

## A fieldwork report

Travelling a month through Sicily and Tunisia to investigate the Italy-Tunisia cross-border cooperation programme



By Joris Wijnakker

### Contains:

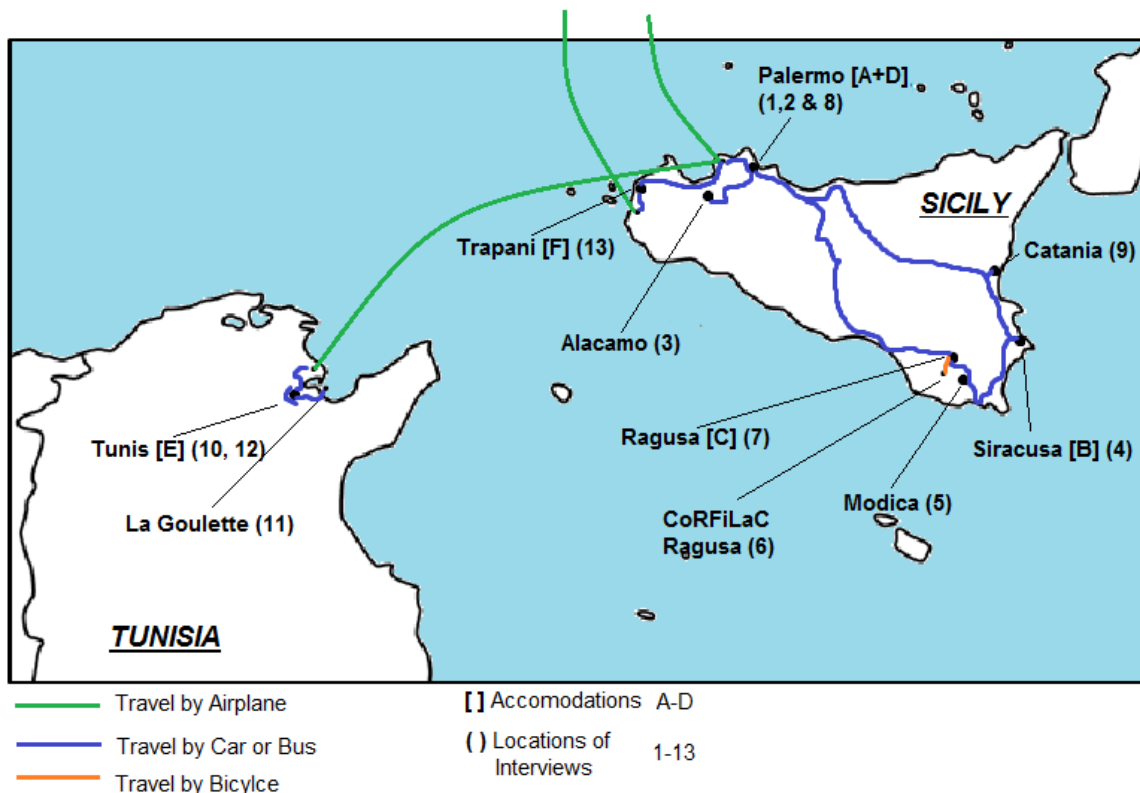
- Where have I been (the accommodation I stayed at and the projects I have visited)
- A summary of the interview outcomes
- My personal experience of the fieldtrip

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## Where have I been? – Tracking my travel route

In order to provide a good illustration of my travels in Sicily and Tunisia, a map was made that depicts the places I have been staying and visited for my research fieldwork. Throughout a period of 31 days, I have stayed at six different places and have done thirteen interviews on different locations in eight different cities. The six accommodation I have stayed in are the following (the letters correspond with the locations of the map):

- A. **Mansarda ne cuore di Palermo – 30 October 2016 until 7 November 2016 – Via Giacalone 15, Palermo.** An Airbnb accommodation rented out by the very nice Federica and Alessandro, at the fourth floor of an apartment very close to the Massimo Theatre, in the heart of Palermo.
- B. **Aretusa Studio – 7 November 2016 until 9 of November 2016 – Via Della Conciliazione 18, Syracuse.** A large apartment on the island of Ortigia in Syracuse, close to the Piazza Del Duomo, also via Airbnb.
- C. **La finestra sull' OvO – 9 November 2016 until 16 November 2016 – Via Archimede 19A, Ragusa.** A large apartment in the town of Ragusa with a lot of working space, owned by Marco, a young Ragusian entrepreneur, together with his young kitten Simba.
- D. **The Mob Hostel – 16 November 2016 until 19 of November 2016 – Via Arrabo 64, Palermo.** An international youth hostel in the southern part of the Palermo city centre, a shared accommodation for travellers from all around the world, in 'Godfather' style.
- E. **Lafayette classical colonial style – 19 of November 2016 until 24 of November 2016 – Rue de la Liberté 94, Tunis.** A large apartment in the neighbourhood 'Lafayette' near the city centre of Tunis, owned by the Japanese Tomoko and her Tunisian partner Riadh.
- F. **Montalbano House, Holiday Flat – 24 of November 2016 until 30 of November 2016 – Via dell'Olmo 31, Trapani.** A nice separate holiday flat in a quiet neighbourhood of the beautiful city of Trapani, and Airbnb accommodation of a young Italian couple.



