

# **From Isolation to Connectivity? The Views of the European Union on Mediterranean and Baltic Islands in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>th</sup> Century**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In Ostsee und Mittelmeer spielen Inseln eine wichtige Rolle bei der Umsetzung europäischer makroregionaler Strategien. Der Aufsatz untersucht, wie die EU an die Probleme von Inseln herangeht. Bis zu den Verträgen von Maastricht (1992) und Amsterdam (1997) wurden sie im Struktur- und regionalpolitischen Rahmen kaum beachtet. Seit die Insellage als gesondertes Problem anerkannt wird, bemisst die EU die „dauerhaften strukturellen Nachteile“ von Inseln fast ausschließlich an ihrer Entfernung vom nationalen Festland. Demgegenüber haben die *Island Studies* der letzten Jahrzehnte unter Verweis auf die Vielseitigkeit der Außenverflechtung von Inseln eine stärker Insel- und Netzwerkzentrierte Sichtweise gefordert. Wie die Autorin unterstreicht, schmälert das Beharren der EU auf einem Festlandzentrierten Ansatz das Potential, das durch den stärkeren Ausbau von Inselnetzwerken zur Geltung gebracht werden könnte.

Since the introduction of a macro-regional strategy, the European Union has highlighted the need to link island areas better with the mainland in order to find a remedy to the “permanent structural handicaps”<sup>1</sup> of islands. Declaration 30 of the Treaty of Amsterdam states that island regions suffer from “structural handicaps linked to their island status.”<sup>2</sup>

- 1 A. D. Foschi, X. Peraldi and M. Rombaldi, Inter-island links in Mediterranean Short Sea Shipping Networks, Discussion Paper 52 (2005), pp. 1-27, <http://www.ec.unipi.it/documents/Ricerca/papers/2005-52.pdf> (accessed 18 January 2017).
- 2 European Union, Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related acts – Declarations adopted by the Conference – Declaration on

The aim of my investigation is to focus on European views regarding the Mediterranean and Baltic Islands. The Baltic Sea region and the Mediterranean Arc provide two interesting examples, as both represent a frontier zone the main feature of which is fluidity. This same fluidity characterizes the island world, confirming that the islands' prevailing trait is connectivity rather than isolation. In this paper, I will discuss the European Union's view of islands and the establishment of cooperation networks among them. My hypothesis is that the conceptual basis of the EU's island policies failed to appreciate both the potential and the challenges of connectivity, and insisted instead on educating the actors to behave according to traditional insularity schemes.

At first glance, islands appear to be isolated worlds by definition, that is, inward-looking and jealous of a cultural heritage that has stratified over time. Many of them have been frequently conquered, and represented a mirage for those who aspired to find a refuge or an idyllic place to establish experimental or utopian societies.<sup>3</sup> Although they have on occasion played a leading role in history,<sup>4</sup> island environments remained on the margins of historical reflection. It is only since the early 1990s, that island scholars inspired by the "spatial turn" in the social sciences have drawn attention to the need to shift the focus away from the continent.<sup>5</sup> In particular Godfrey Baldacchino called "for a recentering of the emphasis from mainland to island, away from the discourse of conquest of mainlanders, giving a voice to and a platform for the expression of island narratives."<sup>6</sup> Island scholars have begun to focus on the claim that islands should be studied on their own terms, and some have labelled this interdisciplinary field of study "nissology".

The idea of a new "island science" appeared for the first time in 1982 in *Nissonologie ou Science des îles* by the French sociologist Abraham André Moles.<sup>7</sup> Ten years later, researchers incorporated the concept into island studies,<sup>8</sup> and it was then that *nissologie*<sup>9</sup> or "nissology" emerged.<sup>10</sup> In 1994, Grant McCall proposed the latter concept to provide a better understanding of insular spaces and to encourage international cooperation and networking among islands.<sup>11</sup> One objective of nissology is to reverse the "continental

island regions, in: Official Journal C 340, 10 November 1997, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:11997D/AFI/DCL/30> (accessed 17 January 2017).

- 3 See J.-C. Marimoutou and J.-M. Racault (eds.), *L'insularité: thématique et représentations*, Paris 1995; M. Trabelsi (ed.), *L'insularité*, Clermont-Ferrand 2005.
- 4 F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1, Berkeley 1995, pp. 148-160.
- 5 See D. Paci, Spatial turn in history. La dimensione culturale e politica degli spazi insulari, in: M. Di Giacomo et al. (eds.), *Piccole tessere di un grande mosaico. Nuove prospettive dei regional studies*, Rome 2015, pp. 119-135.
- 6 G. Baldacchino, Studying Islands: On Whose Terms? Some Epistemological and Methodological Challenges to the Pursuit of Island Studies, in: *Island Studies Journal* 3 (2008) 1, p. 37, <http://www.islandstudies.ca/sites/islandstudies.ca/files/ISJ-3-1-2008-Baldacchino-FINAL.pdf> (accessed 17 January 2017).
- 7 A. A. Moles, *Nissonologie ou sciences des îles*, in: *L'Espace géographique* 11 (1982) 4, pp. 281-289.
- 8 A. Vieira, *The Islands: from Nissology to Nesology*, in: *Anuário do Centro de Estudos da História do Atlântico* 2 (2010), p. 25.
- 9 C. Depraetere, *Le phénomène insulaire à l'échelle du globe: tailles, hiérarchies et formes des îles océanes*, in: *L'Espace Géographique* 2 (1990-1991), pp. 126-34.
- 10 G. McCall, *Nissology: a proposal for consideration*, in: *Journal of the Pacific Society* 17 (1994) 2-3, pp. 1-14.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 2.

bias” and (re)place the study of islands by treating them as interconnected units of a “world archipelago.”<sup>12</sup> As already stated, in parallel with this renewed attention to island spaces in the human and social sciences, since the 1990s there has also been a growing interest of the EU in this spatial reality. Conceptually, however, the EU policies almost ignored nissology, preferring a more traditional understanding of island realities.

