

**MEDITERRANEAN PORT CITIES AND THEIR HINTERLAND:  
EVOLUTION OF TRANS-MEDITERRANEAN COMMERCE AND  
CULTURE EXCHANGE - A CHALLENGE TO EURO-MENA  
COOPERATION (12 April 2018)**

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**Other Project Partners:**

**University of Malta and Venice and other universities such as:**

**Istanbul, Alexandria, Marseille, Barcelona, Tanger, Athens, etc and the**

**Keywords:** Port City Infrastructure Management, International Transport (Freight, Tourism), Regional Cooperation (Integration between Port City and Hinterland), Sustainability (Energy, Environment, Climate Change), Security (Migration, Crime), Culture and Regional Exchange ), International Trade and Cooperation (Relation with MENA region, capacity building, TA), Education & Research (Interdisciplinary Research, Curriculum Development, Publications, Faculty Cooperation, Joint Degree Programmes).

## **1. Background**

1.1) Port Cities have played an important role in the development of the Mediterranean basin throughout history. They often served as entrepôt, service centres (finance, insurance, and banking), industrial processing centres, major employers of poor rural workers, education and cultural centre, and information and media relay station. The

examples going back centuries like Alexandria, Athens Piraeus, Barcelona, Genoa, Haifa, Istanbul, Marseille, Ragusa-Dubrovnik, Tangiers, Trieste, Tunis, Venice as well as other port cities.

1.2) Due to their considerable economic and cultural influence, relations with their respective hinterland have often resulted in both political tensions as well as in mutually beneficial innovation and regional development. However, the economic and cultural weight of the port cities can also lead to conflicts of interest with their respective hinterland. Tensions can arise between perceived national interest and the interests of the port itself and its hinterland which may not be entirely encompassed in the same nation state. Such tensions can hinder and frustrate economic developments.

1.3) Taking into account the centrifugal forces of globalization, the sustainability of constructive relations between port cities and their hinterland(s) requires careful long-term planning and culturally sensitive constructive economic diplomacy involving a multitude of economic and political actors spanning national boundaries. In particular, boundary spanning roles such as business diplomats, political entrepreneurs and cultural ambassadors can be crucial to guarantee sustained economic, political and cultural development.

1.4) Each time a port city has or is being incorporated into a neighbouring national unit, the transition period and the corresponding skill in integrating an often very different ethnic group and administrative culture appears crucial for smooth integration. Without future oriented governance strategies, the transition can turn sour and the result could be flight of capital and know-how through mass emigration.

1.5) Port cities are facing today new challenges related to environmental management and the management of territorial conflicts (conflicting uses of coastal space, conflicts for the allocation of coastal resources, etc.). As a consequence, environmental and territorial policies and management arrangements at a variety of scales (local, regional, national and international) are becoming mandatory strategic consideration for port cities and their coastal regions. In particular, for ports, the capability to cooperate at regional scale and that of promoting innovation in technological and organizational issues are as much factors shaping their success as are traditional forces of competition.

## **2. Rationale**

The Euro-Mediterranean dialogue (Barcelona Process, MEDA programme) has fulfilled its initial promise. New initiatives are urgently needed to provide economic and social growth to all riverains of the Mediterranean to ensure sustained growth, political stability and prosperity for all including the respective surrounding larger regions (North & Eastern Europe, Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa).

The current realities however are characterized by mounting multiple environmental tensions (poverty, illegal migration, trafficking in drugs and humans, pollution, political instabilities) pushing into the background the equally existing potential multiple

opportunities (transport of goods and services, exchange of creative arts, entrepreneurial innovation).

In the recent past, the Trans-Mediterranean Dialogue (Barcelona Process, MEDA programme) were initiated on the demands of the European Mediterranean countries (France, Spain and Italy chiefly) as a compensation and counterweight to the rapid “Drang nach Osten” initiated by the EU to first stabilize then absorb the former Soviet Satellites in Central and Eastern Europe.

Broadening of the European Union to the East was supported by the PHARE Programme, a multimillion Euro programme for the reconstruction of the economies of the former Communist regimes of Eastern and Central Europe. PHARE was successful because of the following factors:

- a) It offered membership and eventually smoothed the path for entry to the EU the East/Central Europe countries wished to switch their political and economic focus away from Russian influence and “rejoin” the West.
- b) There was a ready take-up of PHARE funds by the private sector, both consultants and entrepreneurs and by educational authorities and institutions

None of these factors exist as a spur to MEDA for the following reasons:

1. Membership of EU is not on offer.
2. Drawing closer to the EU poses problems for Arab governments both nationally and in the context of pan-Arab relations.
3. There is no immediate cultural affinity.
4. Educational links are, comparatively, weak.

