Two images on the Euro-Mediterranean encounter

A research on the Italy-Tunisia Cross-border Cooperation Programme in a Mediterranean framework of migration and cross-border mobility issues

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Preface

The borders of Europe are a fascinating phenomenon. While the internal borders are fading, the external borders become more and more complicated subjects. Since I was introduced to the European Neighbourhood Policy and knew more about Border Studies, I strongly felt the need to connect these. The external borders of the European Union are very important for the good governance on all institutional levels, and yet the EU has the urge to govern beyond its borders using the ENP. Doing this with the Southern Neighbourhood across the Mediterranean makes it more interesting, since the sea separating Europe from its southern neighbours makes it more difficult to have this border fixed in space. With the Cross-border Cooperation Programme between Italy and Tunisia, which is part of ENP policy, all these things come together in places that are or have been migration hotspots. This is what makes me excited about this area in the hearth of the Mediterranean.

Travelling through this hearth during my month of fieldwork in Sicily and northern Tunisia, crossing the border through which cooperation has been built, has been a great experience. The experience of doing a big research project in places that were completely new for me taught me a lot about the impact of good fieldwork on your position within the academic debate, and that being in another place and out of your comfort zone effects how you think and write about your topics of interest. Apart from that, the human experience of staying in other people’s homes for a week and having deep conversations with many different people has made a great impact on me. I am very grateful for the willingness of all the people I have interviewed, for sharing their thoughts and feelings with me and for warmly receiving me as a foreign student.

The most gratitude goes out to my supervisors, Olivier and Kolar, who have been co-supervising me through this research project. Our long conversation at the Global Lounge on the Radboud campus have been a great guidance towards the end result of this thesis. The feedback and fruitful discussion always gave me the right stimulation to go to the next step, and it taught me to be a critical researcher.

Yours sincerely,

Joris Wijnakker
# Table of content

Preface ........................................................................................................................................ v

1) Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1) Research objective .............................................................................................................. 3
   1.2 Short introduction to academic debates .............................................................................. 4
   1.4) Short introduction to the Italy-Tunisia Programme .......................................................... 6
   1.5) Structure .............................................................................................................................. 6

2) Theoretical framework ............................................................................................................. 9
   2.1) Borders, above all ............................................................................................................... 9
   2.2) The Mediterranean borderland ......................................................................................... 12
   2.3) European Cosmopolitanism ............................................................................................ 13
   2.4) Postcolonial critique ......................................................................................................... 16
   2.5) Conceptual model ............................................................................................................. 18
   2.6) State of this border debate ............................................................................................... 19

3) Methodology ............................................................................................................................ 21
   3.1) General methodological approach .................................................................................... 21
   3.2) The Fieldwork .................................................................................................................. 22
   3.3) Critical Discourse Analysis .............................................................................................. 26
   3.4) Positionality ....................................................................................................................... 28

4) Historical and geographical background .............................................................................. 31
   4.1) Migration in the Mediterranean......................................................................................... 31
   4.2) Italian influence in the colony Tunisia towards Mediterranean personhood .............. 34
   4.3) Physical geography of the Mediterranean ...................................................................... 36

5) The Case study: Tunisia and the EU ...................................................................................... 39
   5.1) the ENP towards Tunisia in the Mediterranean Basin .................................................... 39
   5.2) Mobility and migration negotiations ............................................................................... 42
   5.3) The ENI CBC Italy-Tunisia Programme lay-out .............................................................. 43
6) Sicily and Tunisia in the Mediterranean (Analysis part 1)................................. 47
   6.1) Cultural interconnectedness ........................................................................ 47
   6.2) What is 'Mediterranean' and what is its borderland? ................................ 50
   6.3) Where is 'Europe'? .................................................................................... 53

7) Issues of migration and mobility (Analysis part 2) ........................................ 57
   7.1) Migration and the Neighbourhood Programme ........................................ 57
   7.2) Mobility issues .......................................................................................... 59
   7.3) Ambiguity in EU relation ......................................................................... 61

8) Conclusion ...................................................................................................... 63

References .......................................................................................................... 67
Appendix ............................................................................................................. 72
   Appendix 1) Personal experience of Sicilian-Tunisian culture ...................... 72
1) Introduction

The Mediterranean sea is the inner sea that separates Southern Europe, North-Africa and the Eastern Middle-East. One is likely to perceive the Mediterranean as a tourist-attractive area with a rich historical heritage of ancient Greek and Roman civilization and their encounters with Islamic cultures from the south and east, and with a very smooth climate and unique environment. However, this image of a cultural intersection is being overshadowed by severe political and even humanitarian issues. In the past few years, the Mediterranean has been given increasing attention on a different note, namely being the gateway to Europe for many refugees trying to reach the northern shores of the Mediterranean on bulging ships, where many people die in the attempt. It has even been referred to as ‘the sea of death’ because of the many people that have died in the dangerous endeavour. The Mediterranean, as I will argue, has got a pivotal role in global political developments, while the meaning and full implication of the term ‘Mediterranean’ is very fluid and perhaps even unclear.

It seems that the exact meaning of the ‘Mediterranean’ is not one-sided to the European Union [EU] as well, and is shifting from time to time. Several of EU policies support multilateral cooperation between the EU and countries across the Mediterranean. There is even a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership since 1995 that attempts for increased shared prosperity and free trade among the countries, maintaining peace, and offering approaches of the diverse cultures towards each other (Kuipers & Dell’aquila, 2004). Also, since 2004 the EU has a European Neighbourhood Policy [ENP] in which is pleaded for a ‘Wider Europe’. Its goal is to manage the relations between the EU and its neighbouring countries, without having more enlargements to the Union, because of the already very big enlargement of many Eastern-European countries to the EU in 2004. Thusly, the ENP is a way to manage the newest external borders (Johansson-Nogués, 2004). What is striking with these neighbourhood policies, is the positive language and buzz words that are used in addressing the cooperation. In policy, the cooperation is claimed to be based on equality and shared values, to create ‘A Ring of Friends’. It easy to be sceptical towards this kind of framing of these policies, since the EU does still have the dominant position, and is the one that manages the funding. There is certainly a neo-imperialist tendency within these policies, that holds a centre-periphery approach. But the ‘Ring of Friends’ also contributes to the blurring, or buffering, of EU’s external borders (Del Sarto & Schumacher, 2005). Upcoming revisions of the EU’s neighbourhood policy address the issue of migrants more clearly, as they should improve cooperation on border-management with countries that serve as departure points for refugees to the Union (Kaca, 2015). Whether this is realistic is questionable.
Especially in the Mediterranean sea, where the actual sea borders are initially harder to be fixed into space, the blurring of the border(s) between the EU and its neighbours is an interesting phenomenon. The ENP towards the Mediterranean has led to several bilateral projects, with the main successes in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. The ENP works with the principle of conditionality, which means that the more a partner meets the condition of the EU values, the more funding it receives for certain projects, because than the outcomes of cooperation is increasingly beneficial for both parties, according to the idea of this principle (Johansson-Nogués, 2004). Tunisia in this case stands out for having the only programme that is framed as a Cross-border Cooperation [CBC] and does not cross land, but sea, since its northern region and the southern region of Italy are separated by 200 kilometres of Mediterranean sea. Both the political and the cultural definition of what is 'European' and what is not European, can be stretched in this border region, right in the heart of the Mediterranean sea.

However, as mentioned before, the Mediterranean sea is also an arena of politics of a completely different nature, an arena for the struggle for and the spectacle of bare life. Each year, hundreds of refugees are lost in the sea by the overturning of bulging boats filled with people trying to escape a desperate situation at their homeland and reach Europe for a better life. Southern European countries, especially Italy and Greece, struggle to deal with the enormous amount of refugees that arrive at their shores, since they are the first on the migrant route. Even though most migrants attempt to travel further to the north of Europe, they still need to deal with the big intake of migrants. The European Union seems to be incapable of taking the lead in the dealing with this big inflow of migrants, and thus a situation has emerged where it seems to be that every European nation is exercising migrant policies on their own terms. Instead of the blurring of external borders, which was supposed to be achieved by the ENP, both the internal and external borders of the EU become more firm and to a bigger extent limit the mobility of migrants, which also has an effect on European citizens. However, as this refugee crisis is going on, simultaneously more ENP programmes are planned and carried out, and even keep on receiving funding from the EU, while most European countries are short on money that can be spend on the proper intake of migrants.

These issues become more under pressure because of aspects of counterterrorism and xenophobic tendencies towards Islam entering the political arena. Already from 9/11 onwards, there is a growing EU concern with terrorism entering from ‘the South’, and the EU’s growing focus on counterterrorism has a noticeable Mediterranean dimension (Del Sarto & Steindler, 2015, p.372). There is an ongoing externalization to the Area of Freedom,
Security and Justice [AFSJ], and increasing relationships across the institutional-legal borders of the EU with its southern periphery (O’Neill, 2015). Several Mobility Partnerships are being made to create a framework for operational cooperation to deal with illegal migration (Kaca, 2015). It seems to me that all these issues of migration and mobility make a difficult match with cross-border cooperation programmes of the ENP. The two completely different images of the European encounter with the Mediterranean, that of a cultural intersection with neighbourly cooperation, and that of high securitized borders to prevent ‘southern threats’, is central in this research.

1.1) Research objective
To go into the contradictions of these two images of the European encounter with the Mediterranean, research has to be done in places that are involved in both an ENP cross-border programme and the intake of refugees. The ENP cross-border programme between Italy and Tunisia is the perfect situation to combine these aspects, since it is in the middle of the Mediterranean sea, and a lot of it takes place in Sicily, that copes with a great influx of migrants the last decade. Therefore, the Italy-Tunisia CBC Programme The research goal is:

To explore how the discourse behind the European Neighbourhood Policy coincides with the local realities of its programmes by investigating the influence of issues of migration and mobility on the Cross-Border Cooperation programme between Italy and Tunisia and those involved with this programme, and constructing their discourse on the European encounter towards the Mediterranean sea.

To clarify this research goal, the main issue is about what remains of the values and statements that are made in the broader ENP policy papers, declared at top-down EU-level, at the local implementation level, and also what is then the experience of those involved in these programmes on how the EU encounters its neighbours through the ENP. This becomes all more relevant in the unavoidable context of a refugee crisis where the Mediterranean is an important arena. It is interesting to see what is at stake for the people actively involved in the CBC Programme and how they deal with the ENP in this Mediterranean setting and turn the discourse behind ENP policies.

This research goal also demands a two-layered research question. One part of the question that goes into the practical functioning of the cross-border programme in an arena that is affected by a refugee crisis and securitization, and another more psychological layer on to what extent the positive EU-discourse that lies within the ENP is present at the local
scale, and how people feel about that. Therefore the main question of this research is the following:

*How is the Cross-Border Cooperation programme between Italy and Tunisia influenced by issues of migration and mobility in the Mediterranean sea and to what extent does the experience of those involved with this programme coincide with the EU-discourse within the broader European Neighbourhood Policy?*

It is attempted in this research to go into the functioning of the ENP as a geopolitical tool of the EU to govern outside of its external borders, and to construct a dialogue with the top-down policy paper and the local experience. Also, the role that the refugee crisis has – whether there is a crisis is considered open for debate, although it is generally framed as such – in the encounters of the EU with its neighbours is put in a geopolitical perspective, which can make valuable contribution to debates about migration and mobility. What is at stake here are question of borders, mobility and migration, and how top-down policy about these matters interact with the local reality, thereby directly addressing local implementers of ENP extensions and EU policymakers, but also the versatility of the Mediterranean borderland. On an imaginative level, it is investigated how the two different images of the Mediterranean meet in the imaginaries of the CBC participants. This research should give more understanding to what the European identity and the Mediterranean culture entails, at the level of an EU programme crossing external EU-borders, and how its border crossings – mobility – functions in the current geopolitical situation.

**1.2 Short introduction to academic debates**

Historically, the Mediterranean has been characterized as a region on its own, as well as an interface between regions. In studies about the Mediterranean, there exists a contest between two leading narratives with a connotation that is quite similar to the two-fold characterization of 'region' or 'interface'. On the one hand, there is Mediterraneanist thinking that describes how there is a certain unifier between the people on all shores of the Mediterranean, something about these cultures that they have naturally in common, a certain *genre de vie* that is typical for the Mediterranean man or woman. On the other hand, there is many academic literature that portrays the Mediterranean as a fragmented space, where many different cultures interact and even have a kind of conflictual relationship (Giaccaria & Minca, 2011). The sea itself, can be considered rather as an site of encounters and currents, evolving around the movements of people, cultures and different histories,
making it a site of continual transit (Chambers, 2004). The sea is important in its history, since sea-based hegemonies have fiercely influenced this area and even do today, suggesting that the Mediterranean sea has been an incubator of modernization, or at least modern thinking. All the different qualifications of the meaning of the Mediterranean are founded on a long history of Euro-Mediterranean interaction. Using the words of Chambers & Curti (2008): “All of this suggests that we re-think the Mediterranean, and with it, Europe and its modernity, in the disquieting light of its doubling and displacement by a past that never fades away; a past that persist to interrogate and interrupt the present and its potential futures” (p.390). In regard to the Italy-Tunisia Programme, the programme areas in Sicily and the North of Tunisia are in the middle of the Mediterranean sea, and on the edges of what we consider Europe and Africa. Their cultural connectedness proves the versatility of these qualifications ‘Mediterranean’ and ‘European’, which is central to this cultural debate.

Another major academic debate lies within the geopolitical dimension. Since the start of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership [EMP] in 1995, several studies emerged focusing on issues of security and identity the EU is addressing when dealing with its Mediterranean partners (Pace, 2004), and the use of power in international relations related to it (Adler & Crawford, 2004). The ENP is pleading for a ‘Wider Europe’, which is viewed with distrust by some of the countries on the receiving end of these policies, fuelled by the notion that EU border management policies are eventually destined to feed neo-imperial aspirations (Schumacher, 2015, p.396). It is questionable whether it is meeting the needs and expectations of partners states across the sea (Tömmel, 2013 & Balfour, 2012). From the latter perspective, the Mediterranean can be considered a postcolonial sea by definition: it is a space that is both modernized by forcing it into a European cultural, political and economic framework and preserved as an Orientalized realm marked by exoticism, therefore, in a certain way, colonized (Giaccaria & Minca, 2011). In regard to migration, Mediterranean islands such as Lampedusa show the difficulties of refugees in reaching the shores of Europe, and therefore reconstructing the sea as a border zone (Dines, Montagna & Ruggiero, 2015). Judging from the stories about the road migrants must take to get where they want to be, a conceptualization of ‘Fortress Europe’ seems more appropriate. Therefore, it can be suggested that in spite of the ‘Wider Europe’ idea, the EU borders on the Mediterranean still produce some exclusiveness to the EU over its counterparts. The spectacle of bare life in places like Lampedusa urges us to question whether these degrading conditions are exceptions due to a difficult legal process or reflect a general ‘European apartheid’ towards counterparts (Dines et al., 2015).
1.4) Short introduction to the Italy-Tunisia Programme

The Italy-Tunisia programme is part of the cross-border cooperation component of the European Neighbourhood Instrument [ENI], part of the bigger ENI CBC Mediterranean Basin Programme. The main objective is to promote economic, social, institutional and cultural integration between the Tunisian and Sicilian regions through a sustainable development process on the basis of a cross-border cooperation. It concerns the five southern provinces of Sicily and six coastal regions of Tunisia. The Italy-Tunisia stands out as being the only bilateral sea-crossing programme for 2014-2020. This is particularly interesting because not only separate views from both sides of the basin on the same policies can be compared, but also the separate views and attitudes towards the Mediterranean as a border region and the cultural assumptions of Mediterraneanist thinking. In addition to this research advantage, Tunisia is mentioned as one of the main profiteers of the ENP incentive policies since their Arab Spring in 2010 (Balfour, 2012). The ENI CBC programme between Italy and Tunisia was officially running between 2007 and 2013, but only finished recently (the lay-out of the programme is discussed in more detail in section 5.3). At the moment, a second programme is drafted, titled Italy-Tunisia ENI CBC 2014-2020. It is striking that the distance between the most northeast point of Tunisia and the southwest of Sicilia is less than 200 kilometres. This proximity results in interesting similarities, because the programme regions share a similar climate and environment, and therefore complement each other in economic sectors such as agriculture and fisheries. Also, Sicily is almost the manifestation of the Mediterranean image of the ‘bridge’, due to this proximity.