### 1. The Views of the European Union on the island question

In the 1950s, at the time of the birth of the European Economic Community, the interest in island regions was virtually non-existent. The attention of the six-member Europe was exclusively addressed to the continent, as the CECA treaty of 1951 and the EEC treaty of 1957 prove. Although Italy only a few years earlier had granted autonomy status to its two major islands, Sicily and Sardinia, it showed no interest in raising the issue and claiming that the ECC should pay more attention to islands. In addition, Sicily and Sardinia lacked the legal capacity to intervene because their statutes included no provisions relating to international agreements.<sup>13</sup> The European Community only began to take into consideration the needs and requirements of islands in the course of the late 1980s, in a changing international context. During the two decades following the fall of the Iron Curtain, Europe’s geography was characterized by the emergence of an integrated supranational economic and political space. Also the islands were involved into the integration effort that went under the name of macro-regions.<sup>14</sup> The European Union introduced a strategy based on these spatial entities with the intention of spreading the effects of economic development to the “periphery.”<sup>15</sup>

The conditions that created an environment favourable for the establishment of EU island policies were on the one hand the upgrading of the regions to the position of active players on the European scene, which led to the creation of the Regional Committee in 1992; on the other – in close connection with the development of the regional policy – the granting of structural funds to “disadvantaged regions.”<sup>16</sup> Following the creation of the European Fund for Regional Development (EFRD) in 1975 and the introduction of the notion of “disadvantaged area” in agricultural regulations, the European Community acknowledged the existence of disadvantaged territories, which included islands, and dedicated certain resources – although these were still modest at the time – to remedying

12 C. Depraetere, *The Challenge of Nissology. A Global Outlook on the World Archipelago. Part II: The Global and Scientific Vocation of Nissology*, in: *Island Studies Journal* 3 (2008) 1, pp. 17-36, [http://www.islandstudies.ca/sites/islandstudies.ca/files/ISJ-3-1-2008-Depraetere2-FINAL\\_0.pdf](http://www.islandstudies.ca/sites/islandstudies.ca/files/ISJ-3-1-2008-Depraetere2-FINAL_0.pdf) (accessed 17 January 2017); on the concept of world archipelago, see also M. Shell, *Islandology. Geography, Rhetoric, Politics*, Stanford 2014, p. 21.

13 J.-D. Hache (ed.), *Quel statut pour les îles d’Europe?*, Paris 2000, p. 54.

14 See K. Mirwaldt, I. McMaster and J. Bachtler, *The Concept of Macro-Regions: Practice and Prospects*, Discussion Paper, Glasgow 2010, pp. 1-20, <http://www.ostsam.no/file=18022> (accessed 17 January 2017).

15 N. Bellini and U. Hilpert (eds.), *Europe’s Changing Geography: The Impact of Inter-regional Networks*, New York 2013.

16 Hache, *Quel statut pour les îles d’Europe?*, p. 59.

these disparities.<sup>17</sup> The initiative by Greece proved to be decisive, because it enabled the island issue to be put on the agenda of the Intergovernmental Conference that prepared the Treaty of Amsterdam. France, Spain, and Portugal also coordinated a joint action in support of ultra-peripheral areas.<sup>18</sup>

The first reference to the social and economic constraints involving islands dates back to 1988, when, on the occasion of the Rhodes European Council, it was declared that “the European Council recognizes in particular the socio-economic problems of certain island regions in the Community. It therefore requests the Commission to examine these problems and submit, if appropriate, any proposals which it deems useful, within the financial possibilities offered by the Community’s existing policies as they have been decided.”<sup>19</sup> In 1992, Article 129b of the Maastricht Treaty determined that “within the framework of a system of open and competitive markets, action by the Community shall aim at promoting the interconnection and inter-operability of national networks as well as access to such networks. It shall take into account in particular of the need to link island, landlocked and peripheral regions with the central regions of the Community.”<sup>20</sup> It was however only in 1997 that the Amsterdam Treaty conceded that “island regions suffer from structural handicaps linked to their island status, the permanence of which impairs their economic and social development. The Conference accordingly acknowledges that Community legislation must take account of these handicaps and that specific measures may be taken, where justified, in favour of these regions in order to integrate them better into the internal market on fair conditions.”<sup>21</sup>

The Amsterdam Treaty, which had the objective of lending support to sustainable development, corrected the policies that Europe had hitherto adopted towards islands. Thanks to this Treaty, insular spaces are since then seen as experiencing pronounced ecological, social, and economic vulnerabilities.<sup>22</sup> According to the European Commission, “institutional recognition of the problem of the islands is important because it opens up the possibility of establishing new European programmes centring on the reduction of ‘permanent structural handicaps’ and suggests that a special effort may be directed towards areas suffering from such structural handicaps linked to natural or geographic factors.”<sup>23</sup>

The Treaty of Amsterdam confirmed that the perception of islands was changing, in the sense that they had become a “problem” which the EU intended to deal with on the supranational level: “the approach to islands can no longer rely on compliance with

17 Ibid., 57.

18 Ibid., 60.

19 European Council, Rhodes, 2 and 3 December, in: Bulletin of the European Communities 12 (1988), p. 10, [http://aei.pitt.edu/1483/1/rhodes\\_june\\_1988.pdf](http://aei.pitt.edu/1483/1/rhodes_june_1988.pdf) (accessed 17 January 2017).

