

Sticks and Stones **Hannah Alkadi**

WOTAN CITY, LADONIA—Sticks and stones may break your bones, so be careful when using them to build a country.

Using nature for a nation's foundation is nothing new. Founders of micronations—small, unrecognized entities that still maintain sovereignty—have commandeered everything from abandoned war fortresses to their own property.

Enter Ladonia, a micronation near the Swedish coast. That is, after you navigate your way there. Getting to the country is no simple task. While there are signs and painted hints on the trees, many of them lead in the wrong direction. Trees and bushes litter the terrain, but a worn path helps guide the wanderer.

Once inside, a labyrinth of driftwood leads to the bay and its stony beach. The wooden sculpture is Nimis, which is Latin for “too much.” Nimis owns up to its name, so massive that visitors can climb it to gaze over the one square kilometer country.

Arx, another sculpture, stands just a few meters from Nimis. Arx, Latin for “fortress” is dubbed the “stone book” of Ladonia. To “read” the sculpture, you place your hand on it and feel the dents in the cement and stone. Tucked underneath is an official ISBN number: 91-88248-47-X.

The artist—and author—of both pieces is also the founder and state secretary of the country, Lars Vilks.

“I had no plan it was going to end as a really huge project,” Vilks said. He began building the country in 1980, citing land art as his inspiration. Kullaberg, the Swedish nature reserve that Ladonia borders, has several coves in the area. Vilks said that the amount of

driftwood in one of them, combined with the seclusion, settled the decision to build sculptures there.

The authorities found Ladonia two years later, and because of Ladonia's location on a nature reserve, they intended to prosecute him. Skåne, the administrative county of Kullaberg, condemned Vilks for his sculptures, but the process for punishing him took several years.

His solution was to proclaim Ladonia as a country on June 2, 1996. This allowed Ladonia to exist because it was no longer a sculpture on Swedish land, it was its own territory. The country thrived online as more and more people heard of the story and applied for citizenship. As of 2014, the website said that there are over 17,000 citizens. Potential citizens fill out an application and promise their creativity to the nation. Nobility costs \$30.

Ladonia isn't the only one of its kind. Historian Peter Ravn Rasmussen mentions several other micronations, which he defines as, 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."

These varying degrees of "real" nationhood include currency, flags, territory, constitutions and holidays. Some micronations are kept within the family, while others welcome citizenship and "foreign involvement," as some of the rulers put it. People start micronations for many reasons; as social experiments, protests against the government or for the sake of art.

Ladonia mints its own currency, the Örtug, which equals 10 Swedish crowns. Its flag is called the "glorious green," and features an invisible Nordic cross. "Waaaall" and "ÿp" make up the Ladonian language. "Waaaall" is for casual occasions and "ÿp" is for solemn ones. The anthem, however, has no words: it is a stone falling into water. Holidays also compromise the Ladonian calendar, includes events such as the Day of Procrastination, the Day of Throwing Away Keys and St Anders of the Holy Computer Day.

The micronation also has a cabinet and president—previously, A Pair of Shoes. Ministries and representatives of Ladonia hail from Mölle, Sweden to New Orleans. Its Queen lives in Chicago.

Queen Carolyn Shelby, also known as “Her Majesty Queen Carolyn I,” lives a double life. In the nation of the United States, she is the director of search engine optimization at the Tribune Publishing Company. Off the Scandinavian coast, she is the queen of a micronation.

“Realistically, my life is not that much different,” she said. “I have a crown now, which is exciting.”

The queen said she first found out about Ladonia while searching the Internet in 1997. She applied for citizenship and later became Minister of Customizations and Gary. The “Gary” references her application, in which she said she detailed a plan for Ladonia to annex Gary, Illinois.

Shelby said that she was elected to her current position because the first queen disappeared in 2011. The Ladonian constitution requires a queen, so the cabinet made nominations for queens. Shelby said that Angelina Jolie was also nominated. The cabinet then ran an election in 2011 and Shelby won on June 2 of that year.

Among her many duties, Shelby said she represents Ladonia on her travels and also on Twitter and her Ask.fm. As long as she doesn’t do anything to make the cabinet mad, she said, she will continue her reign. Her daughter, Gretchen, is next in line for the throne. There are no kings in Ladonia, Shelby said, so her two sons and husband are not being considered.

Men occupy many other areas of Ladonian function. Besides the cabinet, president, and queen, there are several ministries of Ladonia, including the Ministry of Turtle Safety, the Ministry of Teddy Bears and the Ministry of Chilies and Dubious Anthems.