The EU sees the North African shore as a source of threat and insecurity which should be quarantined by a mix of migration controls and of forward defence, i.e. creating conditions in North Africa which will diminish the social and economic pressures to migrate.

Paradoxically the more North Africa takes the European advice and aid the more it is undermined by its own internal critics, hostile to western influence and the same time hostile to policing borders which keep young Arabs from entering European labour markets.

However, the recent upheavals in the MENA region makes it impossible for the EU and the rest of Europe to ignore or isolate the MENA region. Cooperation is imperative and much of cooperation is and will be through port cities. More than 80% of international trade in goods takes place by sea. This makes sea transport one of the main drivers of world trade and this is particularly true for the MEDA-MENA region.

Moreover Mediterranean port cities are basic actors in the process of regional and international cooperation in the field of environmental management, in particular with respect to the problems of managing coastal zones. Against this background, also important is the Integrated Coastal Zone management Protocol, that entered into force in 2011. This Protocol asks national governments to implement new approaches in coastal management, also through new binding tools: in this regard the role of Mediterranean ports and port cities is essential for translating into practice approaches and tools that are mainly state-based.

Besides being the conduit of goods and services, port cities have been in antiquity and remain so today – the meeting ground for people and ideas. Representatives and representations of culture from different countries come into contact with each other in port cities contributing to exchange of ideas and contributing to the creation and dissemination of innovation be this in the fields of economy or society at large. Creative industries receive important inputs from such meeting of minds and cultures which then gets disseminated into the respective hinterland of the port cities.

Finally, while it is clear that in recent times the Mediterranean has improved its position in the global transportation market, mainly for the increasing importance of the EU – east Asia trade, regional flows (intra-Mediterranean flows) have not increased at the same pace: actually, much has to be done in order to increase trade flows in the area, and regarding this, the position of ports and port cities is of basic relevance. Ports and port cities can act as ambassadors of their regional industrial structures, through cooperation programmes in the field of regional economic development, technological and organizational innovation, environmental management initiatives, training, re-training and educational programs.

### **3. Project Approach**

The challenges call for a comprehensive response consisting of initial awareness rising through an international conference to be followed by cross-Mediterranean interdisciplinary research leading to a final phase of inter-university cooperation of port cities to develop joint teaching programmes.

It is envisaged that a staggered approach could be most efficient way to cover the whole MEDA-MENA region for instance starting with the North Adriatic region and subsequently moving on to other regions and subregions. Such a staggered approach would make it easier for institutions and researchers to cooperate due to easier access and proximity while at the same time offering on-going cumulative improvement opportunities for the other regions who will follow consecutively benefitting from the insights gathered by the region having preceded them with their research.

Alternatively, it could also be possible to start simultaneously in different regions and sub-regions of the MEDA-MENA region but this would supposed secure funding and an efficient secretariat to ensure coordination and ongoing learning through exchange and joint learning-conferencing sessions.

## **4. Main Research Topics**

**(non-exhaustive list)**

Taking as an example the North Adriatic Region and its port cities, the following topics are worth pointing out:

- port development, spatial planning and sustainability: how ports and port cities can cooperate in promoting an harmonious development, with respect both to the relationships with their spaces of influence and to the coastal areas where they are located. The topic is how to harmonize at regional scale port development plans with the need for promoting sustainable development.

- Cruising Ships and port cities: problems, opportunities, challenges. Cruising is one of the more dynamic activity in the tourism market. At the present time, Venice and Dubrovnik are the most important assets. But much can be done in order to improve the attractiveness of the North Adriatic as a whole, also with respect to the integration with inland tourist resources. Cooperation between port cities and ports can therefore open new development paths.

- The culture of the sea: what does it mean in the global era? Coastal areas and the seas remain the backbones of the national economy of most of coastal states. The environmental quality of coastal and marine areas and the conflicts between different economic uses represent fundamental points to deal with. Moreover, coastal areas and the seas are the focal point of new national and international policies, under the umbrella of EU policy – we refer to important directions such as the ICZM Protocol, the Marine Strategy, the important development of new tools and approaches in the field of Marine Spatial Planning. However there is yet a poor public and social awareness of the relevance of these aspects. Against this background, port cities, according to their history and the asset of cultural values that they have developed over time, can play a fundamental role for bridging the gap between science and policy on one side, and public attitudes on the other.