20 Council of the European Communities, Treaty on European Union, Luxembourg 1992, p. 51, [https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/treaty\\_on\\_european\\_union\\_en.pdf](https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/treaty_on_european_union_en.pdf) (accessed 17 January 2017).

21 European Union, Treaty of Amsterdam.

22 E. Stratford, Islandness and struggles over development: A Tasmanian case study, in: *Political Geography* 27 (2008), pp. 160-175.

23 Foschi, Peraldi and Rombaldi, Inter-island links, p. 5.

domestic laws, which are the result of historic heritages; it must also be based on an acceptance of geographical evidence and of its socio-economic effect on islands.”<sup>24</sup> Article 158 of the Amsterdam Treaty on cohesion policy refers directly to the necessity to reduce the “backwardness of the less favoured regions,” which include islands.<sup>25</sup> As noted in Article 158 as well as in the 2002 publication “Off the Coasts of Europe” by the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, European islands are considered to be areas of “backwardness” within the EU policy community.

According to the European Union, there are certain characteristics that are common to islands and which can affect the conditions for their development. These characteristics usually relate to their degree of “peripherality,” which is associated with physical parameters such as insularity. As the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) admitted in 2011, this was the main reason why the characteristics of islands have usually been identified by use of the term “insularity” rather than “islandness,”<sup>26</sup> which is the notion preferred by recent scholarship in order to overcome the stereotypes of geographic isolation.<sup>27</sup>

Instead, the EU preferred “insularity” along with the formal definition by EUROSTAT, according to which an island is a piece of land with a surface area of at least one square kilometre, which is permanently inhabited by a statistically significant population (>50 inhabitants), not linked to the mainland by permanent structures, separated from the mainland by a stretch of water at least one kilometre wide, and does not host any state’s capital city.<sup>28</sup> As François Taglioni observes, the attempt to objectify islands by using similar parameters is in fact an illustration of the arbitrary nature of the methodology employed.<sup>29</sup> One should note, for example, that this definition not only excludes island states from being considered to be islands,<sup>30</sup> it also implies that with “mainland” only the national reference territory is contemplated. The formal definition adopted by the EU seemed therefore not even to fully satisfy their own requirements of supranational and interregional governance.

This said, the EU has become an important source of funding for regions through its Structural Funds, and it has made special provisions for islands in its Treaty. The Union

24 Hache, *Quel statut pour les îles d’Europe?*, p. 61.

25 Foschi, Peraldi and Rombaldi, *Inter-island links*, p. 5.

26 ESPON, *The Development of the Islands – European Islands and Cohesion Policy (EUROISLANDS)*, Luxembourg 2013, p. 9, [http://www.espon.eu/export/sites/default/Documents/Projects/TargetedAnalyses/EUROISLANDS/FinalReport\\_foreword\\_CU-16-11-2011.pdf](http://www.espon.eu/export/sites/default/Documents/Projects/TargetedAnalyses/EUROISLANDS/FinalReport_foreword_CU-16-11-2011.pdf) (accessed 17 January 2017).

27 E. Hepburn, *Recrafting Sovereignty: Lessons from Small Island Autonomies?*, in: A.-G. Gagnon and M. Keating, *Political Autonomy and Divided Societies. Imagining Democratic Alternatives in Complex Settings*, Basingstoke 2012, p. 126.

28 C. Panou et al., *Universal service obligations in insular areas*, Lyon 2007, p. 6.

29 F. Taglioni, *Insularity, Political Status and small insular spaces*, in: *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* 5 (2011) 2, p. 48, <https://hal-univ-diderot.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00686053/document> (accessed 17 January 2017).

30 S. Moncada et al., *Islands at the Periphery: Integrating the Challenges of Island Sustainability into European Policy*, in: *European Documentation and Research Centre* (ed.), *Malta in the European Union: Five years on and looking to the Future*, Msida 2009, p. 58, <https://www.mepa.org.mt/file.aspx?f=2887> (accessed 17 January 2017).

distinguishes among three categories of islands: 1) islands that are part of “overseas countries and territories” (such as Greenland, French Polynesia, and Bermuda); 2) the “most remote regions”, consisting of the French Overseas Departments, the Azores, Madeira, and the Canary Islands; and 3) continental EU islands. The cohesion policies insert the latter among the “regions with handicaps.” According to the European Union, “territorial cohesion is about ensuring the harmonious development of all the European places and about making sure that their citizens are able to make the most of inherent features of these territories.”<sup>31</sup>

As affirmed in the preamble to Regulation 1080/2006, the European Regional Development Fund contributes to reducing the development gap by taking provisions for rural and urban areas, declining industrial regions, areas with a geographical or natural handicap, such as islands, mountainous areas, sparsely populated areas, and border regions.<sup>32</sup> Regulation 1698/2005, which supports rural development through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), states that special provisions should apply “to mitigate the specific constraints and structural problems in farming and forestry activities and in adding value to agricultural and forestry products as a result of remoteness, insularity or distant location and of the dependency of the rural economy on a limited number of agricultural products, and to promote a robust rural development policy (Article 60).”<sup>33</sup>

As Moncada, Camilleri, Formosa, and Galea have pointed out, “the European approach to islands may be characterised as incremental rather than comprehensive, and fragmented across a number of policy areas.”<sup>34</sup> Almost all European island regions possess a legal status that recognizes their specificity. Today, island regions operate within the European geo-strategic context; decisions that affect them in many different ways are made not by their nation-state of belonging, but in Brussels.

