the rate of the Canary Islands decreased and those of Madeira and the Azores acquired a very clear negative sign, breaking the upward trajectory they had been developing. This is probably due to the strong impact of the debt crisis in southern European countries in 2012 and subsequent years, leading to a decline in immigration and, above all, to an increase in emigration (Domínguez-Mujica et al., 2016), until a significant economic recovery began in 2017. In the case of Iceland, however, a positive average rate is observed in that second decade, as a consequence of the intense economic recovery it experienced once the effects of the 2008 financial crisis were overcome.

As a further consideration, the effect of the pandemic on the average migration rate during this last decade under study (January 1, 2011- January 1, 2021) was negligible, despite the immobility caused by the border closures and containment measures adopted to stop the virus spreading during the last ten months of 2020.

On the other hand, despite the fluctuations in these four cases, as [Figure 2](#) shows, the logarithmic trend lines show an upward trend in migration rates. This shows that we can speak of a migratory transition in all these island spaces, albeit with different intensities, i.e., of the attraction of population as opposed to the intense emigration behaviour of the past when they depended on the scarce resources generated by agricultural, livestock, and fishing activities.

The case of Cape Verde requires a particular explanation. As can be seen in [Figure 2](#), the trend line is practically flat, a fact conditioned by the positive rate recorded in the 1960s, when it was still a colony dependent on Portugal and migration came mainly from the metropolis. After the archipelago gained independence, emigration became very important, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. However, this emigration has been considerably reduced and some analysts say that the situation has changed recently with an increasing number of immigrants arriving in Cape Verde, a challenge for the government of this country which they are currently addressing (Leandro et al., 2023).

There is no doubt that the migration transition of these island spaces is directly related to their productive evolution and the diversification of their economies thanks to tourism development. Thus, when we compare from 1970 to 2020 migration rate data with GDP per capita data for the two independent countries of Iceland and Cape Verde, we can see very high values of positive correlation between the two magnitudes (PEARSON of 0.95 in the case of Iceland and 0.80 in the case of Cape Verde) ([Table 2](#)).

In Iceland, the reason for this, as we shall see later, lies in the attraction of its dynamic labour market for populations of very diverse origin, fulfilling the premises of the PROFIT model, according to which mobility has become a factor in the country's negotiations with the outside world, and of the SITE model, which relates the mobility to Iceland's recent tourist development due to the "tourist-worker nexus."

Table 2. Indicators of Migration rates and per capita GDP

Period	Iceland		Cape Verde	
	Migration rate	Per capita GDP	Migration rate	Per capita GDP
1971-1980	-1,78	8237,9	-20,02	398,9
1981-1990	0,38	17584,5	-16,84	643,5
1991-2000	0,64	27896,7	-3,45	1248,0
2001-2010	3,17	47292,9	-6,67	2473,8
2010-2020	8,41	58713,7	-2,63	3244,6
(r)	0,95		0,8	

Source: UNdata (2023) and World Bank (2023).

In Cape Verde, the transformations stem from the impact of the diasporic community of this origin. The mobility of former emigrants and their descendants, especially those settled in the United States, has contributed to boosting the country's economy in two different ways: through the direct investment of remittances in houses for tourism use (López-Guzmán et al., 2016) and because the effect of this investment has stimulated tourism consumption. This is a clear example of the MIRAB model, according to which mobility is linked to the economic impact of emigration remittances. In this way, some members of the Cape Verdean diaspora have become the human capital of tourism businesses, if not tourism consumers in their own country, thanks to their frequent visits (Parreño-Castellano et al., 2021).

In the cases of the archipelagos of Portugal (Azores and Madeira) and Spain (Canary Islands), it has not been possible to establish a correlation between the migration rate and per capita income since 1970, given that the EUROSTAT regional accounts data are only provided for the year 2000 onwards, reducing the possibilities of establishing an adequate correlation over time, especially if we take into account that the impact of the economic crisis from 2008 to 2017 distorts the figures.