The thirteen interviews I have conducted in Sicily and Tunisia were mainly with the coordinators of projects of the 2007-2013 Italy-Tunisia ENI Cross-Border Programme, or other organisations involved. I am very grateful to all of them for making time to receive me at their offices, departments of university, or just at a café in their city. This is the list of my interviews in chronological order, which together with the map and the list of accommodation illustrates my fieldwork trip (the numbers correspond with those on the map):

1. **Professor Sebastiano Tusa – Soprintendenza del Mare, Regione Siciliana – Via Lungarini 9, Palermo, 2 November 2016 – Project CUL.TUR.A.S. CULture et ToURisme Actif et Soutenable.** Culturass is a strategic project of the programme which aims to identify and implement new models for the tourist enhancement of the archaeological heritage and territorial economic development, focussing on two specific segments of the tourist market, underwater tourism and cycling. The interview was at his office in Palermo that is the department of Culture and Sicilian identity of the Sicilian Region.



2. **Professor Maria Luisa Germaná – Università degli Studi di Palermo – Viale Della Scienze ed.8, Palermo, 2 November 2016 – Project APER Architecture Domestique Punique, Hellénistique et Romaine : Sauvegarde et mise en valeur.** The APER project aimed to improve the conservation, enhancement and knowledge of archaeological and architectural heritage with the overlap of Punic, Hellenistic and Roman cultures. I visited her, together with a PhD student of her in her office at Palermo University.

3. **Agata Scandariato – Ville de Alcamo – XI Febbraio 14A, Alcamo, 3 November 2016 – Project COURAGE Creation d'Opportunités pour renouveler le tissu associatif local pour les futures Generations Euro-Mediterranèennes.** For this interview I spent half a day in the city of Alcamo, which is a 45 minute bus drive outside of Palermo. The Courage project is mainly about helping young vulnerable people in Tunisia to establish social enterprises, by providing training courses and a general helpdesk.



4. **Sergio Campanella – Gruppo di Azione Locale ELORO – Piazze Del Duomo, Siracusa, 9 November 2016 – Project SERVAGRI Observatoire Italo-tunisien à Service de l'Agriculture Durable de Qualité.** This project aimed to jointly develop pilot strategies and actions to contribute to the integration of agri-food production chains in order to develop the typical productions and increase quality and food safety levels, via a common observatory. We did not meet in Noto, where the office of GAL ELORO is located, but in front of the Dome in Syracuse instead.

5. **Margherita Fargione – Commune di Modica – Corso Umberto I 92, Modica, 10 November 2016 – Project ESSORENTRPRISE Entreprises rurales et nouveaux niveaux de compétitivité.** This project aimed to give support to the sectors of micro and small enterprises through the dissemination and the access capability for innovation of miniaturization technology in the processing sector of agro-food products in accordance with standards safety, quality and phyto-sanitary products.



6. **Stefania Carpino - Consortium Recherche sur la Filière Laitière-Fromagère (CoRFiLaC) – Ragusa Mare km.5 (SP25), Ragusa, 11 November 2016 – Project HILFTRAD Hilât sicilo-tunisien de la Filière Laitière-Fromagère Traditionnelle à travers les nouvelles technologies.** The goal of the Hilftrad project was to transfer knowledge and technology for the production, conservation, characterization and enhancement of historic traditional cheese made from raw milk dairy sheep in the Beja region in Tunisia, to create a Sicilian-Tunisian cheese for the Tunisian market. I visited the lab of CoRFiLaC by bicycle, approximately eight kilometres outside the city of Ragusa.

7. **Emilia Arrabito – Svimed Onlus – Via Teocrito 6, Ragusa, 15 November 2016 – Project AGRIPONIC - Promotion et diffusion de la technologie Aéroponique dans l'agriculture.** The project aimed to preserve the sustainability of the environment by reducing the use of irrigation water and chemicals in the greenhouse and the protection of soil and water resources. The main achievement of the project was building a greenhouse that performs soilless cultivation in Manouba, the target region in Tunisia.