The attention paid to island environments by community policies therefore embeds islands in a new context that to a certain extent seems to contradict their earlier “national” definition: “from being appendages of the states, they have become the periphery of a continent.”<sup>35</sup> Whereas islands previously had to negotiate exclusively with a national power, they now have to deal with a supranational structure within which the political relationships and rules are different, or are yet to be established. While certain island environments in the Baltic Sea Region such as the Åland Islands were able to profit from their special status and obtain derogating provisions at the time of Finland’s Accession Treaty, it was not possible for others to do the same. Brussels waived the provisions passed in this regard in the summer of 1999 with reference to the Member States of the European Union, and granted the Åland Islands the right to continue duty-free sales of

31 ESPON, *The Development of the Islands – European Islands*, p. 6.

32 Moncada et al., *Islands at the Periphery*, p. 57.

33 *Ibid.*, 57.

34 *Ibid.*, 58.

35 Hache, *Quel statut pour les Îles d’Europe?*, p. 77.

goods on the ships that connect the Archipelago to the mainland.<sup>36</sup> It also granted an exception to the right of domicile (*hembygdsrätt*)<sup>37</sup> in effect on the Åland Islands that contravenes the fundamental principles of the Community's legal system according to which any form of discrimination with regard to nationality or in the context of economic freedom is prohibited.<sup>38</sup>

Between 1991 and 1999, the Commission passed 838 measures on the Mediterranean islands, 184 of which concerned Corsica, followed by Sicily.<sup>39</sup> The EU island activism continued also in the new millennium. As André-Louis Sanguin has observed, the debates on European integration nevertheless reveal a bias in favour of the mainland. When island areas are considered, it is from a national or sector perspective that relates to issues such as fishing, transport, or the environment.<sup>40</sup> References in community legislation to the islands of the Mediterranean area are dominated by agricultural questions, while in the Baltic Sea area the interest in fishing prevails.<sup>41</sup> In all that the recognition of "insularity" as the problem constitutes a *conditio sine qua non* for requesting the enactment of measures to serve the specific needs of island areas. No wonder, then, that also the representatives of islands at the European Parliament conform to this thesis to enhance their bargaining power within the EU.

On 4 February 2016, Salvatore Cicu, the Sardinian MEP from the European People's Party (EPP), put forward a resolution on the insularity of Sicily and Sardinia, earning the support of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), the European Green Party (EGP), the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), and the Five Star Movement (M5S), which is part of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) parliamentary group. The resolution passed with 495 out of 693 votes in favour. The statement by Cicu after the vote was significant: "this is an historic vote for Sicily and Sardinia which for the first time finally sees the island issue represented at a European level. [...] The disadvantaged conditions in the two regions have now become concrete facts that will translate into new resources, more

36 G. Baldacchino and C. Pleijel, European Islands, Development and the Cohesion Policy: A Case Study of Kökar, Åland Islands, in: *Island Studies Journal* 5 (2010) 1, p. 91, [http://www.islandstudies.ca/sites/islandstudies.ca/files/ISJ-5-1-2010-Baldacchino+Pleijel\\_0.pdf](http://www.islandstudies.ca/sites/islandstudies.ca/files/ISJ-5-1-2010-Baldacchino+Pleijel_0.pdf) (accessed 17 January 2017).

37 Possession of Ålandic regional citizenship confers voting rights and the right to sit in the Legislative Assembly, to own property, and to carry out a commercial activity. In order to acquire regional citizenship, it is necessary to be a Finnish citizen, to have lived on the Åland Islands for five years, and to demonstrate a satisfactory knowledge of Swedish. Article 40 of the law on autonomy also establishes that teaching in schools financed by government funds must be in Swedish. By using this Article, the Ålandic authorities have the right to prevent the use of any other language except Swedish. See S. Spiliopoulou Åkermark (ed.), *The Right of Domicile on Åland. A report from the seminar The right of domicile, the right of trade, citizens' rights – cornerstones of Åland's autonomy held in Helsinki on 14 June 2007*, Mariehamn 2009; D. Paci, *L'arcipelago della pace. Le isole Åland e il Baltico* (XIX-XXI sec.), Milan 2016, pp. 193-197.

38 Hache, *Quel statut pour les Îles d'Europe?*, p. 157.

39 J.-P. Pellegrinetti and A. Rovere, *La Corse et la République. La vie politique de la fin du second Empire au début du XXIe siècle*, Paris 2004, p. 634.

40 A.-L. Sanguin, *Périphéricité et ultrapériphéricité insulaires dans l'Union européenne*, in: *L'Espace politique* 2 (2007) 2, p. 1, <http://espacepolitique.revues.org/857> (accessed 17 January 2017).

41 Hache, *Quel statut pour les Îles d'Europe?*, p. 65.

opportunities, and more rights. [...] Thanks to this decision, which has been passed with a large majority, it will be easy to overcome the legislative obstacles created by the guarantees of the freedom of competition with a principle of territorial continuity: for example, the transport systems of Sicily and Sardinia will finally be entitled to the economic benefits that they require to cover a geographical gap without encountering EU bans.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, in consideration of this acknowledgement, Cicu demanded the creation of “a homogeneous group made up of all island territories,” the adoption of new statistical indicators in addition to GDP, and an accurate analysis of the additional costs borne by islands.<sup>43</sup>