However, in order to get closer to the link established between the economic development and the sign of their migratory behaviour, it is useful to recognise the increase in mobility in these three archipelagos. In the case of the Canary Islands, a representative indicator of the migratory transition is the foreign exchange rate, i.e., the sum of the emigration and immigration rates in relation to their population. The average of this rate has been very high in the last decade (2011-2020), specifically 23.37 per thousand, which is several points higher than that of the Spanish state in the same period (19.73 per thousand). This circumstance is due to the high immigration rate (15.5 per thousand), compared with only 4.2 per thousand for the emigration rate, and confirms the "relational isolation" (Baldacchino & Starc, 2021), to which we referred in the introduction to this article. It is appropriate to consider that those data of the immigration rate only reflect the figure of permanent residents born abroad, but not that of the irregular immigrants crossing the ocean from African shores in fragile barges, because many of these, after their arrival to the Canary Islands, move to other points of Spain. This is

corroborated by the fact that the percentage of foreigners born in Africa living in Spain reached 17.5 percent in 2023, while it was only 9.4 percent in the Canary Islands (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2024).

In the cases of the Azores and Madeira, the trends of the past persist, as in Portugal as a whole, i.e., the rate of foreign emigration is higher than of immigration in 2021, as has been the case in the past. However, the number of foreign population residing there is increasing considerably, as reflected in the data from the last two censuses (2011-2021), reaching a foreign population rate of 14.16 per thousand in the Azores in 2021, compared to 4.64 per thousand in 2011, and 28.05 per thousand in Madeira in 2021, compared to 8.2 per thousand in 2011. In addition, recent data provided by Statistics Portugal indicate that already in 2022, the migration balance was positive: 1,790 people in the Azores and 1,911 in Madeira (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2024). To the attraction for international labour migrants, based on the aforementioned migration-tourism-labour market nexus, it is worth considering the weight of return immigration and lifestyle migration in the Portuguese archipelagos, as can be seen in the next section.

5. The spatial regime of mobility: the geographical scales of migration in North Atlantic island spaces in the 21st century

A first look at the presence of foreign residents in these geographical areas reveals not only the disparate dimension of immigration, but also that the capacity of attraction for populations of very different origin offers great differences between them. Thus, the countries of origin of foreigners according to the 2021 censuses reached 18 in Cape Verde, 40 in the Azores, 44 in Madeira, 155 in Iceland, and 157 in the Canary Islands. Therefore, their capacity for internationalisation is also unequal, with the cases of the Canary Islands and Iceland representing a higher level of migratory attraction in quantitative (intensity) and qualitative (sphere of influence) terms.

On the other hand, the specific countries of origin according to island areas point to complex historical, economic, and social relations between these countries and the host location ([Figure 3](#)).

5.1. Iceland: labour migration and post-colonial links

In the case of Iceland, the countries of origin of the largest number of immigrants (flows of more than 4% of the total) are Poland, Denmark, and Lithuania, which together account for 42% of the country's foreign residents, with immigrants from 152 additional countries. There is no doubt that Polish and Lithuanian immigration is related to the dynamism of the Icelandic labour market (the pull factor) and to the intensity of emigration from these two countries since the 1990s (the push factor). From about 1998 onwards, after a slowing in GDP growth and a decrease in employment, Polish emigration began increasing steadily and Iceland became an important destination (Dustman et al., 2015). Today, the number of arrivals is still rising, with incoming Polish groups being relatively young (Gospodarczyk et al., 2016). Meanwhile, since the end of the 20th century, important changes