1.5) Structure

The next chapter covers the theoretical part of this research. The core of theory evolves around Border Studies, so the development of border thinking is firstly outlined. Then, these are in particular connected with Mediterranean studies and European geopolitics, the latter with a specific focus on influences of cosmopolitanism, since these are reflected in European policies. Furthermore, the critical lens of Postcolonialism is connected with the other theories, in order to have the analytical tools for discussing the European encounter towards the Mediterranean. Finally, the last two sections of this chapter provide the conceptual model, that translates the research question into useful theoretical concepts, and the current state of debate of all theories connected that are the theoretical focus of this thesis.

In chapter three the methodology of this research is outlined, starting off with the general methodological approach of this qualitative research, followed by a longer section explaining the planning and execution of the fieldwork and the corresponding journey into
this borderland. The next section of the methodology discusses the specific qualitative method that is used for analysis of the primary data that was retrieved during the fieldwork. To round this chapter up, there are some personal comments on the role of positionality with fieldwork and the writing of a big research as a whole.

Then, chapter four and five contain more background for the empirical chapters of six and seven. Chapter four provides historical and geographical background on the area of the Italy-Tunisia Programme, with an overview on how migration in this area has developed over the last few decades, a short analysis on the historical connections between Italy and Tunisia, and information about the unique geographical setting of this sea area that is shared by the two countries. Chapter five provides the institutional background and is mainly about all the political connections between Tunisia and the EU from the Mediterranean partnership of 1995 onwards. Specifically, there is a lot of attention to the Action Plan of the EU for Tunisia, which is the main ENP document that outlines the approach for each of the assigned neighbours, and a more in depth explanation of the contents of the Italy-Tunisia ENI CBC Programme 2007-2013.

The empirical chapters six and seven provide the presentation of primary data and analysis of it, creating a dialogue between theory and practice. In chapter six, the cultural relation between Sicily and Tunisia in the Mediterranean borderland is central, and the qualifications of the terms ‘Mediterranean’ and ‘Europe’ are defined by analysing the discourses of the CBC participants. In chapter seven subsequently, issues of migration and mobility are located within this discourse by looking at their perspectives on these issues and how they influence the functioning of this ENP Programme.

Finally, the last chapter is the conclusion of the thesis, discussing how the two images of the Mediterranean have come together in the border imaginaries and discourses of those involved with the Italy-Tunisia Programme and what is left of the ENP discourse on the local level.
2) Theoretical framework

This chapter provides the theoretical framework for the research. The theoretical areas of border studies, including borderlands, are discussed at first, because these are at the core of all the discussions in this thesis. Also, the theoretical perspective of cosmopolitanism is explained, with the specific European dimension of it, and finally the critical lens of Postcolonialism is used to point towards some insensitivity with this. This results in a conceptual model explaining the relations between core concepts, and a State of the debate, a short overview what this thesis adds to the theories in the framework.

2.1) Borders, above all

For the bigger part, this research evolves around the area of border studies. These studies are surrounding the concepts of borders, boundaries, frontiers and so on, and has emerged from a classical approach that was mainly focused on where borders should be drawn, to a more critical approach, in which it is central what the meaning of certain borders are, and how they are constructed and performed trough practices. The concept of a ‘border’ then refers to certain social demarcation based on certain dimensions of identity that is institutionalized through practices, rather than the classical line on the map or wall on the ground (Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2012). To elaborate on the classical approach, the ‘invention’ of borderlines are part of the making of territories in the geopolitical sphere and particularly with the nation-state. Borders then combine the institutions of a sovereign power within a unity, and thereby allow for a clear distinction between the national or domestic population and the foreigner (Balibar, 2009, p.192). Therefore, the essence of a border is to separate the ‘self’ from the ‘other’, and when it acts as a barrier, its function becomes protecting the ‘insiders’ from the ‘outsiders’. From this perspective, the border is the geopolitical tool of the power elites of a given society or country that view the border as an institution which protects those who are on the inside from the perceived negative impact of those who have been excluded from the inside (Newman, 2003, p.13). According to Newman & Paasi (1998), the 1990s have witnessed a renewed interest in national boundaries due to a rise of nationalism, since national identity has become a slogan for the cultural constitution of the nation-state (p.187). This raised questions relation to boundaries and territorial identities, which were mainly questions of power. Geographers inspired by critical geopolitics and theories of International Relations [IR] suggested attention should be paid to boundary-producing practices, or bordering (Newman & Paasi, 1998, p.187-191). So in addition to the territorial dimensions, the identity and identity-making aspects – which in most cases
prioritizes national identities, but as this research illustrates, also European identity becomes relevant – become important in Border Studies.

Before elaborating on the theory on bordering from a social constructivist perspective and the identity aspects involved, the approach of Border Studies that mainly focuses on the location of the border instead of how the bordering processes occur is further discussed. The beginning of thinking about borders is something that is closely linked to the upcoming of the sovereign state, in geopolitical terms. During the creation of colonies by European imperialism, this type of bordering was most at hand. Border were drawn on the map to serve as tools for the territorial claims of imperialists. Only the ‘where’ of the border was central to discussion, because the bigger the bounded territory of influence, the bigger the power. Balibar (1998) would argue that that Europe is the native land of the representation of the border as a sensible thing that should be or should not be here or there, but always somewhere (p.216-217). Anyway, a relevant distinction that should be made in that respect is between boundaries and frontiers. As clarified by Kristoff (1959), boundaries are the inner-oriented, well-established limits of a given political entity, like a state, that surround a territory and have legal control, while frontiers are the outer-oriented, non-defined, lines that mark the territory ahead of the hinterland, to indicate until where, approximately, a certain influence reaches. The concept of ‘frontier’ is often connected with the concept of a borderland, which refers to the area around a border, where different frontiers overlap and thus different sides of the border somehow interact. These are certain ‘frontier zones’ (Newman, 2006). Interesting about the colonial times was that both boundaries and frontiers played a significant role; boundaries between the protectorates of the imperial powers had to be negotiated among them to decide who got to rule which territory, while also the imperial powers had to gain more and more territory from the indigenous civilisations, and therefore move their frontier of influence deeper into the hinterland so to speak. The Mediterranean sea is a clear example of space where the limits of influence of the different nations across the ocean are not fixed with clear boundaries, but where cultural and political frontiers come into play in the shaping of this ‘borderland’.

So far, borders are mainly discussed in terms of geopolitical tools that are drawn by political rulers for strategic purposes. However, social-constructivist influences in border studies contribute in regard to how borders are socially (re-)produced and internalised into people’s sense of identity. Simple physical manifestations of borders are, for example, walls and fences with barbed wire, or lines on the map. However, these physical manifestations can only exist as borders if they are recognized as such (Eker & Van Houtum, 2013, p.174). Borders represent a social process of spatial differentiation, instead of fixed points in space
or time. For borders to be accepted or recognized, there has to be some kind of belief of the big majority that there is some kind of demarcation there where the border is, some difference in identity that makes sense (Van Houtum & Van Nearsen, 2002). This goes for any border, whether it are national borders or small-scale borders between city districts. Therefore, many borders are contested for badly representing the social distinction or unfairly disadvantaging certain groups by denying access or making them the ’other’. Borders that are accepted, are thus supported by the belief that is justified and protects one’s distinctive identity. In other terms, the border is mentally internalised, and therefore constantly reproduced through social behaviour (Eker & Van Houtum, 2013, p.175). From this perspective, identity is not solely a social manifestation, but also very much a spatial category, since the idea and belief of territory and a sense of ‘we’ requires symbolic, social and physical boundaries, differentiating with the ‘others’ (Paasi, 2001). The belief in borders thus also means that people believe in some kind of identification with a particular territory. The reason they believe this to be so definite and evident is because it provides them with a certain community, which gives a feeling of self-esteem and a sense of belonging to a larger entity. Identification within a certain territory is driven by the natural human desire for social cohesion (Eker & Van Houtum, 2013, p.176-177). This territorial identification can exist on different spatial scales, even simultaneously. Localism, regionalism, nationalism and perhaps even Europeanism can occur at the same time (Van Houtum & Van Dam, 2002).

Apart from the shift in border studies from the concept of the border towards the social processes behind the bordering process, another development in critical border studies is the adoption of a lens of performance through which bordering practices are produced and reproduced. Borders are constantly being performed through all kinds of rituals, such as showing passports, body searching at airports, or the paying of tolls (Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2012, p.729). Rumford (2012) adds to this by introducing the term ‘borderwork’ to refer to the ability of ordinary people, or civil society actors, to shape, constitute or even erase borders (p.897). Therefore, everyone is involved in the bordering process and everyone is affected by it to some extent. This thinking is in line with the earlier mentioned perspectives of borders as social constructs and borders having an imaginative component. The concepts of soft and hard border imaginaries then become relevant. Soft border imaginaries are the mere idea of a border and its dividing principles, and hard imaginaries the physical manifestation of such ideas into, for example walls or fences, but also border police and any kind of regulated border access (Eder, 2006). So when soft borders become more and more internalised, this usually results in hardening of bordering measures. In the Mediterranean borderland, the cultural borders for example are regarded as being soft, they
exist in our heads but there is no physically bounded line you cross, and could therefore
serve very well as a space of cross-cultural traffic and dialogue, as proposed by Chambers
(2004). However, when refugees cross the see and end up stuck at the shores of Italy and
Greece, one cannot deny there is a hard border there.

At this point, it is necessarily to clearly define what is meant by ‘borderland’. Balibar
(2009) defines it as a place where opposites flow into one another, where simultaneously the
‘stranger’ is stigmatized and in the same situation as ‘ourselves’, and a sort of transnational
notion of citizenship is at hand (p.210). The notion of the borderland then does not fit well
with the earlier theory that borders are linked to a demarcation of identities and serve the
spatial category of identity, as explained by Eker & Van Houtum (2013) and Eder (2006),
because it allows for a space where borders are ‘fuzzy’, and also identities are not bounded
in spatial containers, and therefore provides room for a completely different perspective on
border studies.

2.2) The Mediterranean borderland
The Mediterranean sea can be considered a borderland, where cultural frontiers of Europe
(the EU), the Middle-East, and North-Africa overlap and interact, or where opposites flow
into one another. In fact, in studies about the Mediterranean, the main debate is about
whether the Mediterranean sea presents a strong boundary between the different sides of its
shores, or offers a place of integration and unites the areas on its shores. Some scholars do
belief in Mediterraneanism, which is the idea that there is a certain unifier among the people
in its shores, something these cultures have naturally in common, while others perceive the
Mediterranean as fragmented, and these cultures have a conflictual relationship (Giaccaria &
Minca, 2011). From both perspectives, the notion of a borderland can be relevant, the
remaining question then refers to the nature of this borderland and its imaginaries, whether
the Mediterranean is more of a hard border, a buffer zone for the protection of European
identity, or more of a soft border area that can serve as a bridge between the three
geopolitical power blocs surrounding it.

Historians have criticized the use of the Mediterranean as a cultural category,
because the Mediterranean stands accused of being undeniably linked to European
imperialism and is therefore an oppressive concept, deployed in the service of politically
undesirable master narratives (Horden & Purcell, 2006, p.725). This perspective is the main
foundation for the claim that the Mediterranean can be considered a postcolonial sea by
definition (Chambers, 2004). It is a space that is both modernized by forcing it into a
European cultural, political and economic framework and preserved as an Orientalized realm
marked by exoticism (Giaccaria & Minca, 2011; Horden & Purcell, 2006, p.727). Silverstein (2002) adds to this the claim that there is a clear colonial construction of the Mediterranean, mainly elaborated during the period of French colonial expansion in Algeria and Tunisia. This construction of the Mediterranean was linked to colonial narratives of loss and recovery, since the French conquest of Algiers occurred within recent memory of Napoleon’s loss of his outpost in Egypt to the British (Silverstein, 2002, p.2). To point the French imperial endeavours, the term ‘Mare Nostrum’ is recalled, which the Romans used to refer to the Mediterranean sea, literally meaning ‘Our sea’ (Silverstein, 2002). Even without looking to colonial conquest in particular, there are scholars that argue that the role of the Mediterranean for the spread of European modernity is inevitable. It is even suggested that the favourable position of Europe towards the Mediterranean made it possible that this sea serves as an ‘incubator’ for European modernity (Chambers & Curti, 2008).

Others that can vouch for the cultural Mediterranean unity, the Mediterraneanists, argue that there are certainly some constants in this area in the realm of the environment, economic structure and civilisation structure (Horden & Purcell, 2006, p.724). Leontidou (2009) has given major contributions to Mediterranean city theory, by identifying three main components of Mediterranean cities. These are hybridity (1), a term stemming from the postcolonial work of Edward Said, which refers to the interacting of complex cultural histories of a city, along with the interplay of sacred and secular in everyday life, urbanism (2), the attraction of the city rather than pastoral utopias and the strong cultural heritage of cityscapes, and spontaneity (3), referring to the informal modes of living and working, the reproduction of the informal economy and housing that brings Mediterranean cities together (Leontidou, 2009). These characteristics are not reserved for Mediterranean cities, but, as she argues, are all three more present in Mediterranean cities than they are than in other cities from similar economic, political or demographical status.

2.3) European Cosmopolitanism

A significant part of the theoretical debates around the Mediterranean borderland comes down to the European encounter towards the Mediterranean, which carries some contradictories in regard to EU policy discourse and real political activity. The question remains whether the Mediterranean in this encounter is more a border or a bridge between the three main areas surrounding it, or using the historical images, whether the concept of the Mediterranean as a source or as a crossroad is stronger (Silverstein, 2002, p.2). The contradicting element then lies within the European attitude of the ‘outsider-friendly’ neighbourhood and enlargement policies of the EU and the discourse within these policies on
the one hand, and the migrant-restraining border regimes of certain European countries on
the other. This Mediterranean debate aside, the EU in general has difficulties how to
organize politics in an enlarged Union, since many political differences exist among its
members states. Ongoing Europeanization and the denationalization of the state have
instigated Eurosceptic counter movements, making it difficult for the EU to express a single
heading (Jones, 2006). However, the aforementioned ‘outsider-friendly’ policies of the EU do
express a certain heading or discourse, that is explained in this section as ‘European
cosmopolitanism’.

Before getting into the theory of this European cosmopolitanism, it is relevant to
discuss the theoretical connotations around the concept of governance in a globalizing
society in general and in Europe and the EU in particular. Governance generally refers to the
structure of governing activity and is increasingly developing as an important concept
because authority is increasingly allocated outside of the traditional government of the
nation-state (Eising & Kohler-Koch, 1999, p.3-4). This turn towards governance outside of
the sovereign state is generally believed to be instigated by economic globalization, which is
the intensifying of global trade, investment and therefore, interactions. International regimes
and organisation have been established to get a hold of this transnational activity (Held,
2002, p.306). In comparative politics, governance manifest into networks as a response to
the segmentation of society and state that is both vertical, multi-layered in to local, national,
inter- and supranational spheres, and horizontal, via increasing overlapping communities
(Eising & Kohler-Koch, 1999, p.4-5). In this sense, the European Union can be seen as a
one-of-a-kind network of governance, vertically segmented by the establishment of an
overlapping European Commission and regional agendas, and horizontally by having different
departments on different policy fields and issues. At the early stages of the European
network of governance, a popular theory to explain political behaviour at the scale of the EU
was liberal intergovernmentalism. Liberal intergovernmentalism is the idea that the decision-
making process is dominated by the bargaining of national interests (Bomberg, Corbett &
Peterson, 2012, p.12). This type of bargaining does still exist, mainly through the European
Council, but as national interest become more segmented as well, other theories and
approaches become more appropriate to interpret decision-making processes.

The economic intensified interconnectedness of globalization forcing governance
beyond the nation-state creates a disjunction with democracy, since the accountability of the
sovereign is altered towards multi-scalar networks. According to Held (2002), these are the
circumstances for the emergence of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is the classical idea
that every individual is a citizen of the world and therefore has a cosmopolitan right,
meaning that there should be no constraints to the public use of reason and everybody should have the capacity to present oneself and be heard within and across political communities, and to enter dialogue without constraints (Held, 2002, p.308-310).