Given that from a EU perspective the underdevelopment of islands is caused by geographical isolation, the ultimate resolution of their specific problems would be achieved by creating a “geographical continuity”<sup>44</sup> that “bridges” the distance, both in a literal sense, through the implementation of infrastructure and metaphorically, through the provision of more funding. In an TV interview during the election campaign of February 2008, the former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi gave the following answer to a question by a journalist regarding his plans to build a bridge across the Straits of Messina: “I promise the Sicilian people that one of the first things that we will do when we return to government will be to begin the construction of the bridge across the Straits, which is the only major project able to make Sicily fully part of Italy, and Sicilians completely Italian.”<sup>45</sup>

By relying on the concept of “insularity” and its underlying geographical determinism, the European Union can present itself as a “charitable” institution ready to intervene with the provision of structural funds in order to satisfy the requests of their inhabitants. In this way the structural funds fuel an insularist mentality, and the propensity of island residents to over-cultivate their insular specificities in order to confirm a particular cultural identity that legitimates their claims for specific benefits.<sup>46</sup> However, in the effort of the construction of an insular identity a variable linked to the island imaginary comes into play that “does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways,” as Baldacchino explains.<sup>47</sup> In other words, “islandness” rather than just “insularity” co-determines de facto the political negotiation, whatever the prevalent rhetoric of this negotiation may consist of. The

42 Ue, approvata la risoluzione Cicu sull'insularità: “Un voto storico per Sardegna e Sicilia”, in: L'Unione Sarda.it 6 February 2016, [http://www.unionesarda.it/articolo/politica\\_italiana/2016/02/04/ue\\_passa\\_la\\_mozione\\_di\\_salvatore\\_cicu\\_sull\\_insularit\\_un\\_voto\\_stor-1-465287.html](http://www.unionesarda.it/articolo/politica_italiana/2016/02/04/ue_passa_la_mozione_di_salvatore_cicu_sull_insularit_un_voto_stor-1-465287.html) (accessed 17 January 2017).

43 Ibid.

44 See A. Vieira, Il discorso dell'anti-insularità e il poio maderense come sua negazione, in: *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea* 27 (2016) 3, pp. 6-7, [http://www.studistorici.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/15\\_VIEIRA.pdf](http://www.studistorici.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/15_VIEIRA.pdf) (accessed 17 January 2017).

45 Berlusconi promette il ponte sullo Stretto, 22 February 2008, <http://www.lasiciliaweb.it/articolo/2122/italia/> (accessed 17 January 2017).

46 R. Brunet, R. Ferras and H. Théry (eds.), *Les mots de la géographie. Dictionnaire critique*, Paris 1992.

47 G. Baldacchino, The Coming of Age of Island Studies, in: *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 95(2004) 3, p. 278.



interplay between both dimensions can be observed also in the case of political networking among Mediterranean and Baltic Sea islands.

## 2. Networking in the Mediterranean and Baltic Sea Islands

As already mentioned, the admission of regions to the Union's multi-level governance framework, sanctioned by the creation of the Committee of Regions in 1994 and by the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties, represented a turning point also for the island areas whose specific features were now officially recognized. Of course, this was the result of efforts with a longer history. During the first twenty years after the establishment of the European Community, Europe's peripheral and ultra-peripheral islands remained in a kind of political and legal "no man's land."<sup>48</sup> The European island environments began to secure some political recognition since 1973, following the creation of the European Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions in Saint-Malo that year. Today CPMR unites one hundred fifty-nine regions across twenty-nine countries to foster the development of Europe's peripheral regions and represents their interests in the European arena.<sup>49</sup> It is subdivided into six geographical committees: Atlantic Arc, Balkan and Black Sea, Islands, Inter-Mediterranean, Baltic Sea and North Sea.

The creation in 1980 of an Islands Commission within the context of CPMR put a new focus on the centre/periphery and mainland/island binomials. The Commission includes all the islands in Europe plus the Isle of Man, with the aim of refuting the idea that "island" must be a synonym of "isolation." Since the 1990s it operates within an institutional context characterized by the principle of multilevel governance which provides for the sharing of decision-making among various institutional actors at different levels – local, national, and regional. The affirmation of this principle made it necessary to adopt a special legal framework for islands, which decided to group together and fight for their rights and their identity within the European Community, in order to emancipate themselves from their subordinate status in relation to the national mainland powers.<sup>50</sup>

The InterReg cross-border cooperation programmes are three: the first one between the South of Corsica and the North of Sardinia; the second one between the South of Corsica and the North of Sardinia on the one hand, and between the North of Corsica and Tuscany on the other; the third one between Corsica, Tuscany, and Sardinia. They pursue the objective of integrating regions and making them reciprocally complementary in accordance with the principle expressed in the document entitled *Europe 2000+*. *Cooperation for European Territorial Development*. Based on this document, European policy must promote spatial, social, and economic cohesion at a regional level by taking actions to protect the most depressed areas. These actions relate to the protection of the environment and cultural herit-

48 Sanguin, Périphéricité et ultrapériphéricité insulaires, p. 15.

49 Y.-W. Chen, *Transnational Cooperation of Ethnopolitical Mobilization: A Survey Analysis of European Ethnopolitical Groups*, New York 2009, p. 153.