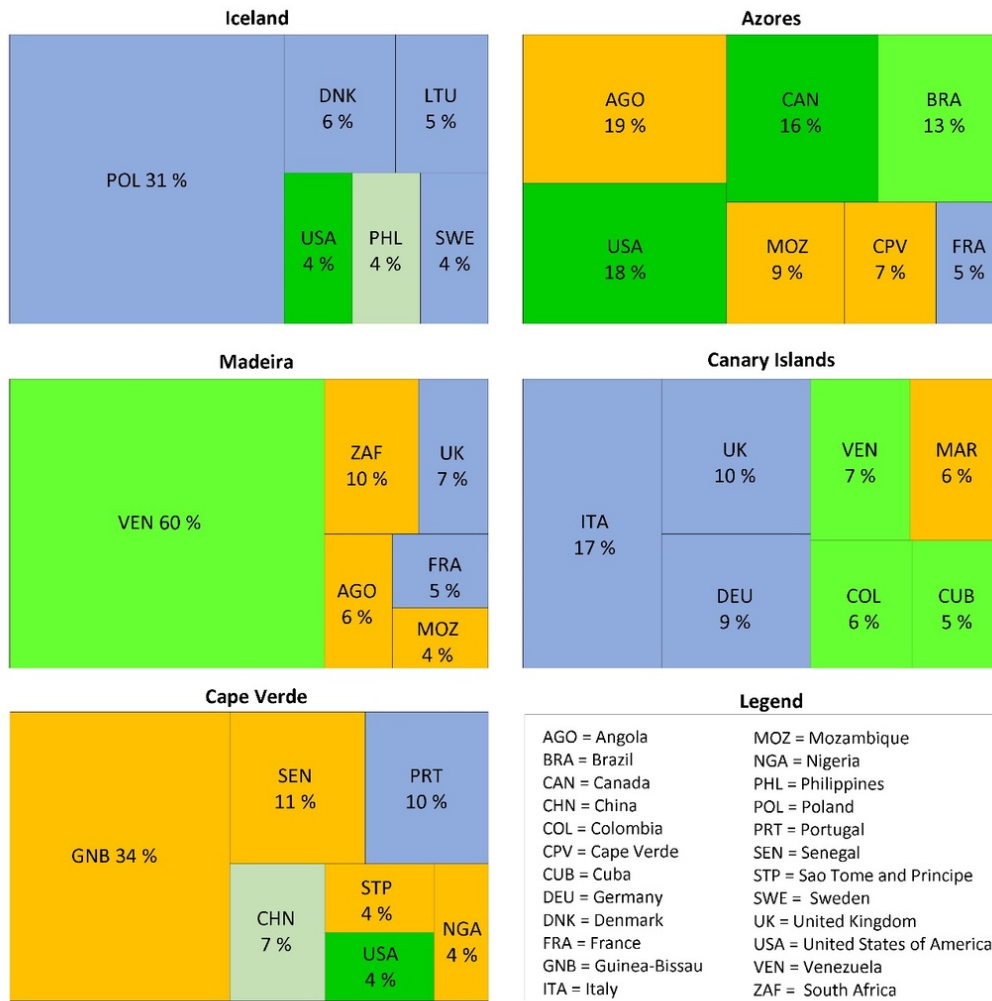


Figure 3. Origin of foreign immigrants

Source: Foreign population data. Statistical Institutes of Iceland, Portugal, Spain, and Cape Verde.

in traditional trends of Lithuanian emigration have also been noticeable, when emigrants began to go not to the nearest countries, but to countries such as Iceland where they could earn the most (e.g., through informal trading or employment) (Sipavičienė & Stankūnienė, 2013).

With respect to Denmark, there had been historical migration flows between the two countries, as Iceland was part of a wider, transnational space during the colonial past. So far, the number of immigrants from Denmark has remained relatively stable, since, as one interviewee in the study by Gudmundsdóttir et al. points out (2020, pp. 89–90) “Denmark and Iceland are very similar in many ways. It’s a reasonably small culture... In terms of day-to-day life and how you deal with the government and how you are taken care of, it’s all very similar.” Thus, a shared historical heritage and cultural affinity have ensured the survival of Danish immigration to Iceland.

5.2. Azores: the colonial past and the trail of seafaring vocation

The case of the Azores is somewhat different, where the countries of Portugal's colonial past are recognised, on the one hand, and the historical destinations of Azorean emigration, on the other, as a result of the archipelago's seafaring vocation. Thus, the largest groups of foreigners come from Angola, the United States of America, Canada, Brazil, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and France, in decreasing order of importance, with a combined contribution of 87%. With the exception of the United States, Canada, Brazil and France, the remaining countries were part of Portugal until 1974-1975, when, following the 1974 Carnation Revolution, various initiatives were taken to give the new states a legal status (Lusaka-Mozambique Treaty, 1974; Alvor-Angola Treaty, 1975; Praia-Cape Verde Agreement, 1975). These colonial links are closely related to the current presence of citizens from those countries, as in Madeira and mainland Portugal. Brazil is also among the countries of origin of a considerable number of foreign residents in the Azores and, by extension, in Portugal as a whole, as the use of a common language and the distant colonial history (proclamation of the Brazilian Empire in 1822) are of some importance.

On the other hand, the geographical position of the Azores points to the Atlantic-maritime vocation of an archipelago that maintained close links with the United States and Canada thanks to a prosperous activity that developed since the eighteenth century; we are referring to whaling (Pérez Marrero, 2001) and which, over time, has consolidated the attraction of the Azores for many former sailors (Sampaio, 2021). To this fact is added the migration of businesspeople or workers, many of them returnees or descendants of Azoreans.

