

**Joint Report issued by Prof Stella Borg Barthet, Prof Lucia Boldrini and Prof. Ivan Callus as Academic Advisors to Mediterranean Imaginaries: Literature, Arts, Culture  
July 2018**

This report reflects on the ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership Mediterranean Imaginaries: Literature, Arts, Culture, which was held between September 2016 and August 2018.

The Strategic Partnership consisted of two iterations of a study programme focused on representations of the Mediterranean in literature and beyond, delivered largely on the basis of an intensively taught, fortnight-long 'Spring School' format in March - April 2017 and in March-April 2018, supplemented by additional dissemination events and professionalization of the participating students through the production of a journal issue collecting their best work. The two iterations of the study programme fitted into ongoing MA and/or PhD courses at the partner universities. There were seven participating institutions: the University of Malta; Goldsmiths, University of London; the University of Florence; the University of Cagliari; the University of Minho; the University of Nova Gorica; and Carthage University. The study programmes were followed by conferences organised by the University of Malta and held to coincide with the end of the taught programmes in 2017 and 2018; and also by related conferences and events held in June 2017 and 2018, organized by Goldsmiths College in London.

Mediterranean Imaginaries: Literature, Arts, Culture was successful in encouraging participating students – 23 in 2017 and 28 in 2018 – to make international cross-cultural and trans-historical connections, and to relate canonical works of literature to contemporary culture and to broader patterns of geopolitical representation, informed by a variety of theoretical perspectives. The Mediterranean has always been a site for diverse, and sometimes deeply fraught, encounters, conflicts and influences, and one aim of the programme was to place all that complexity against a rich set of perspectives informed by literary tradition and associated imaginings. The Mediterranean, in other words, is as powerful a cultural construct as it is a region of immemorial politico-historical resonances, and the programme sought to provide foundations for the appreciation, analysis and critique of its representations and their continued trenchancy.

The project was managed by the University of Malta, with Professors Stella Borg Barthet and Ivan Callus of the Department of English, University of Malta, and Prof. Lucia Boldrini, Head of the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London, acting as Academic Advisors to the project. The first task was to select partners for the project: Prof. Ana Gabriela Vilela Pereira Macedo from the Department of English and North American Studies at the University of Minho, Dr Leonora Flis from the University of Nova Gorica, Prof. Fernando Cioni from the University of Florence, Prof. Mauro Pala from the University of Cagliari and Prof. Nejet M'Chala from Carthage University, Tunisia, all accepted an invitation to lecture within the programme and to coordinate student participation from their respective institution. These partners were known to the Academic Advisors as highly qualified scholars who could deliver the spread of specialisms required for Mediterranean Imaginaries, bringing in expertise not only across a diversity of literary genres but also across other relevant artistic and theoretical discourses and practices.

While the Academic Advisors would have wished for an even more varied presence from around the Mediterranean basin (e.g., Gibraltar, Cyprus, Spain, Turkey) had funding and

logistics allowed it, the combined expertise of the academics involved enabled the consideration, over the two years of the Strategic Partnership and to different degrees of extent and depth, of literature, art, film or theoretical perspectives from or about Malta, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Portugal and Great Britain. In particular, the Academic Advisors strongly felt that it was vital to secure Carthage as a partner for Mediterranean Imaginaries, as this would bring in specific input from the southern littoral of the Mediterranean that might otherwise have been under-represented, and which was felt to be necessary to avoid the risk of an exclusively 'Euro-centric' outlook. The participation of Carthage was deeply welcome as it conferred a dimension – expertise from a North African university – that is not a regular feature of Erasmus+ programmes but that in this instance carried a core pertinence. The Advisors also felt that holding the two Spring Schools of 2017 and 2018 at the Valletta Campus of the University befitted Malta as an island placed between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, reflecting the country's cultural tradition of hospitality – and, on occasion, mediation – in the region. It may be appropriate to add that one of the highlights of the programme was, in each year, the event with Maltese poets, where students from outside Malta encountered a literature and a set of poetic, literary and broader cultural questions that they would very rarely otherwise be aware of, and the Maltese students themselves were able to reflect on the role that the Maltese literary tradition can have in their island and in the larger Mediterranean context.