50 Hache, *Quel statut pour les Îles d'Europe?*, pp. 29-79.

age.<sup>51</sup> The development plan for Corsica, which was adopted on 29 September 1983 by the Corsican Assembly, drew attention to the function of the island as a “natural bridge” between mainland Italy and Sardinia. The document included an invitation to the South of Corsica to create cultural and commercial links with Catalonia, the island of Majorca and the Arab world, the aim being that it should one day become a hub for the exchange and circulation of ideas and people in the western Mediterranean.<sup>52</sup>

On 17 November 1987, the Conference of Islands of the Peripheral Maritime Regions was created within the Strasbourg Parliament with the aim of promoting dialogue among groups with shared interests. Created on the initiative of the Vice-President of the European Democratic Group, the Corsican MEP François Musso, the Conference of Islands of the Peripheral Maritime Regions focuses on issues such as energy, taxation, and the environment.<sup>53</sup> The objective was to obtain the same provisions of support and assistance that certain ultra-peripheral islands, such as the Overseas Department, the Azores, Madeira, and the Canary Islands, enjoyed thanks to the POSEI programme.<sup>54</sup> The thesis behind these initiatives was, once again, that all islands have fallen behind in their development due to their insular situation. With the usual accent laid on a supposed fragility caused by insularity as such, other specific programmes were implemented; the 1995 Special Programme on Remoteness and Insularity for Corsica (POSEICOR) is one example.<sup>55</sup>

In a speech delivered in Ajaccio in 1989, the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, issued an invitation to “create a general contextualisation that would permit islands to overcome their natural handicaps.”<sup>56</sup> In 1995, Lino Briguglio, Director of the Island and Small States Institute at the University of Malta, drew up a vulnerability index based on economic, physical, cultural, and human parameters associated with the fragility of islands. This index was adopted in its entirety by the Economic and Social Council of the Assembly-General of the United Nations.<sup>57</sup> An official report based on that index was prepared for the session of 6 April 1998.<sup>58</sup>

It was in this framework that in the mid-1990s the islands of the Mediterranean and Baltic Sea areas began to formulate new cooperation strategies in order to attain a more central position within the new geopolitical scenarios created after the end of the bipolar world and the acceleration of the European integration and enlargement process. They

51 S. Dühr, C. Colomb and V. Nadin, *European Spatial Planning and Territorial Cooperation*, London 2010, pp. 201-202.

52 C. Olivesi, *La Corse et la construction européenne*, in: *Annuaire des collectivités locales* 15 (1995) 1, p. 55, [http://www.persee.fr/doc/coloc\\_0291-4700\\_1995\\_num\\_15\\_1\\_1184](http://www.persee.fr/doc/coloc_0291-4700_1995_num_15_1_1184) (accessed 17 January 2017).

53 *Ibid.*, 58-59.

54 *Ibid.*, 59.

55 *Ibid.*, 57.

56 Sanguin, *Périphéricité et ultrapériphéricité insulaires*, p. 15.

57 L. Briguglio, *Small Island Developing States and Their Economic Vulnerabilities*, in: *World Development* 23 (1995) 9, pp. 1615-1632, [https://secure.um.edu.mt/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/147257/SIDS\\_and\\_their\\_ecn\\_vulnerability\\_Index.pdf](https://secure.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/147257/SIDS_and_their_ecn_vulnerability_Index.pdf) (accessed 17 January 2017).

58 United Nations General Assembly, *Development of a vulnerability index for small island developing States*, Report of the Secretary-General, 6 February 1998, <http://islands.unep.ch/d98-vul.htm> (accessed 17 January 2017).

underlined that in view of the increasing role of the maritime spaces it was important to bring islands together to address common concerns and challenges. In analogy to the insularity/islandness theoretical divide, from an analytical viewpoint we can interpret this type of argumentation as an example for the social and symbolic practices developed in relation to the sea which have been delineated by the Brazilian anthropologist Manuel Diegues.<sup>59</sup> Here the accent is on the sea space as a connecting medium, whereas the insularity-related paradigm points out the “objective” problems created by the physical presence of water around islands. Island networks can be seen as a synergetic fund raising effort of a sum of “disadvantaged” territories, or as a synergy effort of populations that practically redefines the maritime space they inhabit, placing their islands at its centre. The end of the Cold War divisions brought new opportunities for cooperation among the islands of the Baltic Sea Region. The idea of regional cooperation attracted a number of different political, social, and economic actors. The demise of communism provoked a redefinition and rewriting of the narratives associated with the Baltic Sea Region. The establishment of contacts with countries formerly belonging to the communist bloc, and their future integration, was presented as a historical necessity.<sup>60</sup> In the process of regional integration, region-building narratives of the past sought to overcome the image of the Baltic Sea as an area conflict, proposing instead cooperation as the common denominator of regional identity.<sup>61</sup> No wonder, then, that also the idea of networks was proposed as a characteristic feature of the Baltic Sea area’s past and future, and that the enhancement of island was put on the political agenda. Since 1989, the seven largest islands, that is, Gotland, Öland, Åland, Hiiumaa, Saaremaa, Rügen, and Bornholm, collaborated on issues of common interest creating the B7 Baltic Seven Islands Network, which Bornholm and Öland however decided to leave in 2014, since they did not see the benefits of their inclusion now that according to one of the B7 founders and prominent personalities of Öland, Jörgen Samuelsson, the EU’s interest in cooperation in the Baltic had faded in favour of North-South and East-West cooperation.<sup>62</sup>

Samuelsson’s critique indicates that the local elites of the Baltic Sea islands expect that the islands’ specific problems can be resolved mainly through an island-centred approach and a more autonomously acting intra-island cooperation, a view that comes close to the proposals developed by academic island studies. The B7 organization states that its cooperation “has contributed to putting the islands more in control of their own destiny. Through an exchange of experience, lobbying, and projects, B7 cooperation has helped

59 A. C. Diegues, *Ilhas e mares: simbolismo e imaginário*, São Paulo 1998, p. 259. See also M. Grzechnik and H. Hurskainen (eds.), *Beyond the sea. Reviewing the manifold dimensions of water as barrier and bridge*, Vienna 2015.