Cosmopolitanism therefore does not fit well with nationalism, since it points to a moral politics beyond the nation-state, and attachment to collective existence larger than the nation, thus ‘cosmo’- political. According to Marx, cosmopolitanism is a necessary condition for the development of a global market, where national narrow-mindedness becomes increasingly impossible, and intellectual and material property becomes global property (Cheah, 1998). Because of this post-nationalist perspective, cosmopolitanism is associated with transnational mobility and solidarity, again returning to the topic of borders. The question is if cosmopolitanism postulates a borderless world. As Rumford (2008) argues, it does not, but requires a proliferation of borders instead, that is shaped by the crossing and – re-croossing of borders, making ‘border’ a fluid concept (Rumford, 2008, p.53). From that note, cosmopolitanism has the ability to take away some of the sensitivity of borders and the attached consciousness of identity that exists within a strongly territorial focused nationalist perspective (Balibar, 1998).

Discussing networks of governance, borders and the nation-state shows the issues with cosmopolitanism in Europe. As earlier laid out, borders are the result of a cultural and political definition of where states should be, and therefore, borders make the state, and the state reproduces borders in return to maintain and control their power (Agnew, 2007, p.399). Thinking the other way around, the decreasing accountability of the state due to the increasing networks of governance may take some sensibility away from the borders of nation-states, making borders softer or ‘more cosmopolitan’. However, there is a tension between borders and networks, because networks refer to spaces of flows, making the idea of Europe and European identity more fluid as well, while there is still a state-territorialist paradigm where the nation-state and its corresponding borders serve as the spatial fix for the economic, cultural and political substance of these flows (Axford, 2006). From this tension between networks and borders, a certain ‘European cosmopolitanism’ has emerged. This can be explained as a configuration of Europe with hard external border that are heavily policed to control flows of terrorist and illegal immigrants while simultaneously having an increased internal mobility in the Schengen Area (Rumford, 2008, p.55). The cosmopolitan ideal within this network governance thus only exist within the privileged ‘club’ that is called the EU. Within this club, the moral politics of a cosmopolitan right beyond the nation-state can exist and the consciousness of borders can be stretched by crossing and re-crossing
them, becoming networked borders (Rumford, 2008), but again, only for citizens who carry enough ‘Europeanness’ in them to be part of the European club.

2.4) Postcolonial critique

In the previous paragraph, it is explained how cosmopolitanism and European integration crossed paths in the European Union and how this resulted in a certain European cosmopolitanism, which can be criticised for how it privileges certain people above others. The critique on this process can be categorized as postcolonial critique. As explained by Young (2003), Postcolonialism is rather a critical lens through which social reality can be observed then a theory that simplifies reality through relations of concepts. The critical lens focuses on the cultural effects that the extensions of colonial power of a nation over the other can have. It assumes that no culture is better or worse than another, and the extension of power of a nation over the other creates a cultural legacy and unjust stereotyping boundaries of superiority and inferiority. Thus, it questions the modes of cultural perception linked to these stereotyping boundaries, mainly focusing on human consequences and human relations. A big part of postcolonial literature is on how European empires have eliminated the freedoms of indigenous people in other parts of the world, in the name of ‘civilisation’ (Seed, 1993). Edward Said, one of the founders of postcolonial thinking, stresses this via the term ‘orientalism’. This term is used to refer to the Western attitude towards other societies in mainly Asia and Africa of being more developed and superior to these societies, creating a boundary between the Occident and the Orient (Said, 1998). The main argument of postcolonial literature is therefore that the non-western parts of the world – Africa, Asia and Latin-America – are largely in a situation of subordination towards Europe and North-America (Young, 2003, p.10). It names a politics and philosophy of activism against that disparity and so continues with anti-colonial struggles in the past, in a new manner.

The critical postcolonial lens is useful when discussing the European encounter towards the Mediterranean borderland, or any other ‘neighbour’ for that matter, and the ‘European cosmopolitan’ discourse behind it, because it stresses the complexity of power relations and cultural dominance, which is a difficult point in cosmopolitan theory also. Cosmopolitan intentions rarely come with the proper institutions to facilitate it, without creating too much bureaucracy (Held, 2002). The fact that the world is uneven creates a difficult issues in regard to cosmopolitanism, because the struggles for multicultural recognition in constitutional-democratic states in the global North, or the West, or Europe, cannot be brought into alliance with the postcolonial activism in the periphery, with countries
that are struggling with creating a stable nation-state (Cheah, 1998, p.34-37). In her recent work, Bhambra (2016) critically assesses what she calls the ‘cosmopolitan project of Europe’. She points to the fact that multiculturalism in Europe is framed as a problem, and that migrants are therefore definitely not seen as the ‘citizens of the world’, which is the core of classical cosmopolitan thinking. “A truly cosmopolitan Europe would be one that took seriously its colonial histories and multicultural present” (Bhambra, 2016, p.189). There is no postcolonial sensibility in the European discourse on cosmopolitanism, and therefore it becomes entangled with neo-colonialism. This is illustrated by what Van Houtum refers to as the ‘human blacklisting’ of the EU Visa-policy, allowing citizens from western countries Visa-free access to the Schengen Area while citizens from Middle-Eastern Muslim-countries are denied access (Van Houtum, 2010). Also, the EU is governing non-European space through its ENP framework and even has overseas territories, such as French Guiana, Madeira (Portugal) and the Canary Islands (Spain), which are small countries with special statuses within the EU with some kind of legal suppression (Axford, 2006), both cases colouring the cosmopolitan intentions of the EU with cultural privileges.

Furthermore, the ENP in which is pleaded for a ‘Wider Europe’ also deserves some postcolonial scepticism as to its cosmopolitan intentions (elaborated on in Section 5.1). Earlier the perspective of the Mediterranean as a postcolonial sea by definition was mentioned, it is a space that is both modernized by forcing it into a European cultural, political and economic framework and preserved as an Orientalized realm marked by exoticism, and therefore, in a certain way, colonized (Giaccaria & Minca, 2011). From that perspective, the ENP-encounter of the EU towards the Mediterranean is received by the countries in question either as a vague promise for almost-membership, or as neo-imperialist efforts of ‘the Occident’. It is suggested that these policies are a response of the EU to the Arab Spring in the Islamic Maghreb, defining the normative aspirations and states across the Mediterranean (Tömmel, 2013; Balfour, 2012). Also in respect to the refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean and getting stranded at islands or at the shores of Italy and Greece, cooperating with these ‘neighbours’ is not so evident and the idea of Wider Europe fades away. Mediterranean islands, such as Lampedusa, show the difficulties of refugees reaching the shores of Europe, and therefore reconstructing the sea as a border zone. The spectacle of bare life in places like Lampedusa urges us to question whether these degrading conditions are exceptions due to a difficult legal process or reflect a general ‘European apartheid’ towards its counterparts (Dines, Montagna & Ruggiero, 2015).
2.5) Conceptual model

The concepts of theories act as tools for analysis, and how these concepts relate to each other tells how data should be analysed. In this case, the conceptual model is the theoretical interpretation of the research question. Illustrating how the relevant concepts from the theories discussed in this chapter are related to each other gives the following conceptual model (own work):

The functioning of the Cross-border cooperation programme is central in the fieldwork and it refers to social-cultural experience of the Programme’s participants and the economic development and integration that was achieved in the programme area. It is investigated how this is affected by migration and mobility issues on the Italy-Tunisia border, since these are considered as fundamental in the general frame of the Mediterranean where this CBC programme takes place. Part of this general frame may also include other political tensions but the main focus is on migration and mobility. The EU discourse of European Cosmopolitanism is the particular way of thinking that is behind the ENP policy documents, of which this CBC programme is an element, and therefore on the outset has an influence on the functioning of the Programme, since the ‘European Vision’ that is captured in the ENP policies are implemented in the Programme. It is investigated how this leads to mismatches between the EU-policy level and the local implementation level. The two most right arrows in the model represent already the analysis of the empirical data. From the functioning of the CBC programme and all that is happening in this area, the discourse of those involved with the programme on what the Mediterranean borderland means, or in other words, what their border imaginaries are about this Mediterranean borderland is to subtracted from the empirical data, because that can contribute to Border Studies and to discussions about EU-Mediterranean relations, which is what this research attempts to find out.
2.6) State of this border debate
Theoretically, the main point of contribution to the debate of this research is that the idea of the Mediterranean borderland can destabilize the concept of ‘the border’ in Border Studies. Earlier is this chapter is outlined how Border Studies go from a classical approach of political demarcation where borders invented as geopolitical tools to fence off territory, towards a more critical and constructivist approach where the bordering processes are linked to identity and have an imaginative component to it, towards the performance lens of borders where the bordering practices define the nature and significance of a border. The imaginative component and belief about justified identity demarcation as discussed in Border Studies are very suitable tools in this research when addressing discourses, because discourses are constructed around imaginative components as well. Using discourses and border imaginaries can contribute a lot to the further development of Border Studies in my personal opinion.

Using border imaginaries to re-think the Mediterranean sea (or borderland) and the role of Europe with it, allows to connect Border Studies with cosmopolitan and postcolonial thinking. Even though the concept of the border has evolved, the notion of borderlands is slightly contradicting this border thinking, because it allows for a space where demarcations are multiple and fuzzy, spaces of cross-cultural engagement, where one can feel stranger and native at the same time. The ‘Mediterraneanist’ debate proves that the Mediterranean is a very suitable arena for this particular academic debate, because it is about the overlapping of cultural frontiers of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, and whether these overlapping cultures are conflicting or are interacting to create a ‘Mediterranean component’. Either way, it is an area where borders matter a lot, but demarcations are very fuzzy and therefore it meets the conditions of a borderland, destabilizing the idea of borders again.

The EU-policies, such as the ENP, that have some element of external border management in it, contribute to this fuzziness of borders in the Mediterranean, because they create an increased mobility of economic flows and political engagement, but still carry a EU-dominant tendency, which is illustrated in earlier sections by European cosmopolitanism. The European cosmopolitan discourse carries the idea of softening borders and increased mobility, but with an European exclusiveness embedded in it. With the understanding of the constructivist turn in border thinking, it is the natural human desire for community that could justify this exclusiveness, but it does not justify the desire for managing borders outside of EU territory to create some kind of buffer zone for own security. The multiplicity and the cross-cultural nature of the Mediterranean makes it a suitable place for exposing this EU-dominance in the engagement across the Mediterranean. Investigating at the local level can
reveal to what extent the European cosmopolitan discourse coincides with the functioning of the projects on the ground. The postcolonial lens helps to further expose EU-dominant tendencies within the functioning of this ENP Programme.
3) Methodology

In the methodology section the practical implications of this research are discussed, and what data is to be collected, how this data is collected and how it is analysed. In the first part, the general methodological approach is outlined, and what data collection tool is used. Then, all of the fieldwork that was undertook to collect the data that is suitable for analysis is mentioned as much as necessary. Thirdly, the choice of method of analysis is thoroughly explained and what tools it entails for analysis. And finally, the sensitive topic of positionality is discussed and what role this factor can have in this research.

3.1) General methodological approach

This research is clearly a qualitative research. Instead of using empirical data to test a hypotheses and how variables correlate, it is used to investigate the why and how of certain behaviour and decision-making. An important difference is that with qualitative research the researched phenomenon is investigated within its natural environment and setting, and not taken out of it like with quantitative research that only focuses on a limited amount of characteristics of a phenomenon. The setting or context is often a fundamental factor within the research, which entails that a researcher has to enter this setting or environment and interpret the phenomenon to do proper research (Vennix, 2011, p.89-91). Furthermore, the research could be regarded as a case study, because a single situation is investigated in a single setting, the Italy-Tunisia ENI CBC Programme, instead of a general phenomenon in multiple settings. Although there are more cross-border programmes executed by the European Neighbourhood Instrument, this programme is quite unique as the only sea-crossing programme in the Mediterranean basin. The programme is in a way pioneering and can therefore contribute a lot to our understanding to cross-border cooperation in the Mediterranean. In qualitative research, the case study can mean a fully methodological approach where a contemporary phenomenon is investigated within its real-life context, over a period of time and where multiple sources of evidence are used (Vennix, 2011, p.103), but for this research a different qualitative method is used, since a specific kind of evidence is collected and the period of research is very limited.

For this research, I have conducted interviews with people that are actively involved within the Italy-Tunisia ENI CBC Programme. They are my research subjects and respondents, because they have the experience of working with an ENP programme and all that it entails, and are working and living in this Mediterranean region, so from their experience the dialogue between the top-level ENP policies and the local situation at implementation level can be constructed. The tool for the data collection is the semi-
structured interview, where the researcher uses an interview guide where topics that should
be addressed during the interview are listed, but no clear formulation or sequence of
questions is prescribed (Vennix, 2011, p.253). This is the most appropriate tool of
measurement for the research objective, because in a certain way the mind-set of the
respondents, including their opinions and feelings about the topics, need to be measured,
which is more likely to work when a good conversation is going that is open to some extent.
For each of the interviews that were conducted an appropriate interview guide was made,
according to the background of the respondent. In general, the interview guides at least
include the following topics:

- The importance of the CBC programme or a specific project of it
- The main results and main challenges of the project(s) they are involved in
- The common Mediterranean culture that the regions of the programme area
  potentially share
- The relationship between Italian and Tunisian partners during exchanging activities of
  the project(s)
- The involvement of the European Union during the project(s)
- Impact of the migration crises on programme activities
- Other issues regarding migration and mobility

3.2) The Fieldwork
The fieldwork started off online, at the official website of the Italy-Tunisia programme¹,
because on there you can find all the information on how the programme is organised, what
projects are executed and what parties, public or private, are involved. It contains a list of all
the 33 projects that ran for the 2007-2013 programme track, which were all finished in the
past two years, which resulted in the final closing of the programme in October 2016
(Petruso & Sapienza, 2016). Each project has a leading party that coordinates between all
including partners, receives the funding and had to account for the budget and the final
results. These were listed as well, usually directly with an email address and phone number
of a particular contact person. Via this webpage I was able to contact roughly twenty people
from different projects and organisations that were running projects that had just finished.
Even though this contacting was from far away, it was very successful and resulted in plenty
of appointments and had only a non-response of approximately 40%.

When the first few appointments for interviews were made, I started to arrange the
travelling. I attempted to plan the appointments with respondents from the same city or

¹ The official website is www.italietunisie.eu
region roughly in the same week, so I could arrange an accommodation accordingly. For the travel of 31 days, from the 30th of November until the 1st of December 2016, I arranged three interviews per week on average. The most interviews were with the leading partners of projects, which were mainly departments at universities, research institutes, and municipalities in or around the larger cities in Sicily, and a few in Tunis. It was attempted to speak with people that were in charge of projects as much as possible, because they have the best overview of all the aspects of the programme and are a link between the EU and the locals, since they have to work at different levels.

The best illustration of the journey that was undertaken for the fieldwork of this research is a self-made map that shows the travelled route and locations of accommodations and interviews (Figure 1).

![Map of Sicily and North-Tunisia](image)

Figure 1: Map of Sicily and North-Tunisia illustrating the taken route of the fieldwork trip and locations of accommodation and interviewing (own work)

The capital letters A to F indicate the places I stayed at during the fieldwork trip. Apart from only staying there, also a lot of work was done from those places, including sending emails and telephone conversations for arranging the interviews, making all the arrangements for further travel and accommodations, transcribing interview recordings and writing my personal diary. These are relevant to mention here in the methodology section, since I believe the location from where you write or work has an influence on the outcomes, because it affects your personal discourse about everything you experience, which is
discussed more in section 3.4 on positionality. In most cities I have visited, I was staying at the homes of locals, who were able to help me with my travel plans and could show me around the cities, which was very helpful for connecting with new places in the short time I was there. The places I stayed at that are indicated on the map with A-F are the following (including the corresponding dates followed by the address):


B. ‘Aretusa Studio’ – 7 November 2016 until 9 of November 2016 – Via Della Conciliazione 18, Syracuse. A large apartment on the island of Ortigia in Syracuse, close to the Piazza Del Duomo.

C. ‘La finestra sull’ Ovo’ – 9 November 2016 until 16 November 2016 – Via Archimede 19A, Ragusa. A large apartment in the town of Ragusa with a lot of working space.