The role of the project manager of the Strategic Partnership, with the generous input of several members of the Department of English of the University of Malta, was of pivotal importance for the success of the project and the results obtained helped signal Malta as a ready locus for the management of this and further projects on the Mediterranean. Equally important was the role of the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths: not only did the much sought-after expertise of the personnel of this Department contribute an enviable spectrum of specialisations to the study programme across both years, but the partnership itself has its roots in Professor Boldrini's visit to Malta in 2008 (invited by the British Council) with the express purpose of developing such a collaboration. A further key factor was the lecturing and seminar input of the scholars from the Universities of Florence, Cagliari, Minho, Nova Gorica and Carthage, which coupled with that from Goldsmiths and the University of Malta made for a programme with a good balance between comprehensive coverage and incisive analysis. Students also benefited from the opportunity to book one-to-one tutoring sessions and extensive time for seminar discussion. For most of the students – the University of Malta students were, evidently, the exception here – there was also the added intensiveness that comes from being in a residential course.

Mediterranean Imaginaries enabled students both familiar with and distant from the Mediterranean to study theory, literature, visual art and culture from this region. The topic also drew scholars and students working in comparative literary studies, as well as others from disciplines such as history, cultural and film studies, art and philosophy, thus presenting a strong multidisciplinary approach. Scholars and students shared important cross-cultural perspectives and opinions, in a learning environment that could not have been created while running the module at the separate universities. Indeed, the opportunity provided for extended debate, which could often run over into mealtimes and recreation periods, meant that the unique opportunities for discussion, team teaching and, on a longer-term plane, research

collaboration afforded by an Erasmus+ programme were appropriately taken up. It must be recognised that a major advantage of the intensive residential mode of participation is, indeed, the familiarity engendered by spending concentrated time together, leading to discussion in a relaxed and non-intimidating way (even for the shyer students who hesitate to participate in the classroom context) and to the opportunity to return to discussions from different perspectives as the programme advances, over dinner or breakfast, as concepts evolve and sediment: it is impossible not to notice how learning is vastly enhanced by the sense of belonging to a social community. However, this recognition is accompanied by the awareness that the Maltese students remain somewhat less fully integrated in this community as they return home after classes and are not funded to share in social moments such as meals and excursions. We would like to encourage a reconsideration of the funding rules and suggest that a small element of funding is permitted to support the local students so that they too can become an integral part of the Strategic Partnership community and their learning can benefit to the same extent as that of the visiting students. We also think it would be beneficial for such programmes to offer students more funding as the leanness of the subsidy offered might discourage students who cannot look to their families' support from registering for the programme. More funds may be made available if the rule holding lecturers to a minimum five-day stay were to be relaxed. Such flexibility would also help lecturers as some found it hard to be away from their own university for a full five days.

Coordinated as an entire course by the Academic Advisors, the two-week intensive Study Programmes of 2017 and 2018 featured lectures, typically 2 per day, each of 1 hour's duration + 30 minutes' question time, delivered by specialists in the field and attended by all the students. Each student also opted for one of two specialist seminars, lasting for the duration of the teaching programme – a structure that allowed for more focused specialisation on particular areas of the curriculum. Seminar A concentrated on representations of the Mediterranean since the early modern period and was led by Dr Isobel Hurst (Goldsmiths) and Prof. Fernando Cioni (University of Florence); while Seminar B presented a more contemporary focus and was led by Professors Borg Barthet and Boldrini. Every day, each of the lectures was relevant to one of the seminars, and the lecturers attended that seminar to lead and inform the specific discussion. A number of seminar sessions were held jointly at strategic junctures in the programme to enhance the sense of cohesion and offer students and teachers the opportunity to share learning and research.