“It kind of talked to my weird sense,” said Fredrik Axwik, minister of Art & Jump. “You can be a nobleman, but that costs money. I’m not cheap, I’m economic.” Being a minister, he said, doesn’t cost you anything except for a tax on your creativity. So he pledged to “promote art inside and out of Ladonia,” and began his own ministry.

The “jump” comes from a project called HopArt, where he protests “the order of things,” such as racism, bureaucracy and road salt. He does this by hopping into water, mirroring the anthem of Ladonia. The protest list is available on the Ministry of Art and Jump website, and videos of his defiance are on YouTube.

He credits Ladonia for giving him the opportunity for him to be an artist. Before, he said, art in Sweden meant painting, which he didn’t like compared to drawing.

Now he has the ability to draw and practice performing art, which allows him to “paint a picture in people’s minds.” He also said that his life as a minister in Ladonia and an art teacher in Sweden don’t conflict.

“I never really felt Swedish,” Axwik said. “Ladonia for me...it’s a little bit like a social experiment. There’s an underlying thing, a question about the national state.”

Vilks said that the interesting thing about it all is creating a country, which he adds that the 17,000 citizens all take part in. He spends 150-200 days out of the year in Ladonia, repairing and expanding the country. Yet, no nation recognizes Ladonia.

““What makes you real? Really, it’s only other people agreeing that you’re real,” Shelby said. The queen compared the concept of money to countries: money has value because everyone agrees they have value, and that “countries are real because people agree that they are, or that the U.N. says they are.”

A glorious green flag pin shined on the queen's jacket as she spoke. "The more you think about it, the more crazy our civilization becomes, and you just go along with it. I wonder what would happen if people realized they have a choice."

Ladonia's future is as mysterious as the country itself. Vandalism is uncommon, Vilks said, but he said he recently saw someone sawing off a piece of the country. The event was minor and he said that he hasn't seen anything else.

Many people don't take the nation seriously, said the minister of Art & Jump, and obtaining recognition is difficult. There are ambassadors to Ladonia, but they are individual people and not nations.

Sweden, Axwik said, is split up into three kinds of people: those against, those apathetic toward and those enthusiastic toward Ladonia.

"Some people really don't like it," he said. "They think it's an artist thing, and it's a big issue for some people because it's on a nature reserve." Forty thousand people visit Ladonia each year, but no one can live there.

Because it cannot have residents, the country's main stronghold is the Web. Vilks, Axwik, and Shelby said that they would like to acquire land for Ladonia. Shelby said that she is looking at both Swedish territory and private islands.

The queen said she is also in the process of registering Ladonia as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. This would make it easier to sell merchandise and set up a fund for when Ladonia needs repairs, while not requiring taxes on the donations. Shelby would also use this fund to finance trips to the country. She said she can only visit twice a year due to ticket prices, but would be "very transparent" with the fund.

The current president, Christopher Matheoss, said he has many other plans, like a charter house, a publishing house, an online shop, and an online school.

The one thing set in stone—pun intended—is that Ladonian presidential elections will take place in 2016. Axwik said that A Pair of Shoes might run again. He also mentioned a possibility of Ladonians participating in the Olympics and the Eurovision Song Contest.


“We kinda say that we are a country, but we are kidding,” the minister said with a smile. After a pause, his smile grew wider. “But are we? Nobody can tell, really.”

Sources

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- The *Ladonia New Herald*
 - Website: <http://www.ladoniaherald.com/>
 - Twitter: @ladoniaherald
- FB Page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Royal-Republic-of-Ladonia/187949844657616>
- FB Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ladonia/>
- Twitter: @ladonia_info

People:

- Lars Vilks, Founder and State Secretary

 - E-mail: lars.vilks@swipnet.se
- Fredrick Axwik, Minister of Art and Jump
 - minsterofart (Skype Username)
- Carolyn Shelby, Queen
 - Skype: cshel-1 (Skype Username)
 - Twitter: @Queen_Ladonia
 - Ask.fm: <http://ask.fm/QueenofLadonia>
- Christopher Matheoss, President
 - Email: presidentladonia@gmail.com

Books

- Micronations: For Those Who Are Tired of Existing Incompetent Governments and Are Longing for Something New and Refreshing by Mohammed Bahareth
- Micronations: The Lonely Planet Guide to Home-Made Nations by John Ryan, George Dunford, Simon Sellars

Miscellaneous:

- The Ministry of Art & Jump Protest List: <http://www.ministryofart.se/protestlist.html>
- Segment from Home-made Nations: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZGnuaVbX9w>
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