D. ‘The Mob Hostel’ – 16 November 2016 until 19 of November 2016 – Via Arrabo 64, Palermo. An international youth hostel in the southern part of the Palermo city centre, an accommodation for travellers from all around the world, in ‘Godfather’ style.


Apart from the accommodations and the travelled route, the map indicates the thirteen interviews that were conducted and are the primary data collected during the fieldwork. The numbers 1 to 13 represent the chronological order in which the interviews had taken place. On Table 1 on the next page, the respondents that were interviewed are listed, organized by city, not by the date of the interview. However, the numbers in brackets that come after the names of the respondents correspond with the numbers on the map of Figure 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent (including the number on the map of Figure 1)</th>
<th>From what institutions or organisation</th>
<th>City / Date</th>
<th>Which CBC project (and role of respondent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Sebastiano Tusa (1)</td>
<td>Soprintendenza del Mare – Region of Sicily</td>
<td>Palermo, Italy / 2-11-2016</td>
<td>Culturas (coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Maria Luisa Germanà (2)</td>
<td>University of Palermo – Department of Architecture</td>
<td>Palermo, Italy / 2-11-2016</td>
<td>Aper (coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Giuseppe Raso (8)</td>
<td>University of Palermo – Department of Physics and Chemistry</td>
<td>Palermo, Italy / 17-11-2016</td>
<td>Aida (coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agata Scandariato (3)</td>
<td>City of Alcamo</td>
<td>Alcamo, Italy / 3-11-2016</td>
<td>Courage (coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Andrea Santulli &amp; Concetta Messina (13)</td>
<td>University Consortium of the Province of Trapani – Department of Earth and Sea Sciences</td>
<td>Trapani, Italy / 28-11-2016</td>
<td>Biovecq &amp; SecurAqua (partner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergio Campanella (4)</td>
<td>Local Action Group (LAG) Eloro</td>
<td>Syracuse, Italy / 9-11-2016</td>
<td>Servagri (coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margherita Fargione (5)</td>
<td>Municipality of Modica</td>
<td>Modica, Italy / 10-11-2016</td>
<td>Essorentreprise (coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefania Carpino (6)</td>
<td>Corfilac (Research Consortium of Dairy-Cheese Industry)</td>
<td>Ragusa, Italy / 11-11-2016</td>
<td>Hilftrad (coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia Arrabito (7)</td>
<td>Svimed Onlus</td>
<td>Ragusa, Italy / 15-11-2016</td>
<td>Agriponic (partner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yassine Khaled (10)</td>
<td>University of Tunis – Academic Affairs and Scientific Partnership</td>
<td>Tunis, Tunisia / 21-11-2016</td>
<td>Doremihe (coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Ali Bouattour (12)</td>
<td>Institute Pasteur</td>
<td>Tunis, Tunisia / 22-11-2016</td>
<td>Restus (coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Saloua Sadok (11)</td>
<td>National Institute of Sciences and Technologies of the Sea (INSTM)</td>
<td>La Goulette, Tunisia / 22-11-2016</td>
<td>Biovecq &amp; SecurAqua (coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosario Sapienza (9)</td>
<td>Joint Technical Secretariat of the Programme (STC)</td>
<td>Catania, Italy / 18-11-2016</td>
<td>Technical coordinator of the Programme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: list of respondents that together are the primary data
With almost all of the interviews I was able to visit them in their offices, laboratories or other natural workplace they have. The average length of the interviews is approximately fifty minutes. Even though there was no certainty from the start that it was possible to do the interviews in English, since it is not so self-evident that people from these regions have English as their second or third language, all of them are. One can carefully presume that part of the non-response stems from a language problem, after all, when seeking contact I used only English as well. With three of them, there was somebody present, a colleague or student, that could act as a translator when this became difficult. All of the respondents gave permission to record the interview and no questions were refused to answer. The recordings were transcribed in full and uploaded into the analysis programme AtlasTi\textsuperscript{2}, the research software that is used for coding the interview transcripts.

Travelling around the Italy-Tunisia Programme Area also was a very inspiring experience on a more personal note. A diary was kept during the travelling, which manifested in a small fieldwork report that was made a few days after returning home. This is not part of the official fieldwork that is used as empirical data for the analysis of this research so it is not included here or in the empirical parts of the research. It is however included in the Appendix of this thesis, since it can be an interesting read for those who desire more information on the fieldwork travelling and the whole cultural experience that came with it.

3.3) Critical Discourse Analysis
The qualitative method that was used for this research is a discourse analysis. The personal discourse of those involved in the CBC programme between Italy and Tunisia is where I am after, to put it against the EU-discourse in the ENP policies to construct a dialogue between top-level and implementation level in this Mediterranean setting.

The specific research method I am referring to is called critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis, or CDA, approaches language that is used as a form of social practice and considers the context of the language use as a critical factor. Within the textual practices are discursive practices, that serve the structuring of social life. Discourse, then, is both socially constitutive as socially conditioned, which means that discourse constitutes events, social identities, and relationships between people and groups of people, while these elements simultaneously shape discourse. Discourse helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and it contributes to transforming it as well (Wodak, 2009). It is ‘critical’ in the sense that it is directed at the totality of society in its historical respect and it integrates

\textsuperscript{2} AtlasTi is Qualitative Data Analysis & Research Software. For more information, see atlasti.com
different social sciences. CDA can be very useful at revealing structures of power and unmasking ideologies (Wodak, 2009). It is in fact a critique of the transparency of languages as vehicles of communication. Words, sentences, and phrases can have more meanings and interpretations than seems apparent at first. Language is not a neutral tool of telling the truth, but more an instrumental tool for constructing history and inventing realities (Mignolo, 1993).

The strength of this specific qualitative approach is that it looks beyond the text or language, more than any other qualitative method. Instead of looking for patterns between beforehand selected theoretical concepts through certain indicators, alternative meanings of texts are examined by putting it in its context. The assumption is that text or language is building things. We constantly build and rebuild our world through language and using it alongside with other actions, interaction, symbol systems, and distinctive ways of thinking, valuing, feeling and believing (Gee, 2014, p.94). And this again is context determined, which is not only regarded as the physical setting, but also as a psychological construct, a set of expectations about the future, religious beliefs, memories, and general cultural assumptions (Widdowson, 2004, p.38-42).

The main criticism of this method is, firstly, that CDA’s methods of data collection and text analysis are inexplicit (Widdowson, 1996). It is true that there are no real guidelines specific for this method, other than the general guidelines of ethics of fieldwork. However, this still does not mean that ‘anything goes’, there definitely are certain analytical tools in literature. Because of this, a researcher has the chance of comparing data through multiple kinds of text. The variation of texts that are available can give a bigger representation of a scientific thesis throughout the field, via, for example, official documents, articles, interviews, public speeches, or even something like social media posts. Another main critique is that it is conceptually circular, to the extent that a researcher’s own interpretations of texts are as historically bound as anyone else’s (Stubbs, 1997). I believe this relates to the issue of positionality, which is to be taken very seriously and discussed in the next section.

In regard to tools of analysis, there are several concrete tools for a discourse analysis. General tools, as listed by Gee (2014) are to think for any used text and language one should try to answer what needs to be filled in (1), to make used language strange by acting as an outsider (2), and to think what the subject is trying to do instead of say (3). The third tool relates to the earlier remark that language is used to build and rebuild things in our world. For this research, the main dimensions of things that are built through language are significance, identities, politics and connections. Therefore, one is to answer how words are being used to build up or lesson significance (4), what socially recognizable identity or
identities one is trying to enact or get other to recognize (5), how words are used to build a viewpoint on how social goods are or should be distributed in society (6), and how they are used to connect or disconnect things or ignore connections (7) (Gee, 2014, p.95-97). These seven analysis tools can easily by applied to any written or spoken text to address discourse and reveal how people enact a specific socially recognizable identity.

Last thing to add is some connotations as to why it is ‘critical’. CDA is critical in the sense that it is directed at displaying how certain texts or language are used for the exercise of socio-political control, no matter what level or domain of society (Widdowson, 2004, p.89). In this regard, it is especially relevant to investigate what dichotomies or polarizations are made, and what is constructed as powerful and what as powerless (Strauss & Feiz, 2014, p.329). For this reason, it is very suitable to combine with a postcolonial lens while analysing geopolitical acts, as you could qualify this ENP Programme.

3.4) Positionality
Positionality describes the aspect of the relation between the researcher and the researched subject in qualitative research. First of all, there is the position one chooses to adapt in relation to a specific research topic or task. In any academic writing, an argument has to be made with a clear motive for this academic argument, for which you need to position yourself in a debate surrounding the topic of interest. In this research for instance, I position myself to be very sceptic towards the optimistic EU policies regarding its external borders in the current geopolitical context, and therefore argue for inconsistencies between top-level policies and the local implementation level. This kind of positionality is something the reader should be very aware of as well.

Another kind of positionality relates more to the internal processes of doing qualitative research and also addresses the issue of discourse analysis mentioned in the previous section, as explained by Stubbs. It comes down to the individual reality of the researcher, and that his own history and previous experiences and viewpoints about the world affect the interpretations. When the researcher goes into the field, he already has his expectations and certain assumptions about intentions, and he can only interpret it by relating it to his own reality. In some way, it is his own discourse he reads in the text (Widdowson, 2004, p.13). I believe this is a very important remark, and that social scientist are to be very aware of positionality. However, to then conclude it becomes conceptually circular is too much. On the contrary, I believe a different position than other people involved can shed different light on certain phenomenon and stretch debate as a result. I have experienced for myself how entering the field can affect your initial position, and
meeting others with a very different position is a virtue for research and valuable experience. After all, when using language, even in scientific texts, some level of interpretation inevitable. And with research, the researcher’s interpretation is fuelled by theory, in order to create a dialogue between empirical evidence and theory to generate knowledge.
4) Historical and geographical background

In this chapter, the general context of the research is summarized, in order to make sure that the discussion of the data in the analysis part of the research can be done in regard to the relevant background. As issues of migration are presumed to be a major context variable in relation to any discussion on all that is Mediterranean, this is addressed throughout history and contemporary times, as well as the cultural developments related to this in mainly Italy and Tunisia. Furthermore, the colonial history of Tunisia and Italy is addressed, to have a better understanding of the geopolitical relation between the countries. Finally, some physical geographical factors are discussed, since that came up quite often during the fieldwork.

4.1) Migration in the Mediterranean

The refugee crisis and migration issues that are often referred to in this research indicate the historic proportions of maritime refugees that are trying to reach Europe, the terrible conditions in which refugees and migrants are travelling across the Mediterranean sea, and the difficulties with the intake that takes emergency action. To define an exact point in time when we refer to a ‘crisis’ in regard to the emigration from Mediterranean Arab countries or immigration to European states along the Mediterranean sea is very complicated, since large scale emigration from Mediterranean Arab countries towards EU-member states started almost fifty years ago. However, in literature about migration in the Mediterranean, the start of the revolutionary wave of violent and non-violent revolts in the Arabic world at the southern shores of the Mediterranean at the end of 2010, the so-called Arab Spring, is often used as a key turning point (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012). The revolts started in Tunisia, on the 18th of December 2010, resulting in overthrowing the government and ousting the president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 14th of January 2011, and eventually the achievement of democratic elections. This meant the start of uprisings at the beginning of 2011 in almost every Arab country, with outcomes varying from minor political reform, such as in Morocco, to violently overthrowing the government, such as in Egypt, or even civil war, such as in Libya and Syria, where war is still going on.

Strikingly, as Fargues & Fandrich (2012) point out, before these revolts emigration in most of the these countries was already quite intense, because from 2001 to 2010, the aggregate number of emigrants to mainly Europe, and particular to the three closest neighbours – Spain, Italy and France – increased from 3,5 to roughly 5 million people, with Morocco as the fastest growing sender of migrants in this time span. Important to notice is that the Southern Mediterranean states were also large migrant-receivers. Libya was the
largest receiver and the situation of migrants there has always been characterized by an unstable status and by recurrent deportations. Syria and Jordan would come next, with large numbers of refugees from Iraq. Egypt was to host migrants and refugees from Sudan and the Horn of Africa, and finally, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco had become significant receivers of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. Also in all of these countries, many migrants were given no residence permits or were not recognized as refugees, composing a mixed population of undocumented workers, unrecognized refugees and transit migrants, a population at risk when the uprisings broke out (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012, p.2-3).

Statistics show that Arab revolts did not produce any change in former trends of migration to Europe. From that perspective, it seems arbitrary that it has been framed as the start of a migration ‘crisis’. However, it did provoke a surge in irregular border crossings to Europe, because Tunisia and Libya become points of departure for boats smuggling migrants and refugees into Italy. Italy experienced a staggering increase in arrivals in 2011. 62,700 migrants reached the shores of Italy, compared to 4,500 the year before (UNHCR, 2015). The most illegal crossings took place in the spring of 2011, when police forces were disorganized and coastal control was not consistent, and among the 42,000 migrants that where recorded between January and September 2011, over 17,000 came from Sub-Saharan Africa, many of which stranded at Lampedusa, an island with a population of only 5,000 citizens. The unauthorized migrants coming from Tunisia and Libya decided to cross rather in relation to the opportunity, than in relation to the structural change of the revolution. So the Arab uprisings would have rather rerouted existing flows of irregular migration, than stimulated new ones (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012, p.5). But apart from the fact that refugees and migrants arriving in Europe by sea peaked in 2011, millions of people were displaced, in their own country or their neighbouring countries.

The further outbreak of war in Syria and the uprising of ISIS caused a new wave of migration in the Mediterranean, by a shift towards the Eastern Mediterranean route, mainly
towards Greek islands. Until the beginning of 2015, the rise of sea arrivals in the Mediterranean was mainly felt in Italy, but after six months the islands of Greece took over as the main points of arrival (UNHCR, 2015). In 2015, over 150,000 arrivals were registered on the Central Mediterranean Route from Tunisia or Libya towards Italy, and over 850,000 on the Eastern Mediterranean Route for Syria and Turkey towards Greece. For 2016, these numbers are 180,000 on the Central route and 175,000 on the Eastern Route (UNHCR, 2017). It is important to notice that still the vast majority of refugees from the Syrian war, but also other political conflicts in any of the Arab states since the Arab Spring, are not taking the Mediterranean route to Europe, but have fled somewhere in their own country or to neighbour states. But still, this staggering increase on the Mediterranean routes as these numbers illustrate have built an image of the Mediterranean sea where the issues of migration are unavoidable. This migration story is highly relevant for the Mediterranean context in which the Cross Border Cooperation Programme is taking place. All the more because the Programme area is one of the main regions where the intake of refugees coming from sea is the biggest, it is considered a migration hotspot.

After in October 2013 a sinking ship carrying hundreds of refugees and migrants sank near the island of Lampedusa, which is on the route from Libya to Italy, killed 368 refugees, Italian organization started the rescue operation ‘Mare Nostrum’. This was a remarkable effort to rescue people at sea and resulted in saving thousands of lives. When it became clear that Italy could not handle this crisis alone, a big European search-and-rescue operation was executed to prevent deaths at sea (UNHCR, 2015). But still, thousands have died or gone missing at sea – over nearly 4,000 in 2015 and over 5,000 in 2016, 90 percent of which on the Central Mediterranean Route from Tunisia or Libya to Italy (UNHCR, 2017) – showing how dangerous the journey is for refugees and migrants.

In Italy today the attention is mainly on the reception of refugees once they safely arrive, including the identification and registration. The reception system has struggled to meet the growing needs, and the conditions in reception centres vary a lot (UNHCR, 2015).
But what Italy is showing, and Sicily in particular, is that there is a growing humanitarian solidarity on the part of city administration on the front lines of the Mediterranean migration crisis, while simultaneously national and supra-national scale of government has developed only more exclusionary forms of bordering at the frontiers of 'Fortress Europe' (Parker, 2016). In Palermo, the mayor refers to the city rather as 'Arab-Norman' and part of the Middle East than a European city. As Parker (2016) argues, the Mediterranean migration has made it necessary to revise our view of the 'migrant city', because the emergency camps that are used for the reception of refugees and migrants are resulting in them being containerized and very segregated from the city, creating what we might call 'black sites' and fractured citizenship in terms of inclusion, community relations, health, security and well-being. Although the emphasis in terms of local authority is on welcoming and good reception of refugees, the anti-smuggling and 'illegal entry' focused border policing of national and EU authorities contributes to the strong segregation of these new residents, especially for those with limited or unrecognized immigration states.