Students learnt to identify, characterise and critique literature and cultures from different periods and different areas of the Mediterranean, as well as influences across texts. They studied how different works construct Mediterranean culture, history or geography and how cultural encounters, clashes or exchanges are represented in various texts and how these in turn impact on national literatures. They were encouraged to be sensitive to how these distinct perspectives and approaches can be the basis for a comparative literature minded to explore a Mediterraneanist ethic – or the implications of any discernible one. Among the authors and artists whose work featured in close discussion the following are worth specifying (this is by no means a full list, but the programme schedule and content can in any case be viewed in the attached documentation): Sophocles, Homer, Ovid, Shakespeare, Byron, Valéry, Cavafy, Forster, Camus, Pamuk, Coetzee. Mediterranean Imaginaries students achieved in-depth knowledge of a range of texts – literary, visual and otherwise – from, or representing aspects of, the Mediterranean. They acquired critically informed knowledge of

differences between areas and periods of representations of the Mediterranean, and were introduced to some of the foundational theoretical perspectives in the field, featuring the work of, among others, Paul Valéry, Fernand Braudel, Edward Said and Roberto Cassano. Students also produced advanced critical commentary upon selected texts from the syllabus studied and they were able to present this at the conferences organised to coincide with Mediterranean Imaginaries. The students also wrote essays for their assessments and in some cases will develop these further for publication in the special edition of *GLITS-e*, a peer-reviewed and open-access graduate journal. It goes without saying that academics too learned a lot from the experience of encountering perspectives and materials new to them (a plan is emerging, even though it is still at a very early stage, to develop a research group out of the collective experience of the Strategic Partnership).

'Mediterranean Imaginaries enhanced participants' awareness of the practical ways in which literature, culture and the arts can influence society. Lectures and discussions on representations of the Mediterranean in literature, films and paintings often tackled issues of migration, racism and xenophobia in the region and beyond, the difficult coexistence of different ethnic and religious communities in certain areas (e.g., the Balkans, Turkey, Palestine), and the history of colonialism and cultural imperialism experienced by many of the areas around the basin. Additionally, it is a feature of this Erasmus+ programme that students are helped to acquire a greater understanding and responsiveness to social and cultural diversity, to develop a more informed perspective on European projects and on the values of openness to distinct cultural traditions, and to acquire a better understanding of education policies, practices and systems in other EU countries as well as in other contexts from the region.

The programme was also highly successful in widening the horizons of the students and academics taking part, making them more aware of the wealth of knowledge on the Mediterranean harboured in European universities. The mobility of the lecturers provided opportunities for multilateral cooperation, helping them to understand pedagogies and methodologies employed in different institutions. A distinct feature of the programme was therefore the experience (for the students, but also for the teachers) of different lecturing and teaching styles, and of the different ways in which students from different learning cultures engage with the materials studied. The Strategic Partnership thus brought the added value of promoting the reciprocal recognition of qualifications from different universities and various countries, which in turn further promotes the formation of a European Area of Skills and Qualifications, and enhances the students' employability throughout Europe. Working in multinational and multidisciplinary groups also made for learning conditions which enhanced transversal competences in a lifelong learning perspective.

At the close of the Study Programmes in both years, the students participated in conferences organised by the Department of English at the University of Malta. The students delivered presentations on the Study Programme they had just completed to an audience made up of academics and postgraduates. The presentations helped students to think further on the topics they developed in the following weeks for the 5000-6000-word assignment, weighted at 10 ECTS (30 UK credits or 15 ECTS for the Goldsmiths students), they had to submit for their assessment. Except for the Goldsmiths students, for whom the study programme coincides with a module on the MA Literary Studies and who are assessed by Goldsmiths staff, the assignments were marked by the Board of Examiners of the Department of English of the

University of Malta, allowing students to obtain credits towards their postgraduate degree here, or to be transferred towards their own postgraduate courses at their respective university.

In June 2017 and 2018, University of Malta students, who had not benefitted from mobility funds as the Study Programmes had been held in Malta, were given the opportunity to participate in events organised by Goldsmiths for the Strategic Partnership Mediterranean Imaginaries. The students from the University of Malta met with those from Goldsmiths for workshops during which they gave short presentations about their research for the assignments they were working on, or on the longer research projects they were engaged in for their Master's degrees. They also worked together to prepare a joint presentation for the annual graduate conference of the Goldsmiths Literature Seminar, in which they were participating as Mediterranean Imaginaries students. These presentations continued to enhance the students' capacity for team work and presentation skills whilst spreading further the interest in Mediterranean literature, arts and culture. The students of the University of Malta were also helped and encouraged to spend two days of researching in London libraries, an opportunity that enabled them to make use of collections in Senate House, Goldsmiths, and other libraries. This experience encouraged the students of the University of Malta to think of their research interests in a wider and more specialised scholarly environment.

