
”Cross-Border Cooperation of Islands at the heart of the Mediterranean: an analysis of the Sicily-Malta Cross-Border area and the INTERREG Italy-Malta programme”

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Abstract

The INTERREG Italy-Malta programme represents one of the most recent additions to a long tradition of Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) inside the EU borders. As a matter of fact, the first launch of the operations only took place in 2004, thanks to the official entry of the island-state of Malta inside the European Union. During this period, the Operational Programme (OP) has therefore completed two financing periods: 2004-2006 as a partial ”experimental” phase, and 2007-2013 as an officially established CBC programme.

Despite a vivid lack of analysis in the specialized literature, there is much that can be said about the maritime cross-border area affected by the OP. First, the Sicily-Malta cross-border region is composed by the two archipelagos of the two islands at the centre of the Mediterranean. It is a clear case of a maritime cross-border region, in-so-far-as its border is represented by the 92Km channel of shared waters. Second, it is a CB region composed by two opposing yet somehow completing territories. Sicily is an autonomous island-region of huge proportions and with many natural and historical resources. However, it also deals with an unfortunate history of structural flaws such as the lack of a strong industrial network, a clear lack of infrastructures, a high level of emigration and an important rate of political and administrative inefficiency. Conversely, and despite sharing many historical features with the Sicilian neighbour, the island-state of Malta has nowadays gone up to being one of the best growing economies of the Mediterranean, full-speeding through an almost two-decades process of Europeanization. However, it also deals with a logical lack of resources due to its small size and the common shared issue of insularity and Peripherality inside the European Union.

Can the two islands therefore venture on a common cooperation pattern for the achieving of substantial results? What have been the main outcomes of the CBC programme so far? What factors ensure the success of the OP and what obstacles still endure in its everyday routine? What is the future of the Italy-Malta INTERREG programme? This paper will deal with such questions through the analysis of a collection of qualitative semi-structured interviews. These were carried on during a three months’ fieldwork as part of the author’s PhD dissertation on European cross-border cooperation. The results are expected to produce a much-needed collection of data on both factors and perceptions of the current cooperation in place between the two Mediterranean islands. They will include results related both to the governance structure in place in the CB area and the projects executed in the framework

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of the OP. Finally, they will also serve as a strong argument against sceptical visions of European cooperation, highlighting the highly positive added value of such programme in more peripheral regions outside from the classical Mittel-Europe core.

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