4.2) Italian influence in the colony Tunisia towards Mediterranean personhood

Tunisia has officially been under French colonial rule from 1881 until 1956 as a Protectorate. However, long before that there was a large Italian presence in Tunisia. Already from the twelfth century onwards, people from the Italian mainland had settled there, and by the late 1870s, tens of thousands of Italians, and especially Sicilians, had emigrate to Tunisia for work. It seemed that Italy aimed for a sphere of influence there, but did not seek a protectorate, unlike the French who took Italy by surprise by seizing control of Tunisia in 1881. As Choate (2007) argues, Italy and French had a different style of colonialism. The ancient model of settlement colonies stood as a challenge to the 'new' colonial model of economic exploitation. From the Italian perspective, the presence of a large Italian population in foreign territory meant the existence of an Italian colony, not matter the political leadership. From all the Italian 'colonies' worldwide, Tunisia was quite special because of how close it was to Italy in the Mediterranean Basin, and the fact that France had taken it away from the Ottoman Empire meant a real setback for the Italians.

The colonial status of Tunisia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was crucial for the ongoing struggle in Italy of how it would define itself and how it would project its influence in the rest of the world. The proximity of Tunisia drove much of Italy's interest, and the fact that they potentially could control the centre of the Mediterranean. It seemed that Tunisia was regarded a necessary possession if Italy were ever to present itself as a credible empire (Choate, 2010, p.1-3). The occupations of Tunisia by the French in 1881 and Egypt
by the British a year later was the start of Europe’s scramble for Africa. Italy struggled to catch up with France and England, and built a colony on the west bank of the Red Sea that held the key to the Mediterranean according to the foreign minister. As the scramble for empire moved on southward and eastward, the colonial status of Tunisia remained very ambiguous. Among the high numbers of European population in Tunisia, the Italians and Maltese vastly outnumbered the French, who were officially in control. It was a mixture of a colony of settlement and exploitation, an abnormality in colonial history. The main unusual characteristic was that the exploited population was not just Arab and Berber, but also European. The French response to the demographic situation was mainly characterized by antagonism and dismissal, while from the Italian perspective, the large Italian presence in Tunisia constituted an Italian colony, despite the French rule (Choate, 2007, p.99-100).

The cultural link between Tunisia and Italy was mainly created by the long established merchants, miners, fishermen and shopkeepers. The Italian immigrants that settled in Tunisia held their Italian communal identity while they were setting up their lives there. They even had their own schools there. All the cultural, educational and economic organizations of the Italian colony in Tunisia played a large role in maintaining their communal identity, even when the land became officially under French rule. Also, the fact that the Italians (and the Maltese) vastly outnumbered the French colonists contributed in keeping things that way. The French cultural influence is mainly noticeable by the fact that French is the official second language in Tunisia.

The exchange of communities between Tunisia and Sicily goes both ways. Today in Sicily, there are also several second-generation immigrants from Tunisia living in their own communities. Via policies like the ENP, the EU is discovering its southern neighbourhood as new geopolitical playground, and Italy has the opportunity to use its geographical position to brand itself as the Mediterranean state par excellence, through international pacts and cultural projects. Italy is becoming Mediterranean for two main reasons: its newly strengthened relationship with North Africa, partly by the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme with Tunisia, and the rediscovery of the depth and spread of these connection in its past (Ben-Yehoyada, 2011). In times where globalization processes are ongoing and international connectedness is increasing on different levels, the ‘Mediterranean’ as a category potentially has a revival, and it seems that Italy is foremost taking procession of this category and ‘becoming Mediterranean’ in the heart of the Mediterranean sea. These new Mediterranean connections are mainly personified by these migrant communities, on both sides of the sea, who should be considered the first-rate carriers of this Mediterranean category. However, in the national intellectual discourse, the second-generation immigrant
youths are reduced to the choice between being ‘Italian’, ‘Tunisian’ or global (Ben-Yehoyada, 2011).

The best example are the Tunisian communities in Mazara del Vallo, the largest post-WOII fishing port in Italy, on the southwestern tip of Sicily. From the 1960s onwards, partially by foreign aid-directed development of Sicilian fisheries, this town became increasingly involved in an emerging international constellation with Arab countries on the other side of the Mediterranean sea. Local boat owners had a reputation of working off the coasts of North Africa where they were not supposed to, and their bosses befriended politicians in Rome, Palermo and Tunisia to make sure those boats would not be arrested. This also led many Tunisian fishermen to work on the same Sicilian boats. Sicilian politicians, Mafiosi and businessmen, soon became aware of the potential benefits of having a stake on the fishing operation with a fleet that could go anywhere around the Mediterranean and played large role in the social constellation that was centred in Mazara del Vallo. Ben-Yehoyada (2011) describes this process as ‘Mediterraneanization’, “the process through which a place becomes more intertwined in a network of connection and movements with other places in or around the Mediterranean” (p.389). Italy and the Maghreb were drawn closer together. And in their coming of age, the second-generation Tunisian youths in Mazara del Vallo give meaning to their lives on both sides of the Sicilian Channel rather than as new Italians, so are to some extent impersonating this Mediterraneanization process. On the other side of the Channel, there are examples as well of still existing Italian fishing communities. La Goulette, the town with the most important port of Tunis, to the Northeast side of the city, is one of the places where many immigrants from mainly Sicily had settled in the nineteenth century because of the opportunities of maritime activities. Until today there is a small community there which is referred to as ‘Little Sicily’.

4.3) Physical geography of the Mediterranean
In the scientific realm of physical geography (among others), the use of ‘Mediterranean’ as a category is very common. The Mediterranean climate is the climate type typical for the lands around the Mediterranean Sea. It is characterised by dry summers and mild, moist winters. This climate type is also found in most of coastal California, in parts of west and south Australia, in some parts of Central Asia, in central Chile, and along the southwestern shores of South Africa, naturally all regions with a similar latitude (Cowling et al., 1996). It is named after the Mediterranean sea because the lands around the Mediterranean sea are the largest area where this climate type is found. Biologist and ecologist can confirm the uniqueness of the Mediterranean climate, for example in its streams and rivers, because the flow regimes
reflect precipitation patterns better than with other climates, making these rivers hotspots for biodiversity (Bonada & Resh, 2014), and Mediterranean regions have an unique dispersal of primary freshwater fishes (Bianco, 1995). Also plant diversity is high, the Mediterranean climate regions occupy less than five percent of the Earth’s surface, but harbour nearly 50,000 vascular plant species, almost twenty percent of the world total (Cowling et al., 1996).

Naturally, this climate results in the Mediterranean countries having very similar landscape and agriculture, including fishing and maritime environment. Because Mediterranean neighbours have these things in common, cultural and economic connections are also obvious to some extent. Some of the respondents from Sicily that were involved with cross-border cooperation with Tunisia had never been to Tunisia before, and were very surprised how much the regions of the Programme area were alike in terms of landscape and agriculture. A Sicilian man from Syracuse on the southeast coast of Sicily explained how Tunisia reminded him of Sicily thirty years ago. The pictures in figures 4 and 5 that are taken during the fieldwork trip to Sicily and Tunisia illustrate the resemblance in the landscape, supporting this feeling. From a physical geographical perspective, Italy, and Sicily in particular, are very much related. Sicily and the North of Tunisia even have a lot in common that both countries

Figure 5: Picture taken on the outskirts of the city of Tunis, Tunisia, towards the suburbs facing the Sebkha lake (November 21, 2016)

Figure 4: Picture taken from the bus from Syracuse to Ragusa in the south of Sicily (November 9, 2016)
do not share with the other far ends of the countries, where Italy has the mountainous area of the Alps, and Tunisia has mainly desert.

This cross-border programme has a clear geopolitical and economic agenda, but it also illustrates how those two dimensions are related with social, cultural, and physical geographical aspects such as climate and landscape. All of these themes are related and from each perspective there is some form of ‘neighbourhoodness’ with a Mediterranean component.
5) The Case study: Tunisia and the EU

Apart from a geographical and historical context, in light of the ENI CBC Programme, a more institutional context is also relevant. Therefore, this chapter deals with the actual policy documents, like the ENP Action Plan with Tunisia and Mobility Partnerships, to see the institutional build-up towards the actual programme and how it represents a EU discourse that can be characterised by European cosmopolitanism which is discussed in the theoretical chapter. Also, more information about the outline and set-up of the programme is provided, and some first insights on the outcomes of the 2007-2013 ENI CBC Programme between Italy and Tunisia.

5.1) the ENP towards Tunisia in the Mediterranean Basin

The ENP, as mentioned before, is meant to establish a ‘Ring of Friends’ to achieve possible political association and the greatest possible economic integration. The partner-states are both the Eastern Neighbours, such as Ukraine and Belarus, and Southern Partners, which basically are all non-EU countries along the coast of the Mediterranean sea. For these two groups, separate ENP policy documents are made up. Within these separate documents, the general policy goals and basis for cooperation are set out. In addition to that, a specific Action Plan for the implementation of the ENP is drafted for all ‘willing participants’. The ENP is supported by the European Neighbourhood Instrument, which deals with the division of the budget through incentive based principles. According to the EU Treaty, the general aim of the ENI is: “to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterized by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation”.

Support is then given through bilateral programmes, multi-country programmes and Cross-Border Cooperation [CBC] programmes between member states and partner states, where both national and local authorities are involved. As part of the ENI, there is a specific ENI CBC Mediterranean Basin Programme, focused on particular cross-border project along the Mediterranean coast.

My focus within all of these policy programmes institutions is on a specific ENI CBC programme. With this, I am particularly interested in the western side of the Mediterranean, because those countries are involved with EU programmes since the Barcelona Process instigated in 1995 and are more involved in multi-country programmes. An interesting example of such a programme is the so-called 5+5 Dialogue, which is the Forum for the Dialogue in the Western Mediterranean, an informal political dialogue that brings together ten countries in the western basin of the Mediterranean. These are five countries from the Arab Maghreb Union (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia) and five member of
the European Union (Spain, France, Italy, Malta and Portugal). The initiative was created as far back as December 1990 with the goal of reinforcing and enriching the political, economic and cultural dialogue between the two sides of the Mediterranean. It has a flexible and informal character. The forum takes places a couple of times a year. Apart from the 5+5 Dialogue, the western is more appropriate for research of this kind due to the tensions and state of war in eastern Mediterranean countries such as Israel, Palestine and Syria, where political debate is dominated by other matters than EU policies and the relations to the Mediterranean sea.

Of the Mediterranean partners, Tunisia stands out as having the only sea-crossing programme and was also the first of the North African partners to sign an Association Agreement with the EU. They signed as early as 1995, and the Euro-Med Association Agreement with the Tunisian Republic and the European Community came into force on March 1, 1998. The aim was to cooperate in strengthening political dialogue, trade, economic, social, and cultural issues (EEAS, n.d.). In the Tunisian Action Plan, which is the main ENP policy paper that is made for every neighbour/partner state, made up in 2004 at the start of the ENP, issues of migration are already mentioned. It is mentioned that the EU should have a leading role in the facilitation of legal migration and that active cooperation on this matter should always be promoted. Also that the development and implementation of a common immigration policy will be discussed, using the relative EU instruments (EEAS, 2004). In the Action Plan of 2004 they also address issues of illegal migration and border management. It is suggested that travel documents and visas should be made more secure using European experience and expertise and that border management and surveillance should be trained.

The latest Action Plan for the relationship between Tunisia and the EU is set for the period of 2013-2017. In this document, the EU-Tunisia approach is said to be based on partnership, joint ownership and differentiation. Big part of the focus is that the neighbourhood policy should allow Tunisia to reinforce its ties with Arab, Mediterranean and African countries whilst respecting its national identity and characteristics. Their ambitious goals are said to be based on common values, which are listed as the following: ‘democracy, the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, market economics, free trade, sustainable development, poverty alleviation and the strengthening of political, economic, social and institutional reforms’ (EEAS, 2013). Even though these are quite broad and open for interpretation, it is quite a list of common values. Also there is included that there is a shared responsibility for conflict prevention, conflict resolution and disaster management in
regard to transnational and inter-regional cooperation. It seems that in the introduction of this policy, the EU is framing Tunisia as an equal partner (EEAS, 2013).

In other publications on the Action Plan and further additions to the original policy document, similar keywords are being used, while it is difficult to find any concrete measures in the documents that are accessible. In latest publications, the notion that Tunisia has come out of a crisis and a Revolution since 2011 is being used as the main motive for increased cooperation or attention on the relations between Tunisia and the EU (EEAS, 2016), and the key areas in which Tunisia will receive EU assistance are in these EU press releases referred to as ‘Tunisia's needs’ (European Commission, 2017). Generally, the same buzz words come up as the key areas in which Tunisia is in need of assistance according to the EU. These are referred to as establishing ‘the building blocks of democratization’, ‘sustainable development’ is mentioned many times, and other very vague terms such as the ‘strengthening of the constitutional state and governance’ and ‘social justice’ (EEAS, 2016). What these buzz words mean in practice and how these things are implemented is not clear. What is clear is that over the years the political dialogue between Tunisia and the EU has been increasing and that the EU is very much attempting to create an entire ENP institutional framework for Tunisia.

The Tunisian Action Plans and other press releases or publications from the EU in addition to these plans reflect the discourse that in this research is often referred to as ‘EU discourse’ of ‘European cosmopolitanism discourse’ and can be criticised from a postcolonial perspective. The postcolonial critique is firstly aimed at the motives for all the cooperation and funding of the EU, because in the Action Plans and other publications, Tunisia is framed as being in need of EU assistance and in need of development, which is quite paternalistic to suggest. In the general ENP outline it is even suggested that this should happen ‘based on the values of the Union’. The EU is the instigator of the cooperation and political dialogue with Tunisia and seem to have decided for all parties involved that Tunisia needs their help, which is very questionable to say the least. Secondly, the critique can be aimed at the use of these buzz words such as ‘democratization’ and ‘sustainable development’ that are not practically explained in further instance but remain vague, and therefore support the framing of the EU discourse that Tunisia is better off with these vaguely described EU values. It can be considered very colonial in some sense to claim that another country is actually backward in its political institutionalization, using these vague modern political language. There is definitely a postcolonial argument to be made in regard to this ENP policy language and discourse. To say that the ENP is solely a neo-colonial and geopolitical act is perhaps too much, it is also part of an ongoing process of political globalization as nation-states become
more connected through all kinds of institutional reform. Because of the vague use of buzz words in the ENP policies, it is very interesting to see what is at stake for the people involved in the Italy-Tunisia CBC Programme that implement these policies, and how they turn this discourse around, which will be addressed in the coming empirical chapters.

5.2) Mobility and migration negotiations
Apart from the Action Plan of Tunisia and the EU and other publications and press releases around it, there are several other negotiations between the two parties that are part of the political dialogue. Especially those that are related to mobility and migration are relevant as background for this research.

In the Action Plan of 2004 they already have a kind of build up towards the Mobility Partnership between the EU and Tunisia that was established in 2014. In the Mobility Partnership, the facilitation of movement of people between the EU and Tunisia is central and the management of existing migratory flows becomes a common responsibility (European Commission, 2014). Again, it is striking that a lot of attention is paid on the fact that Tunisian should be trained with the European expertise in learning how to deal with migratory movement and the procedures for issuing visas.

Following the revolution in Tunisia in 2011, the start of the so-called Arab Spring, the EU and Tunisia approved the Privileged Partnership in 2012, which had the main objective to enhance particularly stronger economic integration by new Free Trade agreements and the harmonisation of regulations in priority sectors (EEAS, 2016). Going forward with economic integration and giving Tunisia this privileged status really shows how Tunisia is considered by the EU as the gateway to Africa, or at least the Southern Neighbourhood in the Mediterranean. The increasing institutional reform also show how the principle of conditionality by the ENP is functioning in Tunisia, since institutional willingness is followed by more financial support. In addition to this, the EU decided to cancel the annual import quota of olive oil coming from Tunisia after the terrorist attacks in the Bardo Museum in Tunis and on the beaches of Sousse, since this led to such an enormous economic setback in the touristic sector. Tunisian olive oil is a major source of direct and indirect employment and this should provide better access to the European market (European Commission, 2017).