In June 2018, the Academic Advisors started implementing the plans for the publication of a selection of the essays submitted for the Study Programmes of Mediterranean Imaginaries in 2017 and 2018 in a special edition of *GLITS-e*, the peer-reviewed open-access journal published by the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Goldsmiths. The edition will be guest-edited by an editorial board selected by the Academic Advisors from among the Mediterranean Imaginaries students of 2017 and 2018 who apply for the position. The whole process from peer review to the preparation of the manuscript for publication in Spring 2019 will be carried out by the editorial board with assistance and direction from the Academic Advisors. This contributes to the skill and CV development of students, and is especially useful for those who aspire to an academic career.

Presenting a programme to students from different educational backgrounds created challenges that the Academic Advisors addressed with the help of the other seminar leaders, Dr Isobel Hurst and Prof. Fernando Cioni, and all the lecturers. One of these challenges was the dissimilarity in the competences of the students. Students who came to the course with native speaker fluency in the English language were more confident in asking questions and participating in discussions. Interestingly, however, other students with native-speaker fluency sometimes held back from intervening in discussions because they came from an educational background that did not develop oral presentations to the same extent current in other universities. It was also highly interesting to see students who were confident of the conceptual validity of their argument, but challenged in their ability to articulate highly complex theoretical positions, succeed in communicating their precise position in the discussion in hand. Equally, academics were challenged to adapt, with different strategies and always instructive results, to the expectations and competences of this heterogeneous but coherent group, which also always included a selection of their peers. The presence of two seminar leaders in each seminar group (as indicated above, Dr Hurst and Prof Cioni for Seminar A, and Profs Borg Barthet and Boldrini for Seminar B) was crucial to facilitate the establishing of connections between the various materials and the continuity of discussions,

and also to mediate the different teaching styles and ensure that students were clear about the objectives of individual seminars sessions, of the seminar and the programme as a whole, and of the expectations placed on them.

Where the administration of the project is concerned, the Academic Advisors, the lecturers and the students were constantly helped and very capably advised by the Project Support Office of the University of Malta. The staff of this Office communicated regularly with all the participants of Mediterranean Imaginaries as well as with the staff of the International Offices of the participating universities. The staff of the European Union Planning Agency (Malta) were also at hand whenever uncertainties had to be clarified and challenges addressed. One problem that this Office tried to resolve for Mediterranean Imaginaries arises from Malta, unlike most other European countries, having only one university. The funding rules for Multiplier Events rightly stipulate that the audience has to be made up of individuals who were not participants of the programme. In other countries, this is interpreted to mean that the university managing the project draws audiences and readerships from other universities, usually situated a practicable distance away. While we were lucky enough to be able to add dissemination events in London thanks to the leading role willingly taken by Goldsmiths to permit this and to the funding for the Maltese students to enable them to travel to the UK, the regulation on Multiplier Events offered locally presented great difficulties for Mediterranean Imaginaries as students of the Department of English who had not participated in the programme, students from the Faculty of Arts and indeed from other faculties were all considered ineligible for funding. As there are no other universities in Malta, the Department had to garner an audience from students and scholars ready to meet the expense and take the time to fly to Malta for the events.

Fortunately for the success of the Multiplier Events, the Department of English has an international profile that enabled it to attract enough students and scholars from abroad to claim sufficient funding for the organisation of the conferences that coincided with the completion of the Study Programme of Mediterranean Imaginaries in 2017 and 2018. The organisers, however, were considerably stretched to provide conference services for an audience that was largely made up of University of Malta students and scholars who were not eligible for funding. As Academic Advisors, we request that the regulations are reviewed so that the particular situation of the University of Malta, as the only university of the country, is taken into consideration and the regulations of the funding for Multiplier Events reviewed.

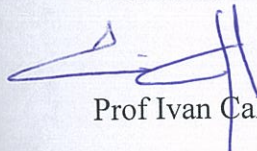
We hope that this Joint Report, which we are presenting to the European Union Planning Agency and publishing on the Mediterranean Imaginaries website, will be useful to current and future applicants to Erasmus+ and other EU collaborative projects, and to EU officers and institutions whose task it is to promote ever greater compatibility between EU higher education structures.



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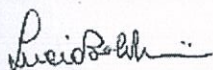
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