Finally, it is also the immigration of returnees or descendants of emigrants that explains the presence of French people in the Azores and Madeira, as France was another destination of emigration from these archipelagos in the 20th century. The flows were particularly large from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, and most of them were clandestine. Scholars of this emigration claim that these were people who integrated into French society, while maintaining their links with their places of birth (Candeias et al., 2014), which explains why, in current immigration flows, this trail of the migration past is recognised.

5.3. Madeira: a crossroads on the Atlantic route of historical migrations

Although it is another island area that shares many similarities with the previous one, Madeira presents some differentiated features. The main countries of origin of the foreigners residing there are, in descending order, Venezuela, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Angola, and France, accounting for 87% of the total number of foreigners, but with a greater prominence of only one, Venezuela, with 60% of all foreign residents coming

from that country. With the exception of Angola, which refers to the colonial links noted above, the presence of Venezuelan, South African and UK nationals calls for other interpretations.

After World War II, the decline in the number of tourists, agricultural problems, and economic difficulties led many Madeirans to emigrate to Venezuela, a place of the future in those years. The Portuguese started small businesses that prospered over time, and Madeira benefited from the remittances and investments of these emigrants. In the 1960s, the colonial war triggered a second wave of emigration. Many young people chose Venezuela to escape a war in Africa that was robbing them of their lives and dreams (Alves, 2020). This fact is of decisive importance when interpreting the current presence of Venezuelans in Madeira, as most of them have Portuguese roots. This is a generationally deferred process of return, which has increased as a result of the profound socio-economic and political crisis in Venezuela, and which has contributed to increasing the diaspora of these people.

Another historical fact that needs to be mentioned is Madeira's relationship with South Africa, as Cape Town during the 19th and 20th centuries was a major destination for Madeira emigration. Vessels coming from the United Kingdom and stopping at Funchal harbour were part of a maritime route which attracted many people from Madeira to Cape Town, who sought better living conditions and job opportunities. Further, young boys, escaping from compulsory military service, entered South Africa through the Mozambique border, increasing the emigration flow (Vieira, 2018). As a result, a significant number of South African citizens now reside in Madeira, because the socio-political balance of this Atlantic archipelago is comparatively greater than that of the Republic of South Africa.

Finally, with regard to the British presence in Madeira, it is necessary to recall the three pillars of the past that link this territory to the United Kingdom: the cultivation of wine, tourism for therapeutic treatments, and the large shipping companies set up in Funchal (Blandy Brothers since 1807), a city that became the focal point of international trade and transoceanic emigration (González Lemus, 2018). Consequently, in recent years, British origin predominates among tourists visiting the island. Lifestyle migration continues to ensure the link between the old British colony of merchants, invalids who went to Funchal for convalescence, and the current business people or retirees who choose this destination as a permanent or semi-permanent place of residence.

5.4. The Canary Islands: the complexity of migration in the confines of the European Union

As can be seen in [Figure 3](#), the Canary Islands show a greater migration complexity, as the number of countries of origin with more than 4% of foreign residents reaches seven (Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, Venezuela, Morocco, Colombia, and Cuba), while these only account for 60% of the total. In terms of specific origins, the predominance of blue reflects

the strength of the European communities residing there, two of them with a long tradition as lifestyle migrants (the British and the Germans) (Rodes García & Rodríguez Rodríguez, 2018) and another, the Italians, which has become increasingly important in recent years, as many young adults have migrated to the archipelago in search of lower taxation and work activities linked to tourism development.

In addition to this notable presence of Europeans, there are also Latin Americans, mainly from Venezuela, Colombia, and Cuba. These groups of immigrants are among the largest in Spain in relation to the citizens of these origins who reside in other regions of the country. In the case of Venezuelans and Cubans, historical emigration from the Canary Islands to these countries has favoured a generationally deferred return flow at a critical moment in the economy of both republics (Díaz Hernández et al., 2021; Domínguez-Mujica & Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2023). The migratory flow from Colombia, for its part, has a history of no more than twenty-five or thirty years, when drug trafficking and the armed conflict caused great political instability and significant internal displacements in that country. All of this made it difficult for many families to live together and survive, which led to significant international emigration. Some of the main destinations of these flows were the Spanish regions, especially those whose labour market was more dynamic in less qualified economic activities, as is the case of the Canary Islands.