In 2016, the EU continued its negotiations with Tunisia on visa facilitation and readmission. The European Commission wants Tunisia to have a larger role in the process of issuing short-stay visas and wants an agreement to establish procedures for the readmissions of irregular migrants. The EU is really regarding Tunisia as the North African pioneer in all kinds of sea-crossing cooperation, also in the area of migration and mobility.
An European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos, stated that economic, cultural and scientific links will be strengthened by facilitating the issuing of visas, while simultaneously the conclusion of a readmission agreement will help to avert the risk of irregular immigration from Tunisia, and manage its consequences (European Commission, 2016). The fact that the European Commission is having these two negotiations with Tunisia in parallel betrays the underlying motive of the EU to reach out to Tunisia with these kinds of institutional reforms. It seems to recognize that the EU needs the participation of its southern neighbours in dealing with migration issues, and attempts to use them as a buffer zone for the increased migration, as critical literature has pointed out many times as one of the main motives for having the ENP at all.

5.3) The ENI CBC Italy-Tunisia Programme lay-out

The ENI CBC Italy-Tunisia Programme has been mentioned many times this far in this research document. Before going into the empirical data of the people that have been doing the projects that are part of this Programme, it is necessary to fully understand the lay-out of the Programme and what it practically entails.

The Programme for 2007-2013 received a funding of approximately 25,2 million euros, with the overall objective to create “a zone of shared prosperity and good neighbourliness between the EU Member States and their neighbours” (Italy-Tunisia Programme official website³). The cooperation area included five Sicilian provinces and eight provinces in the north of Tunisia (see Figure 6). In previous sections of this chapter it was discussed how the general ENP policies including the Tunisian Action Plans use vague terminology to indicate the general objectives, which are not made concrete in further instance. The programme works with three thematic objectives that are already a little more specific in its meaning but can still be interpreted very broad. These are the development of economic clusters and entrepreneurship (1); supporting education, research, technical development and innovation

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3 www.italietunisie.eu
(2); environmental protection and climate change adaption (3). To achieve these objective, 31 of projects were developed, each with an assigned budget and partners, which can be governmental organizations such as municipalities, private organizations and NGO’s, one of which is assigned ‘chef de file’, managing the project. A distinction was made between standard projects and strategic projects. Standard projects received a funding between 500.000 and 800.000 euro with a minimum of two partners, of which one is based in Italy and one in Tunisia, and were directed at fostering joint initiatives by local actors on issues such as economic development, research and innovation, renewable energy and the promotion of natural and cultural resources. With these projects, peers from both sides of the Mediterranean shared their knowledge within their field of expertise. Strategic projects on the other hand received between 900.000 and 1.800.000 euro with four to eight partners, of which at least two Italian and two Tunisian, and were based on the formation of public-private partnerships, bringing together key actors of change around the challenges that were previously identified by the Joint Monitoring Committee in Palermo. These projects are multi-disciplinair and aimed at creating a network of private and public partners to deal with big issues of development. Of the 31 projects, only four were strategic and the rest were standard projects (Joint Technical Secretariat, 2013).

Of the three main objectives, the first objective of regional development and integration received the most funding, since 14,7 million was spend on this, divided over nineteen projects. These were mainly projects were businesses of a common economic sector bundled their expertise so entrepreneurs could improve their quality of products and had a sort of observatory to support them in their businesses. For the second priority, the promotion of sustainable development, about twenty percent of the budget was available, nearly six million, divided over seven projects. These projects ranged from production of durable energy on the one hand, to the preservation of archaeological sites to have a sustainable cultural and touristic sector on the other. The final objective of cultural and scientific cooperation was addressed by five projects with only 2 million of the budget. With these projects, mainly the starting-up of scientific think-tanks around all kinds of issues was central (Petruso & Sapienza, 2016).

To illustrate what the specific projects looked like in practice, it is useful to have an example of both a standard and a strategic project. An example of a standard project is Courage, which is mainly about helping young vulnerable people in Tunisia with establishing social enterprises, by providing training courses and a general Help Desk (Petruso & Sapienza, 2016, p.70-71). It was
coordinated from the City of Alcamo, in the region of Trapani in Sicily. The main activities of the project entailed the creation of a co-working space of young Tunisian and Sicilian entrepreneurs, to exchange knowledge on how to invest, deal with regulations and everything that you need to start your own business. The main result is a functioning Help Desk where young members can have a platform that helps them with all these things (A. Scandariato, personal communication, November 3, 2016). This project fell under the third general objective of cultural or scientific cooperation, which manifested thus in a co-working think-tank on issues of start-ups for youngsters in vulnerable communities, mainly in Tunisia.

One of the four strategic projects was Culturas, which was coordinated from the department of Culture and Sicilian identity of the Sicilian Region. The project aimed to identify and implement new models for the tourist enhancement of the archaeological heritage, focussing on two segments of the tourist market, underwater tourism and cycling (Sapienza & Petruso, 2016, p.54-55). The project gave the possibility to build some underwater archaeological itineraries in both Tunisia and western Sicily. There are very beautiful places for scuba-diving on the Mediterranean shores, and the project built a platform for enriching the touristic offers of these places to have an effective underwater tourism. Mainly in Tunisia, there was a lack of the best tactics to produce the most effective touristic sector out of the beautiful choral and underwater life that is there (S. Tusa, personal communication, November 2, 2016). This project fell under the second objective of sustainable development and has to some extent built a sustainable economic sector in underwater tourism, or at least created the right platform with all the expertise to use the full potential of this region.

The general administration of the entire CBC Programme is located in Palermo, Sicily, which strikingly was not one of the targeted regions of Sicily. What is more striking is that most of the ‘chefs de file’, the coordinators that are in control of the money, are Italian governments or organizations, and very few
are Tunisian. The 31 projects were done by a total of 163 partner organizations, of which 103 Italian and 60 Tunisian. Because these partners are both public parties – municipalities and regional offices – and private parties – universities, research institutes, local enterprises – the impact of this cooperation in the programme area is enormous. The budget of around 25 million is very little as an investment into the economy of a region of this size, but in this case it is a structural investment in a cooperation and the creation of a social and institutional fabric.
6) Sicily and Tunisia in the Mediterranean (Analysis part 1)

Now that all the proper background is provided, the focus can go to the empirical data that was collected during the fieldwork and the interpretation of it. This chapter and the next cover the results of the interviews and the discourse analysis of these results. In order to keep this well-structured, the cross-border discourse is first analysed in terms of cultural interconnectedness between the two sides of the Mediterranean sea, discussing the potential of the concept of the Mediterranean borderland, and finally, the perception of Europe in this (geo-)political arena and the European status of the parties involved in the Italy-Tunisia Programme. The next chapter goes into other factors that can influence the functioning and outcomes of the cross-border cooperation and the discourse of the respondents on those issues is constructed. The border imaginaries of this cross-border cooperation programme are outlined and what is the Mediterranean category of these imaginaries, and how do other factors – primarily migration issues and mobility – fit within these imaginaries. Within these analysis, it becomes clear what is at stake for the people working with the CBC programme and how they turn around the ENP discourse in their border imaginary.

6.1) Cultural interconnectedness

The ENP has an approach of bilateral cross-border cooperation programmes by countries that are geographically neighbours, of which the Italy-Tunisia programme has been pioneering as a sea-crossing programme. It is questionable however whether one could call these neighbours, since they are not physically attached, we don't consider Italy and Greece neighbouring countries just because they share the Ionian sea. This raises the question what the underlying geographical imaginations of the ENP are. Apart from the principle of conditionality that favours the neighbours that are open for European change, it could be the fact that Tunisia is (or was) a migration hotspot and border management there is more required. In the ENP policies discussed in Chapter 5, it is clear that Tunisia is framed as a closer neighbour than others through things such as the Privileged Partnership.

However, the interviews made clear that, in the minds of the Sicilians and people in the area of the city of Tunis, Italy (or at least Sicily) and Tunisia are considered neighbours. Every respondent recognizes the common history between these areas, and how that resulted in common cultural utterances, and in some cases even in a shared mentality that is not shared with other countries around the Mediterranean sea. Sergio Campanella, project coordinator of Servagri, addresses this the following, talking about ‘here’ (Sicily) and ‘there’ (Tunisia):
"We have a lot of history we share, here we also had three centuries of Arab domination. We have also something in our mentality that is inherited by them. And there, apart from the same kinds of products and same kinds of landscape, we have a history in common between us which makes our people nearer, closer than with other people in the Mediterranean." (S. Campanella, personal communication, November 9, 2016)

The fact that the island of Sicily had been under Arab domination is considered of great significance for the cultural connectedness of today, even though Tunisians do not speak of ‘domination’ as the Sicilians do when referring to this history. This is also something that separates Sicily from the rest of Italy, or at least creates a connection with Tunisia that the rest of Italy does not have. The Arab heritage is very much present in the daily lives of Sicilians and they are proud of it. “You can really see it in everything. Food, the people, how they look, even in Italian language there are things from Arabs” (M. Fargione, personal communication, November 10, 2016). The idea of Sicilians being pre-eminently a mixture of cultures that have been there in the past, from the Greeks and Romans to the Normans and Arabs, is very strong and is considered an important factor for them being closer to the Tunisians in personal contact. The interview with Sergio Campanella was held on Piazza del Duomo in Syracuse, in front of the Dome of Syracuse. The picture of Figure 10 was taken afterwards. Special about this building is that it has always maintained its function as a religious building, in spite that there have been several dominations with different religions. The Greek, Arab and Christian dominations each shows its architectural influences (S. Campanella, November 9, 2016).

Another aspect of this is the similar environment and landscape. Because they are used to exploit the same sea resources, have similar agricultural product and the landscape is very much alike, the culture and way of living that is built around it is similar as well. The
fishing communities of both sides already have a long tradition of collaboration with their fishing activities, and already since 1999 certain Local Action Groups [LAG] have worked together in cross-border projects (S. Campanella, personal communication, November 9, 2016). Because of the programme, the respondents appear very aware of their cultural connection on different aspects and therefore regard the limitation of the programme area and the intentions of the programme as legit. Crossing this particular border does not seem so difficult from cultural and human point of view at least. The ‘soft border’ between the two sides of the programme area is very well-accessible because of their common cultural features, and therefore they are closer, not in geometrical distance per se, but from a human point of view.

Strikingly, for many of those involved in the cross-border projects, this cultural connectedness was something they discovered during the projects, which they were unfamiliar with on forehand. It came as a positive surprise, which made the cooperation experience for many very enriching from a personal point of view. The contact was made via these projects, and they will continue to cooperate and keep in contact even though the projects are finished. On top of their pre-existing cultural fabric and shared historical heritage, there is now also social fabric.

“We share a lot, and we built our common work together, we were very friendly to each other. To show this, they continued to call after that and we want to do a new project. They invited me last July to go there and discuss this. Because we were friends, if not, they would not have called me. There was a human aspect to this cooperation.” (M.L. Germanà, personal communication, November 2, 2016)

The easy contact between the both sides also enabled them to operate on an equal basis, despite of the hierarchal and paternalistic tendencies that ENP policies are criticised on. Many of the projects were primarily about exchanging the know-how in specific fields to enhance the quality of production on both sides of the Mediterranean. Although, it has to be recognised that most of the knowledge that was transferred came from the Italian side, the general discourse definitely entails that the social relation during any project activity was “on equal say”. “We always worked side by side, and without any hierarchy.” (S. Tusa, personal communication, November 2, 2016). And like mentioned before, many expressed how these collaborations could even evolve into friendships and continuing relations. Hence, the cultural connections that are embedded in the shared historical background or heritage and the geographical setting proved to be the right foundations for the involved parties to have a
very open attitude towards each other and equal treatment, which in various cases resulted even in friendly relationships and long-term collaboration. This way, the cultural connectedness seems to legitimize this particular cross-border movement, even though it is crossing the Mediterranean sea and the Europe-Africa border. It shows how this positive connection is building towards a border imaginary that is moving away from the Mediterranean sea as the border between Europe and Africa, towards a shared borderland. This cross-border cooperation can also be consider a certain type of ‘borderwork’, the term coined by Rumford, because it effects how the border between Sicily and Tunisia performs and makes it more vague and fluid.

6.2) What is ‘Mediterranean’ and what is its borderland?
Discussing the cultural connections between Italy and Tunisia, it is clear that especially Sicily has more in common with the southern Mediterranean neighbour than the rest of Italy and is also more assigned to being ‘Mediterranean’ than other parts of Italy. Among the respondents, there is a clear Mediterraneanist discourse that considers the Mediterranean not simply as a topographical indication for a particular sea or area around it, but also an indication for a particular way of living and thinking. Even for the locals it is very difficult to grasp this term, but it is evident that it is part of their identity. As Architecture Professor Germanà from Palermo University explains: “I feel Mediterranean, different from other people. Not better, but different. It is our strength to be different.” (M.L. Germanà, personal communication, November 2, 2016). People feel very strong that ‘Mediterranean’ is an identity claim, without feeling exalted above other people.

From the different interpretations of this category, two main connotations can be distinguished. The first is about the traditional way of living that is based on the Mediterranean sea resources. Professor Bouattour from the Pasteur Institute in Tunis: “We share this sea, and all sea resources, and we have the same fish, livestock, and when you consider we have some part of the Earth in common, you have the same direction of thinking also, I believe” (A. Bouattour, personal communication, November 22, 2016). The resources and economic possibilities that the Mediterranean sea offers is very important for the way of living in the coastal areas, and is therefore partially determining for their way of living and even of thinking and their mentality. Part of this live based on sea resources is also the soft climate, which allows people to interact outside on squares.

“The Mediterranean life is in our identity. We have a lot of history that you can see in monuments, way of preparing food, way of thinking, behaviour and the way of life.
All over the Mediterranean, life is developed outside, not inside. So we have squares where people meet, and this is all part of making life that is common. If I go in Lebanon, it is the same, exactly the same.” (S. Campanella, personal communication, November 9, 2016)

“There are similarities. Not in food because it is different, but there are similarities on how people think. We think the same, we joke the same way. The behaviour is the same, not the culture. We (Tunisia) are a Muslim country, Italy is Christian. This is a big difference. But we share some behaviour. The family, the mother, the warmth, the hospitality.” (A. Bouattour, personal communication, November 22, 2016).

The second connotation of being or feeling ‘Mediterranean’ is strongly related to the idea of Sicily having a unique role in the Mediterranean basin. This the idea that the Mediterranean is a crossroad between different civilisations, a point of passage. Because it has always been crossroad, with Sicily as the one of the principal points of passage due to its geographical location, people there are naturally more open to those that are not from their territory. According to Campanella: “We are used to have foreigners to speak with, it is in our DNA” (personal communication, November 9, 2016). This points to a part of the Mediterranean identity that is about an open attitude towards foreigners and migrants, because the Mediterranean man is historically used to be at a point where all kinds of people pass and cultures meet. French historian Fernand Braudel called the Mediterranean area ‘a liquid land’. “It was like a big bridge, even without any direction, but it connected people. The Mediterranean has always connected people. Even now but in a different way” (M. L. Germanà, personal communication, November 2, 2016). When discussing the concept ‘Mediterranean’, the discourse of the Mediterranean sea being a crossroad or a bridge between distant civilisations is very strong. The main idea is that it always has and always will connect distant people, not matter the circumstances. In the last sentence from the quote from Professor Germanà she refers to the migrant crisis that is nowadays a general frame of the Mediterranean area. In regard to the migrant crisis, the Mediterranean still serves as a crossroad of different people, only it has a clear European border that has been under fortification. Interesting difference between that regard and the historical ‘Mediterranean as a crossroad’ discourse is that with the latter, like Germanà pointed out, it is ‘a bridge without direction’, while in the discourse concerning migrant debates there is a very clear direction from Africa towards Europe.
In addition to these Mediterranean connotations, Sicily is considered the area that give the most expressions to this Mediterranean crossroad. Historically and geographically it is seen as the centre of the Mediterranean, where cultural mixture is fully apparent in everyday live, but also in the faces of the people. Margherita Fargione from the city of Modica describes Sicilians as “the fruit of the mix of cultures”. “There is no pure Sicilian, we are inherently a mix” (M.Fargione, personal communication, November 10, 2016). In people, in buildings and structures you can see the different cultures intertwining. Throughout history, people from all over the Mediterranean, from the Spanish, the French, the Arabs, are in a way hybridized in Sicily. “It is a real Mediterranean melting pot, so we can say easily that we are the middle of the Mediterranean” (R. Sapienza, personal communication, November 18, 2016). Leontidou (2009) already described hybridity as a major characteristic of the Mediterranean city, a view that is shared by the participants of this CBC programme.