8. **Professor Giuseppe Raso – Università degli Studi di Palermo, Dipartimento di Fisica e Chimica – Viale Della Scienze ed.18, Palermo, 17 November 2016 – Project AIDA Auto-Immunità - Diagnostic Assisté par ordinateur.** AIDA is another strategic project, which

constitutes an Italian-Tunisian cooperation in research and innovation in the health sector through the application of ICT for the diagnosis of autoimmune diseases.

9. **Rosario Sapienza – Secrétariat Technique Conjoint du Programme – Vulcanic, Viale Africa 31, Catania, 18 November 2016 – Coordinateur du STC. Mr. Rosario Sapienza is the main technical coordinator of the 2007-2013 Italy-Tunisia programme.** While the technical secretariat is officially based in Palermo, we met at his company Vulcanic, which is an incubator for social innovation. With him I could discuss the programme as a whole and all other social, cultural and geopolitical aspects it contains.

10. **Yassine Khaled – Université de Tunis – Boulevard 9 Avril 1938 nr.92, Tunis, 21 November 2016 – Project DOREMIHE Doctorat de Recherche pour la Mise en valeur de L'Héritage naturel et culturel.** A project about the construction of a system of knowledge and analysis of the cultural and natural heritage through the integration of all the experience acquired in previous cooperation programs. The project has produced a bundle of scientific articles about the ancient waterway system from the area of Zaghouan that provided the city of Tunis with water.



11. **Professor Saloua Sadok – Institut National des Sciences et Technologies de la Mer (INSTM) – Centre La Goulette, Tunisia, 22 November 2016 – Projects BioVecQ: Biotechnologie marine vecteur d'innovation et de qualité. SecurAqua: Security and Aquaculture Product Quality: Developing a Common Way Tunisian-Sicilian.** Professor



Sadok on behalf of the INSTM coordinated two projects. BioVecQ is a strategic project, with its mainly focus to establish a good partnerships between research institutions, technology parks and socio-economic actors, and a relationship for the future, in order to create new methods of analysis of sustainable socio-economic development in the water and food sector. SecurAqua as a standard project, is very similar to this goals, but more focused to the quality and food safety of the mutual production in the aquacultural sector of both Sicily and Tunisia. She showed me around at her laboratory in La Goulette, which is not far from Tunis, at the shores of the Mediterranean sea

12. **Professor Ali Bouattour – Institut Pasteur – Avenue Jugurtha, Tunis, 22 November 2016 – Project RESTUS Mise en place d'une plate forme et d'un réseau tuniso-italien pour la surveillance des maladies émergentes transmises par les tiques et les Culicidae.** The Restus



project helped to strengthen and improve the monitoring of diseases emerging due bacteria and viruses transmitted by fleas and mosquitoes, and therefore reinforcing the diagnostic capacity in this region.

**13. Professor Andrea Santulli & Concetta Maria Messina – Consorzio Universitario della Provincia di Trapani, Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra e del Mare – Via Barlotta 4, Trapani, 28 November 2016 – Projects BioVecQ & SecurAqua.** Professor Santulli and Mrs. Messina are both working at the laboratory of Earth and Sea Sciences in Trapani, and also part of the University Consortium of the Province of Trapani, which is listed as a partner in both the BioVecQ and SecurAqua projects. I visited them in their laboratory in Trapani where I interviewed them together and Mrs. Messina showed me around in the lab after the interview.

### **Overall outcomes of the interviews**

The goal of the interviews I have conducted was to put this Italy-Tunisia Programme, that is part of the European Neighbourhood Instrument, into a geopolitical perspective, in order to have a better understanding of what role the Mediterranean area plays in European external border management. With this geopolitical perspective, also social and cultural angles to the cross-border cooperation are relevant, and these are all interconnected. Furthermore, a very important factor in my research is the migration and mobility aspect, since this is crucial for border management, and I strongly believe this aspect always has its impact on any activity in the Mediterranean setting. To capture all this, the main topics that were discussed during the interviews were the functioning, results and challenges of the cooperation projects, the meaning of the Mediterranean culture and the cultural similarities between Sicily and the North of Tunisia, the social relations during the cooperation, the 'EU presence' that was experienced during any of the projects, the impact of the migration crisis on the projects, and finally, the issues of mobility of border crossings during the projects. The following is my general sense about all of these aspects that I have discussed during interviews.