Finally, the presence of Europeans and Latin Americans is complemented by that of Moroccans, showing significant numbers in Spain as a whole, although of more limited importance in the Canary Islands, despite the geographical proximity of the two territories. The inclusion of this group of residents from the African continent among the main nationalities mentioned is a clear sign of the tri-continental crossroads character of the Canary Islands.

5.5. Cape Verde: African prominence and internationalisation

The prominence of African immigration in Cape Verde is evident in the fact that more than half of the foreign residents in the archipelago are of African origin, with two groups predominating, those from Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. In the first case, it is worth remembering that “when Cape Verde achieved independence in 1975, it shared a unique feature with Guinea-Bissau... In both countries, the same liberation movement, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), took over power from the colonial administration” (Meyns, 2002, p. 154), despite the fact that the two countries took profoundly different paths since 1980. These past links still permeate relations between the two countries, but current immigration from Guinea Bissau is mainly due to the attraction of a higher standard of living and a healthier and more dynamic economy in the archipelago, as reflected in the differences in GDP per capita between the two countries: 4,500\$ in Cape Verde compared to 1,030\$ in Guinea Bissau (2023) (IMF, 2023).

Immigration from Senegal is also explained by the greater possibilities offered by the Cape Verdean labour market, despite the fact that the standard of living in that country does not differ that much from that in Senegal. On the other hand, the fact that Senegal is the closest African country to the archipelago, and particularly the capitals of both (Praia and Dakar), is of some importance, so that the greater communication between Cape Verde and the continent, through Senegal, contributes to the development of these migration flows.

The tenor of the Portuguese in Cape Verde is different because it is important to notice that Portugal is the main economic partner of this country, a result of colonial relations. Hence, the Cape Verde economy is extremely dependent on the foreign sector, especially the Portuguese economy (de Oliveira et al., 2014). This has repercussions on the development of migration processes in both directions, albeit with unequal levels. Moreover, some Cape Verdean emigrants or their descendants who have resided in Portugal have returned to their country of origin, maintaining the ties between the two territories, a phenomenon like that of the Americans, although the latter do not reach the top positions of the foreign communities residing there.

Finally, migrants from China are the only group of Asians who rank among the top foreigners in the island spaces analysed. Although they are present in all of them, their prominence in Cape Verde has been studied by researchers such as Carling and Haugen, who note that “China was among the first countries to open an embassy after Cape Verde’s independence in 1975. It was a close ally during the years of single party rule and remained a principal source of development assistance after the introduction of multi-party democracy in 1991” (2008, p. 319) and by Carling and Åkesson (2009). Since the beginning of the 21st century, these ties have become closer and entrepreneurial migration to the archipelago has also developed, an example of the internationalisation of the economy in the context of globalisation.

5.6. Discrepancies in emigration destinations in the North Atlantic archipelagos

When a comparison is made between the countries of origin of immigrants and the countries of destination of the natives of these islands (Figures 3 and 4), a first discordance can be seen, given that the Canary Islands and Iceland receive flows from a greater number of countries than those going abroad. In the case of Cape Verde, the figures are roughly equivalent, while the Azores and Madeira diaspora is more dispersed and the number of countries from which immigrants arrive is smaller.

On the other hand, there are also discrepancies between the levels of predominance of flows. Thus, the number of blocks in Figure 4 (countries of destination of emigrants with a representation of more than 4% of the total) in relation to those in Figure 3 (countries of origin of immigrants with a representation of more than 4% of the total) is lower, with the sole exception