- Ports and hinterlands integration. Through history the relationships between ports and hinterlands have nurtured the evolution process of port cities and coastal regions. In the last few decades containerization and intermodality have caused these relationships to become more complex, uncertain and unstable. Today the design of logistic chains, and therefore the position of ports and the social and economic evolution of port cities, is driven by the network logic: this means that the concept of proximity needs to be re-contextualized and interpreted, according to the new functional and spatial paradigms that

are driving the restructuring of industrial and service sectors. This topic is also important in the North Adriatic coastal region, where inland nodes have recently become the nodes of new transport system. Against this background the position of port cities has to be reconsidered and reassessed. This calls for new common and shared development plans, the search for promoting new technologies and new organizational approaches to the complexity of the markets. Also with respect to this issue, cooperation can be considered a basic element in the agenda for the years to come.

- North Adriatic port cities in the new Mediterranean context: problems, opportunities and challenges. The end of the 'cold war' and the recent geoeconomic and geopolitical trends that characterize the North Adriatic space is opening a new phase of regionalization, in which national borders, also because of the process of EU accession, lose the importance they had in the recent past. In this context, North Adriatic port cities can act as levers of new trans-boundary cooperation process.

- Energy issues are becoming more and more important, facing the climate change challenge. The topic of 'greening' is of basic importance for Mediterranean ports and port cities. Technological, economic-financial and organizational issues are concerned.

-Creative industries receive important inputs from exchanges of goods, people, ideas and cultures in port cities. Such exchanges contribute through new tacit and explicit knowledge to industrial and societal innovations. The contributions of port cities as integrators of cultural diversity and generators of innovation facilitates the larger integration of the Mediterranean region. Insights gained through this study should be identified and added to relevant curricula and training modules of institutions of higher learning.

*Other topics could be added as seen needed and useful by the research team participating in the North Adriatic Region.*

## **5. Milestones**

The following flow of activities are proposed:

### **1. Prospection Workshop in Venice**

Persons and institutions interested in this project agree to an initial prospection meeting at the University of Venice or other port city university.

The goal of the meeting would be to discuss and agree on the scope of the project, membership, funding possibilities, organizational arrangements and time frame.

In particular, the workshop will aim at:

- Providing a framework/detailed picture of the different interests of the potential partners for the issues at hand.
- Providing an overview of the different sources of funding for future calls/applications, in the various fields of interest (research, cooperation programs, education, and so on)
- Defining the time frame, the scientific committee and the basic structure/agenda of an international conference on the topic.

## **2. International Conference (Venice or Malta)**

The conference goal would be to learn from historical experiences and to identify strategies for successful sustainable regional development be this through constructive absorption of port cities into the respective hinterland recognizing that these hinterlands are changing with the development of the integrated markets of the enlarged EU. Lessons learnt from the conference could be useful for future regional development planners and actors within the Mediterranean basin.

### ***Target Audience***

Experts in charge of regional development, policy advisers, economic and cultural representatives of related regions and port cities, EU policy makers in charge of regional development (maritime transport, economic development, cultural cooperation, migrant workers)

### ***Suggested Duration***

Conference could be envisaged to last 3-4 days depending on the number of port cities participating at the conference

***Suggested Cities*** (non-exhaustive list): Venice, Malta, Trieste, Barcelona, Alexandria, Beirut, Tunis, Marseille, Genova, Haifa, Istanbul, Valencia, Tanger, Thessaloniki, Tunis, Mysrata, Algiers.

### ***Expected Outcome***

Presentations and papers will be edited and published as conference proceedings.

Subsequent to the conference, interested parties are encouraged to form research consortia to study in depth the different sectoral issues described above focusing on Port City Management in collaboration with other port cities

## **3. Research Projects by Region or Subregion**

Similar to the current Framework Programmes in Natural and Social Sciences Research, calls for research should be designed and funded focusing on all the themes listed above.

Know-how of past FWP should be used to design international research projects. In order to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness in administrating such multi-thematic and multi-year research, a separate MENA research organisation should be envisaged and given adequate research funds.

Scope, institutional arrangements and thematic priorities could be discussed and initially outlined subsequent to the international conference.

#### **4. Development of joint educational programmes for university level graduate Programmes**

Capitalising on the outcomes of the multiple sector specific research projects, inter-university partnerships could be envisaged whose tasks would be to develop graduate educational programmes linked to current issues identified during the international conference and the international research projects.

The goal here would be to develop curricula and teaching material, organised joint teacher training and designing jointly accredited graduate educational programmes

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