60 See N. Götz (ed.), *The Sea of Identities. A Century of Baltic and East European Experiences with Nationality, Class and Gender*, Huddinge 2014; N. Götz. *Spatial Politics & Fuzzy Regionalism. The case of the Baltic Sea area*, in: *Baltic Worlds* 9 (2016) 3-4, pp. 55-67.

61 See M. Grzechnik, *Making Use of the Past: The Role of Historians in Baltic Sea Region Building*, in: *Journal of Baltic Studies* 43 (2012) 3, pp. 329-343.

62 M. Ståhl, *Öland lämnar B7-samarbetet*, in: *Ölandsbladet* 16 December 2014, <http://www.olandsbladet.se/ettan/oland-lamnar-b7-samarbetet/> (accessed 5 February 2017).

make the islands more resilient and their populations richer, smarter, and happier.”<sup>63</sup> It is true that the cooperation in the Baltic Sea region was a way to reposition the North of the Western European countries after the Cold War, and that island networks fitted with this objective of continental actors. What matters to the B7 islanders, however, is to perceive themselves as members of a group and to achieve the external recognition of the group’s existence. These aspects have become crucial for the development of a collective island identity.

In regard to the Mediterranean islands, it is worth looking at IMEDOC, a network that since 1995 has united the western Mediterranean islands (the Balearic Islands, Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily) in order to create a “shared mouthpiece for the islands of the Mediterranean.”<sup>64</sup> IMEDOC’s main goals are to promote shared interests by ensuring that their status as islands is recognised at the European level; to share experiences among regional administrations; to carry out coordinated activities undertaken by the political and economic actors; to encourage economic, social, and cultural cooperation among islands aimed at the defence of their special island status; and to support projects in a variety of spheres, such as transport and communication, infrastructure, tourism, environment, fishing, and business development.<sup>65</sup> IMEDOC’s objective is therefore to create “an area of stable cooperation for the exchange of experiences and the promotion of their shared interests in the European Union,”<sup>66</sup> so as to draw the European Union’s attention to the needs of island environments in the hope that the island dimension is present in Community policies. As Farhad Daftary has pointed out, the network has attempted to lobby the European Union to attend to the critical situation in Europe’s Mediterranean islands, seeking EU structural funds to facilitate the development of peripheral regions.<sup>67</sup>

In 2010 within the framework of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) another network of the “Mediterranean Archipelago” was established, the acronym of which is ARCHIMED. It was founded by the governments of the Balearic Islands, the Region of Sicily, the District of Larnaca, while Crete joined it later. The aims of this partnership differ little from those of IMEDOC. Notwithstanding the late lip services paid to the “archipelago” concept, the overall route taken by IMEDOC reveals a tendency of the Mediterranean islands’ local elites to plainly adapt to the EU’s “insularity” paradigm, differently from their northern peers. As the resolution presented by MEP Cicu shows, their chief concern remains to receive assistance by the continental centre. The frequent underlining of their islands’ “mediterraneaness” is functional to that effort,

63 B7 Baltic Islands, B7 Info, <http://www.b7.org/> (accessed 17 January 2017); see also B7 Baltic Islands, B7 25. 25 years of the B7 Baltic Islands Network, 2014, [https://issuu.com/pelagis/docs/b7-25\\_brochure\\_pages](https://issuu.com/pelagis/docs/b7-25_brochure_pages) (accessed 17 January 2017).

64 Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, Imedoc, <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/en/resources/projects/projects/project/show/imedoc/> (accessed 17 January 2017).

65 Ibid.

66 Olivesi, *La Corse et la construction européenne*, p. 55.

67 F. Daftary, *Experimenting with Territorial Administrative Autonomy in Corsica: Exception or Pilot Region*, in: *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 15 (2008) 2, pp. 273-312.

as it suggests that “aid from Brussels” is a fair reparation for the disadvantages suffered from the economic and political hegemony of Protestant northern European countries.

### 3. Archipelagos in a sea of problems

The concept of “archipelago” introduces an aspect that the EU policies seem to have underestimate for a long time. The words “isolation” and “insular” derive from the Latin word for island, *insula*, whereas the Greek word “for island is *nissos* or *nesos*, etymologically rooted in \*nau-, meaning ship, and related to navigation of vehicles.”<sup>68</sup> One may say that the insularity concept prevailing in EU policies preferred the Latin meaning over the Greek one. This is not just an academic question without practical relevance. In fact, it is in the practical dimension that all islands prove to be both, isolated *insula* and connected *nesos*. In the Mediterranean, the recent humanitarian emergency caused by waves of mass immigration has revealed how mistaken it is to treat islands only as isolated spaces.

Under the impact of geopolitical tensions and dramatic migration movements, the Mediterranean *mare nostrum* turned out to be perceived as a *mare aliorum*.<sup>69</sup> Also the islands in the Mediterranean have become “fortresses” unprepared to cope with the flow of migrants. They are located along migratory routes that are fluid and continuously recomposed by specific events, such as wars or agreements between countries regarding migration controls. According to Nathalie Bernardie-Tahir and Camille Schmoll, the islands are therefore at the centre of a media-driven social construction of an immigration imaginary that emphasises the aspects of the humanitarian crises. The same media delineate new “geographies of fear” in the European public opinion.<sup>70</sup> Islands, which are a perfect “geographical laboratory,” take on the appearance of places where frontier impacts are crystallized. They fall within the complex dynamics of the “teichopolitique”<sup>71</sup> – a neologism coined by Florine Ballif and Stéphane Rosière to denote space control policies originating from the idea that the construction of barriers is sufficient to counter the undesired effects of “liquid modernity.”<sup>72</sup> Europe represents a dual division between the territories located on the periphery of the Schengen area – that is, the Mediterranean

68 E. Clark and L. Clark, Isolating connections –connecting isolations, in: *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 91 (2009) 4, p. 315, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-0467.2009.00324.x/pdf> (accessed 17 January 2017).