The last comment from Rosario Sapienza gives away that this discourse of Sicily being in the centre is also used to achieve some special status, but he also explains how this discourse can have useful strategic purposes. Because of the cultural connections that Sicily has more easily with other Mediterranean neighbours, it was the perfect place to have a decentralised cooperation that is much more effective than a traditional top-down structure. Through the social and cultural dimensions of this concept ‘Mediterranean’, it can have a political dimensions as well, mainly in terms of geopolitical strategy. The Mediterranean category can be used to connect with southern neighbours, and the EU has done so by launching programmes in the Mediterranean basin.

When we speak of the Mediterranean borderland, it is not only a place where cultural frontiers overlap and flow into each other, it is more than that. The Mediterranean borderland is historically and culturally moving in various directions and has its own identity, instead of being an overlap of two or more cultures.

“What excites me is that we are on the edge of a gap. Europe stops here and Africa starts here. We are not in the middle of Europe, we are not in the middle of Africa, we are in the middle of something that is very distant, and we should move.” (R. Sapienza, personal communication, November 18, 2016).

The Mediterranean borderland imaginary is here constructed by the idea that Sicily – and perhaps even North Tunisia as well – is not only a region on the outskirts of Europe, but is in the middle of something on its own. Very interestingly, Sapienza even regards it as something the can and should move, producing the Mediterranean borderland as something
that is not fixed in space, in contrast of the borders of Europe and Africa that are performing as boundaries. By saying this he connects with the thinking of Chambers (2004), that ‘Mediterranean’ is something that evolves around the movements of people and cultures, and is a site of continual transit. Sapienza expresses how this imaginative aspect is not only about the sea, but about land in relation to the sea.

6.3) Where is ‘Europe’?

While engaging further into the Mediterranean borderland, it is important not to forget that the Italy-Tunisia Programme is part of European policy. Therefore, the discourse about the role and position of Europe in this cross-border programme, and the role of Europe in relation to this borderland has to be addressed. When discussing institutional Europe, the terms ‘European Union’ or ‘EU’ and ‘Europe’ are used almost interchangeable, and it is one political entity or actor. But when discussing ‘Europe’ in terms of what is ‘European’, it is not an acting being, but more an idea about how civilisation can be. In terms of this Mediterranean programme, ‘European’ stands for high standard and high quality, the standards that should be achieved.

Institutional Europe in the embodiment of the EU is of course in control of the programme and its projects. It appeared that during the projects, there was little direct influence from the EU. The 2007-2013 had started with a long selection process of the right projects, where a panel from the EU is involved, but as soon as the projects were approved and funding was provided, there was a lot of freedom. They had to control all the papers and look into the budgets, but most of the project coordinators did not feel the constant pressure of the European Commission, even though there is a clear chain of command in the programme. However, the other side of the coin of this aspect is that the main feeling about the EU is that its officers that have to make important decisions are not well-informed about the situation on the ground, and only remain in their ‘institutional and bureaucratic ghetto’ in Brussels (S. Tusa, personal communication, November 2, 2016). Accordingly, this has resulted in the programme’s objective and the project’s criteria being very vague and not concrete enough for the local executors, which could mean a lot of freedom but also makes it quite difficult to serve the donor-driven structure as well as possible (A. Scandariato, personal communication, November 3, 2016). It has to be noted that in both Italy and Tunisia, there were many cases of a lack of institutional support from ministries, regional offices, municipalities and so on. Taking in account that most of these political bodies were unfamiliar with cross-border cooperation, in both Sicily and Tunisia there is a lot of bureaucracy and public bodies are quite rigid. Emilia Arrabito from the private organisation
Svimed: “You have to reach the results together, and this is very difficult to understand when you put realities together that have always worked on their own and don’t have the culture of working together” (E. Arrabito, personal communication, November 15, 2016). Celata, Coletti & Stocchiero (2016) explain that the CBC programme is in need of further decentralisation in order to be more effective and also cost-efficient, since a lot of money is lost to bureaucratic rigidness. Their explanation is the active involvement of many Ministries and central institutions that gave the CBC programme more attention in terms of diplomatic relations, but led to less involvement of local government, while the Programme’s design is a decentralized cooperation with a lot of freedom from local parties.

Addressing the meaning of ‘European’ in terms of identity and the European civilisation, it is again a versatile concept and it is not so clear where this Europe starts and ends. However, within the general perception of the concept ‘European’ there is the consensus idea that, although Sicily is officially within the territory of the EU, it is not as European as other countries to the north. The southern states of the EU, and Sicily as a region in particular, are very much on the periphery of Europe. Rosario Sapienza gives his reading of this discourse as the following: “We are not the colonizers, we are colonized” (R. Sapienza, personal communication, November 18, 2016). In this instance, the term ‘European’ is related to ‘colonizer’. There is a certain imperialistic or paternalistic implication to the term. Strikingly, with many of the projects that were mainly about the exchange of know-how in certain fields, it was the Sicilians teaching the Tunisians how it is done the European way, or by European standards, while recognizing that Sicilian standards are different from the ‘real’ European standards. Professor Sadok from the INSTM in Tunis even explained: “Sicily is compared to Europe not European, it is considered not as developed” (S. Sadok, personal communication, November 22, 2016). Sicilians talking about this would say the same: “We are not European in the real sense. We are much more different from you [the Netherlands] than from Tunisia, that’s for sure” (R. Sapienza, personal communication, November 18, 2016). On the other hand, Sicily is undeniably part of European territory, with all its consequences, as explained by this statement from Professor Germanà: “We live in European commonness, not only via the euro, but also we live in a common frame of laws, rules, and we share a vision, a European vision” (M.L. Germanà, personal communication, November 2, 2016). So there is an ambiguous situation regarding the European status of Sicily. It is European land including its laws and all its institutions, and is therefore part of a European commonness and corresponding vision about civilisation, but it does not fully meet the standards of this vision and is therefore not European in the real sense. Ironically, considering Sicily as a periphery of Italy and Europe, and ‘not-as-European’ compared to
other European states, Sicily is in some way (re-)produced as Europe because of the CBC programme (Giglioli, 2016), since the Sicilian partners are the European partners in this equation and represent the ‘European way’. Their feeling of being backward in Europe and
Italy should, from this perspective, be reduced. During the fieldwork travels in Sicily, there was a visual production of Sicily as Europe noticeable, as many official buildings in Sicilian cities proudly wave a European flag, usually next to a Sicilian and/or Italian flag. Figures 11 to 14 represent official buildings of four major cities in Sicily that were visited, showing the European flag to support the image of being European, even though they recognized not being fully European in the broadest sense.

In the general ENP discourse, there is no space for this peripheral status of Sicily on the outskirts of Europe, since it requires to regard Europe and the EU as a functioning whole, that is supposed to ‘assist’ their neighbour Tunisia to develop based on EU values. The people working with the Italy-Tunisia CBC Programme on ground level have turned this discourse around by their Mediterranean discourse and see all the potential in cooperation in this region and consider the ENI funding as a great opportunity to improve things in their own region. This is best illustrated by the Doremihe project that is mainly about doing research about archaeological heritage on both sides by a mixed team of students from Sicily and Tunisia, which mainly resulted in scientific publications combined in a book. As the coordinator Yassine Khaled stated:

"With this project, I ensured that the practical ways to do this [conservation of heritage] was visible. I don't need to write a book, it is only a step. But I need to find something for the local population, to create activities that bring profit for the local site". (Yassine Khaled, personal communication, November 21, 2016).

On the ground level they don’t need the objectives of better regulations, to improve democratization or integrated development, what is mainly at stake is profit for their local area, and the positive cooperation activities are considered effective tools for substantial improvement in these areas. Apart from cooperation, there can also be competition between the two sides, just because they have similar economic sectors. On some projects on aquaculture it was expressed how the projects had an imbalance of profit for the separate parties. “The market is very competitive, so we try to develop our aquaculture as well. This can be a big problem, because they have very low prices” (A. Santulli, personal communication, November 29, 2016). With some sectors, the offering of assistance means your competitors become more competitive. So in their discourse they do have an very open mind, a Mediterranean mind-set, but also a very local orientation in terms of benefits of the projects, which is something the ENP policy discourse does not answer for.
7) Issues of migration and mobility (Analysis part 2)

In the previous chapter, the Mediterranean borderland is discussed and how it can be interpreted in regard to the Italy-Tunisia programme. Another part of the research is about (geo-)political factors that are part of the general frame of the Mediterranean sea of today and how these factors have influenced the functioning and outcomes of the Italy-Tunisia Programme. As explained earlier, issues of migration, whether there is a refugee or migrant crisis going on, are considered nowadays as part of the general frame of the Mediterranean area, and affects the Mediterranean image. This image converges with the image of the cross-border cooperation programme, and therefore the first section addresses these issues in particular. Furthermore, issues of mobility are discussed, since the objectives of the programme require those involved to cross the borders of the EU and be mobile in the Mediterranean borderland, which can be very challenging in a geopolitical setting where increased fortification of European borders is the other side of the coin. Finally, the focus turns to what remains in the minds of those doing the cross-border projects on ground level in regard to the intentions of the programme in combination with all the other issues that are connected to this geopolitical setting.

7.1) Migration and the Neighbourhood Programme

When travelling through Sicily, it really is noticeable that it is indeed an area where migration issues and the topic of refugees predominate. In big cities like Palermo, many migrants from different background fill up the streets to sell small items in order to make a living, and often there is a specific part of town where migrant communities are concentrated. Furthermore, in the most southern parts of Sicily, many cities have refugee camps nearby, to offer emergency care to those refugees that have illegally arrived by boats without the proper documents. Noticing all this during the fieldwork, I am convinced that this migration topic is indeed part of the general frame of the Mediterranean, and Sicily serves as a point of passage within this. In regard to the Italy-Tunisia CBC Programme however, the general sense is that there is no direct influence of issues regarding migration and refugees on the functioning of the cross-border projects between Italian and Tunisian partners. The main reason for this is that big migration of refugees is not coming from Tunisia anymore since the country has become more stable, so there are no issues of this kind between the eligible programme areas of the Italy-Tunisia programme. Professor Tusa from the regional office of Sicily elaborates: “There was a migration from Tunisia but it was about five or six years ago and now it has finished. There are only few people coming from Tunisia, it is a normal migration, like Italians that go to England” (S.Tusa, personal communication, November 2,
The main bulk of refugees arriving at the beaches of Sicily have gone by the Libyan route, which is why so many are stranded in Lampedusa, which is almost directly on this route from Libya. Additionally, people are very used to the ‘normal’ migration of Tunisians coming to Italy legally.

“For us this is a fact, nothing new. We have so many Tunisian immigrants since 1970 or maybe earlier. This is for us a fact and nothing new, so we don’t have talk with Tunisia about this. The new immigrants are coming from Libya, from new areas, from new territories.” (M. Fargione, personal communication, November 10, 2016)

It was assumed that the CBC Programme would suffer in its functioning because of the situation with migration. However, in their discourse, the people directly involved with the CBC Programme do not seem think in terms of ‘crisis’, but have a long-term perspective on migration instead. Just like with the framing within ENP policies of Tunisia being in need of EU assistance, there has been a framing of the migrations in the Mediterranean as being in a state of ‘crisis’. Those involved with the Programme have turned that idea around in the sense that migration is natural – “I believe man is migrant” (S. Campanella, personal communication, November 9, 2016) – and that the Mediterranean area has always been a migration hotspot and they are used to it.

It should be noted that in the outset of the programme it was strictly not intended to deny migration as a problem, even though it could be perceived as such since there are no projects on migration from this programme. That being said, the awareness about these migration issues of the people involved in the programme is very large, but they are too big for this bilateral programme to get involved with. And as Rosario Sapienza, the technical coordinator of the Programme, explains, from a formal point of view, the ENP programme is not entitled to use its funds for the emergency of migrants and refugees, since this is the authority of the Italian Ministry of Externalities, which is not involved with the programme (R. Sapienza, personal communication, November 18, 2016). Discussing these issues in regard to the Programme necessitates to make a clear division between relief and emergency on the short term and development and integration on the longer term, when discussing these issues of migration and the refugee crisis. For the latter, the respondents are very convinced of the use and potential of the cross-border projects they have executed.

“A lot of things in our programme, if you read with the lenses of migration, can have plenty of opportunity there. But each of these opportunities should be performed in
terms of development, in terms of integration, and not in terms of relief, or crisis, or emergency, because there we don’t have money, nor authority, we don’t even have the tools”. (R. Sapienza, personal communication, November 18, 2016)

The idea of dealing with migration through development of the countries of origin is very strong among the participants of the programme. This is something for the long term and which takes a lot of effort but their belief in the value of these projects and the opportunities for young people in Tunisia it can bring about is strong. For many this is also a big motivation to get involved: “We sat down and we said that we really wanted to do the project because we wanted to give some future to young people, and especially woman, and taking care of minorities” (S. Carpino, personal communication, November 11, 2016). Within this development discourse, there is a major role of Tunisia to achieve this, since it is the main example of an African and Arabic country that is improving at high pace, and also as one of the final destinations that migrants from all over Africa pass through when seeking their way to a better life, as Professor Khaled from Tunis University is very aware of:

“I think this programme is oriented to Tunisia, but Africa is another thing. Because for African countries, Tunisia, Libya and Algeria are the bridge to go to Europe. So the European countries give money to Tunisia, to Libya, Morocco and Algeria, to show that they are with us and to open windows to the young people and push them not to think about migration”. (Y. Khaled, personal communication, November 21, 2016).

In regard to the Mediterranean borderland imaginary, the long-term migrations in terms of development fits within the general objectives of the programme, where the Mediterranean could serve as an example and has its potential and capability to cultural connect with different civilisations. However, in terms of relief and emergency, which can only refer to the refugee crisis, it does not fit well within the borderland imaginary. It seems that migrations and people from different cultures coming together is very much embedded in the Mediterranean way of living, that speaking in terms of the intake of migrants and the spectacle of bare life related to it does not fit well within their view of migrations.

7.2) Mobility issues
Apart from this Mediterranean being a migration hotspot, for all those people working with the cross-border programme the mobility in this setting is very important as well for the functioning of the programme, since there should be some back-and-forth travelling between
the two sides of the Mediterranean. For every project there were meetings, seminars, workshops, or other cooperation activities, both in Tunisia and in Sicily. Therefore, the cooperating parties have to be mobile in this borderland – for good cross-border cooperation, one has to cross borders. For many projects this was a big problem, because it is very difficult to cross a European border for the Tunisians, because of the visa requirements. Strikingly, not only the partners from Tunisia but also the Sicilians partners working with them were very aware of and frustrated by this visa policy in regard to the cooperation activities. “This was a problem. Not for the Italians going to Tunisia, but for the other side. Anytime they would go here we had to assure they had a letter for the consulate” (G. Raso, personal communication, November 17, 2016). A non-European needs a visa of course to enter the Schengen area and stay there for a limited time. This is a common EU policy. However, the procedures to receive a visa is not the same in every EU-member state, and the duration can vary also. With many of the Italy-Tunisia CBC projects, there are stories that show how difficult this could be for the Italian border.

“Every time we had to write them an admission letter in advance and let them know they were only coming for a few days and then would go back. They needed to have the hotel reservations, the flight ticket back already booked, so it was really difficult. I wanted to bring here a young farmer and I couldn’t, because they worried he would stay here, even if I guaranteed and met all requirements”. (S. Carpino, personal communication, November 11, 2016)

The examples prove that even though the visits are meetings for a cooperation programme, it requires a lot of writing to consulates and ministries and information about the stay a person crossing this border, facing many frontiers and border police.