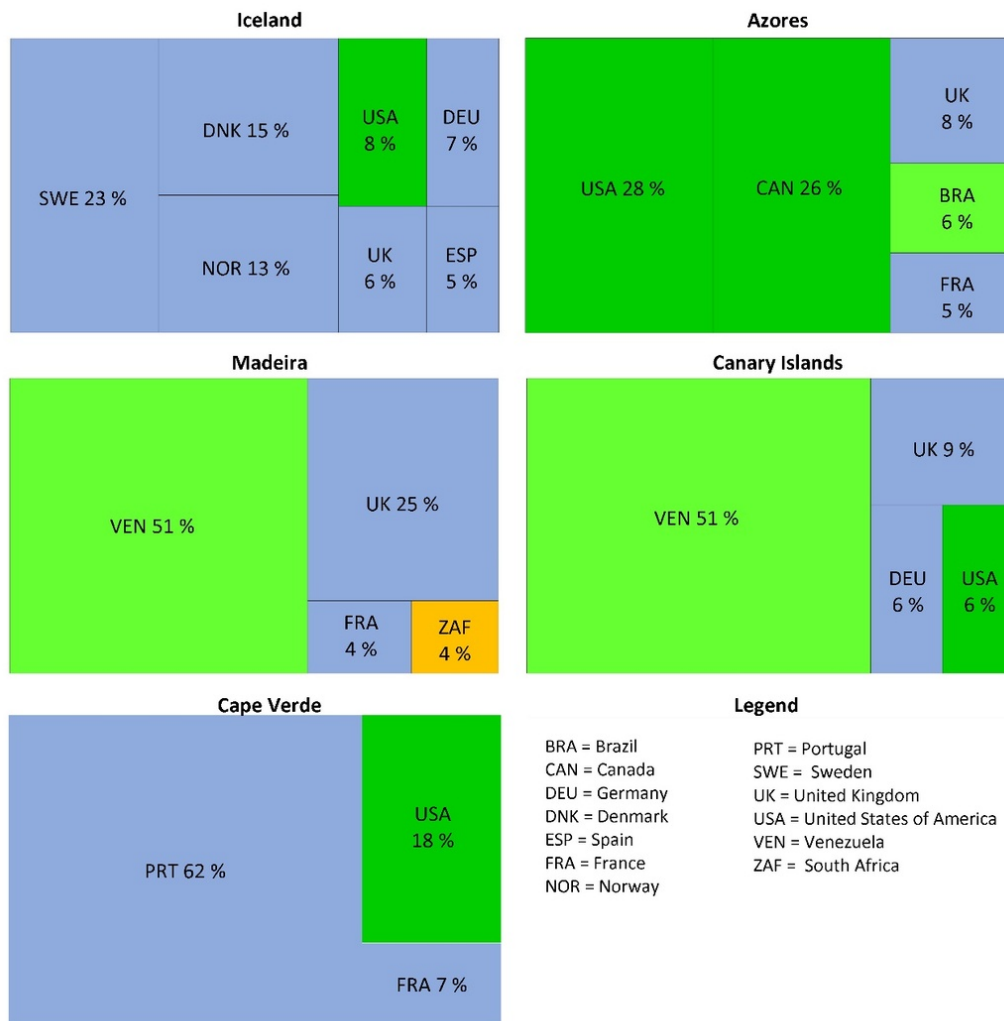


Figure 4. Countries of destination for migrants from the North Atlantic archipelagos

Source: Foreign population data. Statistical Institutes of Iceland, Portugal, Spain, and Cape Verde.

of Iceland. In this case, the weight of the origins of Poland, Denmark, and Lithuania is only compensated by a certain sizeable flow of Icelanders to Denmark, while emigration to Poland and Lithuania is negligible. This reveals that immigration processes have not yet led to return, and that they do not occur because of equilibrium relations between countries. On the other hand, the predominance of blue in [Figure 4](#) is also noticeable, indicating the strong attraction of other European countries for Icelandic emigrants, mostly developed countries in Northern Europe, as well as the United States. The case of Spain is striking, which is related to lifestyle migration and mainly retirees in search of better climatic conditions, as evidenced by the fact that most of them reside in the Costa Blanca (Alicante) and the Canary Islands (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2024).

When we compare immigration and emigration in the Azores, the African countries that were in a prevalent position in relation to immigration, Angola, Mozambique, and Cape Verde, disappear from the top of the ranking of destination countries. However, the United States of America,

Canada, and France remain, and the United Kingdom joins them. The selective behaviour of labour immigration from poor countries and emigration to richer countries, which has a long history, reveals the socio-economic imbalances of the migration processes. Thus, the only country that disappears from the ranking in the case of Madeira is Angola, while South Africa loses prominence, at the same time that the balance is maintained with Venezuela, the United, and France. This contributes to the fact that the blue and green colours in [Figure 3](#) are more prominent than those in [Figure 4](#) in the case of the Portuguese archipelagos.