69 C. Fogu, From Mare Nostrum to Mare Aliorum: Mediterranean Theory and Mediterraneism in Contemporary Italian Thought, in: *California Italian Studies Journal* 1 (2010) 1, pp. 1-23.

70 N. Bernardie-Tahir and C. Schmoll, Iles, frontières et migrations méditerranéennes: Lampedusa et les autres, in: *L'Espace politique* 25 (2015) 1, p. 4, <https://espacepolitique.revues.org/3333> (accessed 17 January 2017).

71 F. Ballif and S. Rosière, Le défi des «teichopolitiques». Analyser la fermeture contemporaine des territoires, in: *L'Espace géographique* 38 (2009) 3, pp. 193-206, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-espace-geographique-2009-3-page-193.htm> (accessed 17 January 2017).

72 Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge 2000.

islands, which perform the function of “guards and prisons,”<sup>73</sup> and the territories in which migrants aspire to settle.<sup>74</sup>

As Paolo Curtitta has shown, the island of Lampedusa has come to be seen in Europe as the perfect symbol of the Euro-Mediterranean border; after 2011, with the Arab Spring, the Sicilian island has become also an open-air prison.<sup>75</sup> The “frontierization” process means that islands such as Lampedusa and Lesbos form the stage on which the “society of the spectacle”<sup>76</sup> mounts its “border show” on mass invasion, hospitality, rejection, and humanitarian emergency. The political and media discourse depicts a permanent state of emergency that generates feelings of solidarity with the island’s population. On 5 July 2004 the then President of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, awarded the towns and ports of Lampedusa and Linosa a gold medal for civil merits for the humanity shown in coping with the emergency. The then President of the Region of Sicily, Salvatore Cuffaro, stressed “the example of the civility of the Sicilians.”<sup>77</sup> Lesbos and Lampedusa were recently proposed for the Nobel Peace prize.<sup>78</sup> In a world characterized by what Manuel Castells calls “the information age” and “the network society,”<sup>79</sup> islands have become essential components of the “world archipelago”<sup>80</sup> suggested by Christian Depraetere.

#### 4. Conclusions

As we have seen, the EU’s growing attention towards island areas coincided with the shift of island studies from a “continental” view to the full appreciation of island centrality. However, this coincidence remained only chronological. While the EU policies led to an increasing mobilization of resources, they remained tightly linked to the insularity paradigm. According to the emerging discipline of island studies, the isolation felt by islanders is not due to the physical separation from a mainland as such, but to the perception of their concrete living conditions as disadvantageous due to a more complex entanglement. Although the EU policies evolved from the earlier view on islands as mere territorial appendixes of national territories that were handicapped by their physical separation, to a supranational view that mobilizes the island worlds in the effort of interregional integration and region building, the connectivity of islands appears to be constantly underestimated, both as a potential for the development of more seaward and

73 L. Lemaire, Islands and a carceral environment. Maltese policy in terms of irregular migration, in: *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 12 (2014) 2, pp.143-160.

74 Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, *Iles, frontières et migrations méditerranéennes*, p. 7.

75 P. Curtitta, *Lo spettacolo del confine: Lampedusa tra produzione e messa in scena della frontiera*, Milan 2012.

76 G. Debord, *The society of the spectacle*, New York 1995.

77 Immigrazione. Cuffaro: “Dal popolo siciliano esempio di civiltà”, 5 July 2004, <http://www.regione.sicilia.it/presidenza/UfficioStampa/2004/luglio/riconoscimentoimmigrazione.htm> (accessed 17 January 2017).

78 F. Gatti, Nobel per la Pace a Lampedusa e Lesbo: perché l’appello di Rosi va sostenuto, in: *L’Espresso* 22 February 2016, <http://espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/2016/02/22/news/premio-nobel-agli-abitanti-di-lampedusa-l-appello-di-rosi-e-l-espresso-1.251430> (accessed 17 January 2017).

79 M. Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, 3 vols, Oxford 2009.

80 Depraetere, *The Challenge of Nissology*.

outward looking economic and cultural initiatives and for the prevention of tensions and crises that manifest themselves on the islands not because of their isolation, but because of their connectedness.

As long as the island networks are not fully recognized as “archipelagos” that possess their own endogenous synergies, but continue to be seen as a sum of problematic “insularities” that merit charitable help from the centre, their potential of synergetic development will hardly be fully exploited. Especially in the Mediterranean both European and local decision makers abstain so far from adopting a more island-centred and connectivity-oriented approach that would improve the obsolete internal infrastructures of great islands such as Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica, incentivize intra-islands transport and communication networks, and foster common marketing initiatives in tourism, wine and food production under a “Mediterranean Islands” brand, and so on. But as long as the term “insularity” recurs in official documents and the eligibility of islands for funding hinges on the assumption that their physical condition is responsible for their delay in socio-economic development, especially in the Mediterranean the islanders and their representatives all-too-easily adjust to the EU terminology, and probably also to the related way of thinking and behaving. The same can be said of the “predictable surprise” regarding the migration crisis. Here, again, it should have been considered long ago that a sea not only separates islands from the mainland, but also connects them to realities inside and outside national and continental borders. A major awareness that these borders remain physically and conceptually fluid, and require permanent negotiation and legitimisation, could help a better handling and prevention of crises.