Apart from that, there are other difficulties in regard to crossing this border that can be considered problems of mobility. The organisation of transport between Sicily and Tunisia is very low. For example, there is only a flight between Palermo and Tunis once or twice a week, and not from Catania, which is another important metropolis of Sicily, 300 kilometres from Palermo. In that sense there is little connection between Sicily and Tunisia. This was also experienced with sending samples and products across. “For the relationship between the institutional procedures, how to send products without facing frontiers, there is a lot of work to do” (S. Campanella, personal communication, November 9, 2016).

The big difference between these mobility issues of transportation and sending products and the visa requirements, is that the weak economic infrastructure between Sicily
and the north of Tunisia is a shared difficulty for both sides. The visa requirements however only exist for the Tunisians entering Italy, since they enter Europe by doing so. For Italians, and other Europeans, entering Tunisia, there are not visa restrictions. This created an unequal mobility, and could therefore affect the equal standing between them that was the basis of cooperation.

“We can go wherever and they cannot. I could decide now to buy the ticket and just go. I don’t have to apply to anything and they do, even if it was the head the department. It was really frustrating for them. And I feel like they had this feeling of being a different people.” (S. Carpino, personal communication, November 11, 2016)

The feeling of having a lower status and being treated differently while the other is privileged affects the cooperation from an institutional level, even though the cultural background of this specific cross-border cooperation had such a strong foundation. The participants considered each other equals, but they experienced inequality in their mobility, in their capability to cross borders, while doing a cross-border programme together.

### 7.3) Ambiguity in EU relation

Although the general discourse about the success of the Italy-Tunisia programme is mainly about the positive vibe between the partners and the positive intersection of their different cultures, there are some ambiguous feelings in regard to the relation between the EU and this cross-border area of cooperation. This ambiguity is mainly caused by the inequality of mobility and their treatment at the borders of Europe. The performance of the Italian border caused many frustrations with partners from both sides. The participating Tunisians experienced a strong feeling of minority because of this, and in some cases even feel violated. The strong equal basis on which the good cooperation culture was based and resulting friendly relationships are undermined because of this. For them the EU really has two faces, because it is the same institutional framework that has them invited for cooperation and that faces them with many frontiers at the border. Professor Bouattour from the Pasteur Institute expresses this feeling the following:

“This project is financed by the European Community and the Italian government. They give you money and tell you to work together on a common project and share knowledge and exchange visits. And when you ask for Visa at the embassy, it suddenly is not their problem. They treat you in the same way as a terrorist. Even
though you come there with their invitation.” (A. Bouattour, personal communication, November 22, 2016)

Apart from that, there are some postcolonial tendencies to this programme as well. Many projects are about doing this the ‘European way’ or at least according to European quality standards. The participating Tunisians show that they are very sensitive to these kind of paternalistic tendencies, which contribute to their feeling of a minority.

“They quickly feel that someone else is better than them, because they quickly feel that somebody is a colonist. They feel this very strong. That somebody goes there like a colonist. This is not a good step to build a cooperation.” (M.L. Germanà, personal communication, November 2, 2016)

This feeling of a minority has the reverse effect that many of the projects were intending, especially in regard to migration. As most coordinators of projects explained, part of the objective of the participants was to enhance productivity in poorer regions where many young people migrate from, and to show that they can have opportunities in their own country. To achieve this, they should not feel like a minority, but feel empowered instead. Their feelings prove that the European cosmopolitanism is also present in the practical implications of the programme, not only on policy level. The buzz words in the policy documents such as ‘sustainable and integrated development’ has failed to soften this and produce feasible solutions for institutional hindrances.
8) Conclusion

The introduction opened with describing two vastly different images of the Mediterranean sea, as the sea of death with the bare spectacle of life on the one hand, and as the area with rich historical heritage and culture where different civilizations have encountered and left their marks. In the theoretical chapter, these images are conceived in regard to border studies, which raised the discussion about border imaginaries and how these images fit in the Mediterranean borderland. In the empirical chapters, the border imaginaries of those involved in the Italy-Tunisia CBC Programme were investigating by analysing their discourse on the Mediterranean borderland and the impact of issues of mobility and migration and other geopolitical forces. By looking at the perceived impact of these factors, they can be placed within their Mediterranean borderland imaginary. Throughout this thesis, the appearance of two different images, imaginaries or discourses that somehow do not match or contradict each other has been a leitmotiv, whether these are 'the sea of death' versus 'the rich cultural heritage', or the Mediterranean sea as a bridge or as a strong border, or the local experience versus the top-down European policies.

During the Italy-Tunisia Programme, this mismatch of border imaginaries are mainly visible in the cultural connectedness between Italian and Tunisian partners on the one hand that constitutes a strong belief in a certain Mediterranean mentality or way of living, and the 'borderwork' of Italian border police and mobility restrictions that were experienced during the cross-border activity that is constituted by the lack of being European by the Tunisian participants. In both situations there is borderwork working towards opposite outcomes. The cultural connectedness and additional equality, including the positive vibe during the cross-border activities, can be regarded as borderwork that is making borders soft, more fluid and contributes to the idea of a Mediterranean borderland. The experience of Tunisian participants at the Italian border, however, works towards the reproduction of the hard border between non-EU and EU states and makes this Mediterranean borderland imaginary falter and perhaps appear farfetched.

Analysing this two-way borderwork that have shaped different border imaginaries in terms of the European cosmopolitanism that is embedded in ENP policies, the positive cultural connection and feelings of the cross-border activities nearly created a vibe that can be considered pure cosmopolitan, since it is using cultural similarities and embracing cultural differences. The Mediterranean borderland imaginary is building towards a mind-set that is beyond the nation-state like the classical cosmopolitan ideas. The contents of the projects fit with the prerequisites of cosmopolitanism as well, since they answer to global market flows and keep economic regions from being isolated and work against narrowmindedness.
other borderwork concerning the actual border police and visa-restrictions evidently stress the ‘European’ dimensions of this cosmopolitanism we find in this cross-border Programme. Given that cosmopolitanism does not implicate a borderless world, this particular borderwork is producing a situation where there are privileges for the Europeans and restrictions for the ‘other’. The outset of this ENP programme did not have the postcolonial sensibility towards these issues, restricting the positive cosmopolitan vibe that was creating by positive cultural experiences and made possible by the Mediterranean borderland.

The main research objective is to work out what the Mediterranean border imaginary means by investigating the discourse of the partners working on this Mediterranean cross-border cooperation of the Italy-Tunisia Programme, and then reveal the mismatch between the discourse on ENP top-down policy level and the local implementation level. What is clear is that the discourse of the programme’s participants about being Mediterranean and the full meaning of this term – the discourse that is supporting the Mediterranean border imaginary – had two major connotations. One is the belief in a common mentality and behaviour (genre de vie) that belongs to the life that is built around the exploitation of sea resources from the Mediterranean sea. The other is the feeling of being at a crossroad between different civilisations and being a point of passage, which has hybridized the Mediterranean man and provides them with a natural open attitude to other cultures, since there is a cultural mixture inherited in their mentality. Additionally there is the general belief of the central role of Sicily in the Mediterranean sea as being the place where these elements have manifested the most. Elaborating on the central role of Sicily, there is even the sense that it in some way moves between the different sides that are separated by the Mediterranean sea, and therefore has its responsibility to act as an bridge.

Within the Mediterranean border imaginary, it has also been worked out where issues of migration and mobility fit, since the ENP policies do not address this while these issues have a central role in contemporary debates regarding the Mediterranean or Europe, especially migration in terms of the refugee crisis. From the outset of this research, it was expected that the CBC experience at the local implementation level would show great impact from the refugee crisis, since it is almost part of the everyday life in this particular region. However, it turns out that there is no direct impact of the refugee crisis on the functioning of the projects that are the basis of all cross-border activity. This is because the local discourse in regard to migration issues is strong towards a clear distinction between short-term emergency and long-term development, where the development of regions where migrants originate from or pass through, is considered the main approach to stop the high influx of migrants, because young people from these regions could then see better opportunities for a
future in their own regions instead of in Europe. In regard to emergency and relief of the refugee crisis, they feel less connected to migration issues, since the Italy-Tunisia programme is not designed to cope with this and they do not have the tools for this. The framing of ‘crisis’ is not present in the discourse of the CBC workers, due to a naturally long-term perspective of migration. Migration is so much embedded in the Mediterranean mentality that the conditions of the refugee crisis of today is not that much different or worse than what they are familiar with in this area. In regard to the mobility issues we can again point towards the borderwork at the Italian border that is undermining the equal basis of cross-border activity between the partners from different sides of the Mediterranean sea. The Mediterranean border imaginary has no other way of addressing this than by frustration.

The way these issues of migration and mobility fit within the Mediterranean borderland makes clear that the postcolonial lens is indeed a relevant approach for the analysis of this cross-border cooperation programme. The ENP lacks a postcolonial sensibility in the sense that European partners are privileged over non-Europeans in their mobility. Although no structural relations of superiority of one side over the other was experienced during the Italy-Tunisia CBC Programme, in regard to long-term migration from Africa and the Middle-East towards Europe, it does reveal tendencies where Europe is regarded superior, since cooperation programmes like these – where EU-member states and their non-EU neighbours simultaneously develop their border regions in the European way – are considered a key instrument in reducing these migration flows and their additional issues. Additionally, speaking in terms of ‘needing development’ is very colonial or at least modern thinking, supporting the idea that the Mediterranean is the incubator of European modernity. But also the with short-term refugee crisis – aforementioned in terms of emergency and relief – these tendencies appear, because then Europe is regarded as the central power that needs to deal with this, and the border regions such as Sicily and North Tunisia as the weak European periphery.

The migration and mobility issues did not reveal a major mismatch between the EU-discourse in broader ENP policies and the Mediterranean discourse of those involved in the Italy-Tunisia CBC Programme, apart from inefficiency in terms of borderwork that the ENP does not answer for and the projects had to struggle with. The major value of the Italy-Tunisia CBC Programme is that it enables us to combine the two conflicting images of the Mediterranean sea which were at starting point of this research and combines the ideas of ‘Wider Europe’ and ‘Fortress Europe’ and shows how they can co-exist in practice. Similarly, the Mediterranean borderland destabilises the border in Border Studies by not being just a boundary between Europe and Africa or just an area of cultural mixture with overlapping
frontier zones, but being a borderland on its own, with a hybridized identity where spaces of crossroads and boundaries are constantly in movement. In this case in particular, Sicily is serves as the rubber band between Africa and Europe that is constantly in movement and has the potential to pull these continents together by its Mediterranean identity when political tensions between Europe and ‘the others’ are driving them apart. Unlike most borders, the Mediterranean borderland does not need to be fixed in space, but it can serve as an imaginary that connect people from all sides. Not even migration issues can disrupt that imaginary.
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Appendix

Appendix 1) Personal experience of Sicilian-Tunisian culture

The month of travelling through this Mediterranean area was a totally new experience for me. It was the first time travelling alone, the first time using something like Airbnb, where you live together with a host in their house, instead of staying in a hotel or something, the first time in Sicily and even the first time outside of Europe into another continent (not very far, but still). The first things you notice of the different culture are the physical things. My appearance is very different from the local Sicilian or Tunisian appearance, even though these have a big variety, which naturally made me feel more like ‘the stranger’. But also the buildings and the streets are very different. Houses in Sicily are built directly attached to the streets, without leaving any space between kerb and door, making every street into a funnel of rock and balconies, often with multiple floors. The size and facades of some large buildings such as municipalities, domes and theatres are truly astonishing. The Greek and Roman influences in building style is what appeals to me personally a lot.

Part of the lifestyle is that life is on the streets. When people go out, they walk around and meet each other and socialize with each other on the street. People do go into cafés for a quick coffee or to get a drink, but it all happens outside. This is wonderful, because nobody is restricted in any way by the course of behaviour that an indoor setting can have, and the mixture and variety of people engaging with or alongside each other is inherently much bigger. It also increases your sense of freedom in some way. The same goes for the marketplaces and little shops, that are also outdoors. Market streets or squares are chaotic, lively places where there is so much to see. People work hard here to make a living and it is a nice view when a vendor has displayed all of his stuff on the street, whether this is food, clothing, pieces of art, or other small items. Even though for the locals it felt like the winter had started, for me the climate was absolutely great. Around 20 degrees Celsius is the best temperature for walking around, it is not too hot or too cold.

I arrived on the island in Palermo, which is the biggest city of Sicily. The first cultural shock I encountered was the traffic. It is so chaotic and fast, klaxons are horning constantly and cars and motorcycles pass left and right without staying in lines. The city is so vibrant and probably the most culturally mixed place I have ever been. There is a large number of different cultures among shop-owners, different kinds of street food, and you can see how earlier migrants are integrated in society. Of course you can notice some kind of social stratification and a little bit of segregation, but you do sense that the presence of other cultures is so normal and that people are very open to this. Other places I have, like Siracusa and Ragusa, do also have these characteristics, but Palermo is the biggest cultural melting pot from my experience.

When travelling through the island, I used the busses a lot. I did need to adjust to this, because there are several bus companies, and you need some time to find out which company does the route you need to take, where to buy your ticket, and where in the city of your destination you are dropped off, which is not so evident mostly. But I have to say it is very affordable in comparison to the Netherlands. Public transportation here is faster but more expensive. Another thing I had to adjust to was the customs of going to restaurants. Being from the Netherlands, I am used to have dinner a lot earlier than the Italians do, and also take less time for it. I went for dinner together with hosts or people I met a few times, and it is really nice. I believe Sicilian people are at their best when going for dinner, you get a few hours of enjoying each other’s company and everybody is full with excitement and laughter.
The hospitality of both Sicilian and Tunisian people I met is truly amazing. Everybody I met went out of their way to help me with my research as good as possible. Not only did they take plenty of time for me, they were prepared to provide me with any documents or papers that could be useful and are willing to keep if I need anything else. Their habits of treating guests is really good and you immediately feel very welcomed. Using Airbnb helped a lot with this, because with this concept you always have a local nearby that you can ask anything you need to know. The accommodation I have stayed at were all very different, but all more than enough for me. The one that stands out for my experience was in Ragusa. I stayed with Marco, a young entrepreneur, who owned a combined shop and café/restaurant/lunchroom kind of setting, where he sells fresh food and you can enjoy a nice meal. We spent some time together in house, sharing breakfast at his shop, cooking each other some meals and we walked together through the valley of Ragusa, to Ragusa Ibla, the old town that is built onto a hillside, where buildings are connected through a network of stairs. The nicest thing about this experience is that I really felt at home for the short time I was there, and I could to some extent live like a local, which is the best way to get to know a place. In Trapani, I was hosted by a very nice couple, who took me along for dinner once with their friends and where extremely friendly people. It are mainly these experience I cherish the most.

Despite its similarities with Sicily, going to Tunisia gave me the biggest culture shock. When I arrived at Tunis airport, my bankcard didn’t work on the ATMs so I couldn’t get Dinars, and my phone didn’t work either outside the EU, so I wasn’t able to call anybody to help. So I was a little bit stranded. Fortunately, I could use a little bit of French I possess and some English to ask a policeman to call my Tunisians hosts, and they could pick me up, and even lend me some money right away. So they were immediately very helpful to me. Later, I found out I had to activate my bankcard for outside of Europe to use it, and I bought a Tunisian SIM-card for my phone, so both problems were easily dealt with. My further experience in Tunisia was very good. The people I contacted with were very helpful and very welcoming, they even offered to send a driver to pick me up for their interviews, so I didn’t have to arrange transportation myself. Being there, you can really see so many European elements, but still feel like you are in Africa. Mainly the Arabic language is what gives this feeling and how people are dressed as well. The ambiguity of familiarity and strangeness is really a remarkable thing, I can understand why Tunisia is seen as a sort of European gateway to Africa, the linkages are definitely there.

Overall I can honestly say that I am very happy with the outcomes of my fieldwork trip. I believe I have more than enough information to write a good master thesis. Travelling alone has taught me a lot, and I have met so many great people I would love to stay in contact with. I am very thankful to everybody that helped me with my research and took the time to meet me for an interview. After every interview I had I felt like I could fill in some more of the story of my thesis. I especially like how the people I met, while being aware of their vulnerabilities and shortcomings, carry out a really strong positive vibe, and I feel privileged that I was able to experience this myself. I do intent to go back some day, may it be for more research on sea-crossing cooperation in the Mediterranean, of just for own pleasure.