With respect to the Canary Islands, there is a great contrast in terms of the number of countries of immigration and the number of countries of residence of emigrants, reflecting an unusual immigration dimension in the recent history of the archipelago. Only five countries constitute a priority destination for emigrants, with a certain correspondence between emigration and immigration with respect to Venezuela, the United Kingdom, and Germany. However, Italy, Morocco, Colombia, and Cuba, as countries of origin, do not generate significant movements in the opposite direction and, conversely, the United States becomes an important destination, joining two European countries with a high level of income (the United Kingdom and Germany). The case of Venezuela is also noteworthy, a country where, despite the notable emigration of recent years, a large number of Canary Islanders still reside. This is in the wake of emigration in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, as is also the case with Madeira. In fact, at present, both in the Canary Islands and Madeira, the main nationality of origin of immigrants is Venezuelan, as well as the place where the largest number of Canary Islanders and Madeirans live abroad.

Finally, Cape Verde has a lower capacity for migratory influence, given the smaller number of countries that attract people to this archipelago, as well as the smaller number of emigration countries. However, despite its geographical location in the far south of the study area, it shares with Iceland the same behaviour with respect to its neighbours. It receives immigrants from neighbouring, less developed countries, and the most important emigration is to the former metropolis (Portugal) and to two countries with a long tradition of emigration for Cape Verdeans: the United States and France.

6. Conclusions: the critical location of the Atlantic Islands in the scenario of global human mobility

As global flows of capital, people, information, and objects are increasing in times of global capitalism, mobility studies have become more relevant. These studies involve revising “regimes of mobility” from space and time, addressing the relationship between border places and transnational connections, as well as between rootedness and cosmopolitan openness. This is particularly important for island analyses, where the “relational isolation” gains a renewed meaning thanks to the intrinsic linkage between islandness and migration.

In the case of the North Atlantic Islands, the approach to the temporal and spatial regime of mobility allows to redefine the concept of Atlanticity from the perspective of historiographic and literature legacy, in light of the current circumstances. Using MIRAB, PROFIT, and SITE models, the nodal nature of these island spaces is exhibited, with jointly common and disparate migration trends. Moreover, the geographical characterization and unique geomorphology and biogeography have promoted their tourism attractiveness, making it one of the most important pillars in their recent economic development and in the subsequent increase of human mobility through the “tourists-workers” nexus.

From the point of view of the temporal regime of mobility, an important transition in the migration rates from negative to positive figures took place in all of these island spaces since the 1960s. This transformation was more intense in the cases of Cape Verde, Madeira, and the Azores, which started with great negative balances that are today offset by immigration flows. In the meantime, the highest positive rates in the last two decades are reached in Iceland and in the Canary Islands, where this trend is explained by economic development linked to tourism and, to a lesser extent, in Madeira, where the overseas dimension plays an important role in migratory attraction (PROFIT and SITE models). In the case of Cape Verde and the Azores, there is no doubt about the impact of emigration remittances in this migration behaviour (MIRAB model).

Considering the spatial regime of mobility, some disparities characterize the areas of influence of these North Atlantic island spaces. In the case of Iceland and the Canary Islands, European origin predominates in immigration flows. In Cape Verde, African provenance is the dominant, while return immigration, or generationally deferred migration increases the weight of Latin American origin in Madeira and the Canary Islands. In the Azores, immigration from African countries with historical links with Portugal is accompanied by immigration from Canada and the United States. These are good examples of the external dimension of these island spaces, whose migratory dynamics go beyond the influence they exert on nearby places, as part of the international circuits of movement that derive from their Atlantic condition.

Other additional factors in their migratory schemes mark important differences. The balance between the countries of destination of emigrants from these islands and the countries of origin of the immigrants who settle there are not necessarily aligned. For example, the Canary Islands and Iceland receive flows from a greater number of countries than those to which the outflows are directed. In the case of Cape Verde, the figures are roughly equivalent, while the diaspora of the Azores and Madeira is more dispersed and immigrants from fewer countries arrive. However, all these archipelagos share the capacity of external projection towards Europe and the United States, predominant destinations of the emigration throughout their history, which reinforces their Atlantic vocation in the recent years of capitalist

expansion. All this makes the comparative study of human mobility regimes in these North Atlantic island spaces a fundamental piece to understand the intrinsic relationship between insularity and human mobility in times of global capitalism.

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