I found that everybody I talked to truly believes the 2007-2013 has been a great success, without ignoring the challenges they faced. The projects have contributed to the socio-economic development of the selected areas in Tunisia and to lesser extent also in Sicily. The cooperation projects basically include that know-how of a certain sector in which Sicily and Tunisia share a lot, whether this is on cultural heritage, agriculture or fishery, or safety and dealing with diseases, is transferred to one another, in order to create a common way of dealing with this sector, a common way of organising production, doing tourism, etc. It is noticeable that most of the know-how and expertise comes from the Sicilian side and is used to improve the situation in Tunisia, as often explained, but the Sicilians learned a lot from this experience as well, on other aspects, the more human and social aspects. The main importance of the projects is the creation of opportunities on both sides of the Mediterranean sea. The socio-economic development is very important for showing young Tunisian people that there are opportunities in their own regions, and they don't necessarily have to go to Europe to have a good future. And Sicily itself is a region that is relatively poor and on the periphery of Europe, and Sicilians acknowledge this for themselves, without feeling a minority. They too are vulnerable, and have problems with ageing, because young people tend to go abroad or to the northern part of Italy a lot for their studies or work, and so leave this region. Although not on the same level, Tunisia and Sicily have quite similar vulnerabilities in regard to opportunities for young people. A programme like this is a great chance to enhance opportunities, raise the cultural level and therefore offer stability on the long term.

The challenges that were faced during the projects are for the bigger part institutional. Many explained the importance of the involvement of public parties, whether these are municipalities, regional or provincial offices, or national ministries, because they eventually have the means to make substantial changes that will last for the future. It seemed a big challenge to have these parties involved and to convince them of the long-term relevance of these projects, because the direct benefit in terms of money is very difficult to estimate. Some even claim that public officers can sometimes refuse to work for you, which makes all the movement of money harder and communication one-sided. Waiting for approval of the budget or anything has caused many delays for projects, and most of them are finished two years later than officially planned. This rigidity of public parties was a problem in Tunisia but also in Sicily to a less extent, but still their involvement is paramount for structural change, especially on the short term. Another thing that was not really a problem, but did offer some challenges, is the difference in religion. Even though both sides agree that the cultural similarities are vast, religion is something to take in account, and so offered challenges, but luckily no barriers.

Most of the participants definitely agree that this programme is a 'Mediterranean' programme. The best argument for that is that life in this region is shaped by the resources that the Mediterranean sea has provided, and the typical climate and landscape of this geographical situation, and the socio-



economic development this programme brings, elaborates on this. The cultural similarities between Sicily and the coastal area of Tunisia are big. They share a common history that is expressed through cultural heritage, buildings and the behaviour of the people themselves, and a common climate and landscape which results in the same agricultural products. Sicilians express how they are part of Europe, and you can see the EU flag on official buildings next to the Italian and Sicilian flag, but still are not so 'European' as average. They are in ways connected to other Mediterranean countries that most European regions are not. Simultaneously, people from the coastal regions of Tunisia express their connectedness to Europe that most other North-African countries don't have, let alone African countries further south. The increased political stability in Tunisia and its openness to collaborate with European partners for further socio-economic development makes that this country can really serve as a gateway to Africa and prevent the two continents from getting more isolated from each other via extreme politics. And Sicily has a natural cultural mixture in its DNA, mainly because of their various dominations throughout history, by Greeks, Romans, Normans, Arabs, so the Sicilian man or woman is a cultural mixture in principle so to say. For this, the island also has a unique position. Their cultural connectedness with non-European countries across the Mediterranean sea is naturally very big, making Sicily a perfect candidate for cooperation programmes like this.

I assume the cultural connectedness was beneficial for the social relationship. Participants from both sides expressed how surprised they were when travelling to the other side that the land and the people look so similar, and therefore felt at home or at least welcomed when travelling for meetings or seminars or whatever manner of coming together for the projects. From almost every project coordinator I visited it was explicitly stressed that the social relationship between partners from different sides of the Mediterranean was very good and intense. Even though the transmission of know-how was not completely in balance, during the cooperation everything was based on equality, no party felt better than another, and everybody was treated very respectfully. The difference in religion was also very much respected. Many feel like they have made friends during the projects, and the contact between the partners was not only for business, but also established in private and informal settings, which relates to the hospitable nature that both cultures have (which I was lucky enough to experience for myself as well). Moreover, many claim that they will continue to collaborate in their sector with their sea-crossed neighbour after official end of the programme when the EU funds have stopped. So you could say the social fabric of this first sea-crossing programme has been established, which would then lead to presume that cooperation programmes in the future can be more efficient, since the costs of organising the network and contacts should be lower.

Because this programme is EU-funded via the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), one could assume that its projects are very top-down, donor-driven, and under high control of EU executives. However, this was not really the experience. Of course, there is a certain chain of command, since the European Commission controls the Managing Authority in Palermo, and the Managing Authority controls the projects leaders, who at their turn need to manage all the partners involved. But still, the people executing the projects on the ground, did not sense a large EU-presence or felt particularly pressured by a top-down entity. The difficult part was to get the project through the selection round, and then as long as the budget was accounted for, people didn't sense any presence of the European Commission looking over their shoulders. The reason I am interested in this aspect, is because some academic literature on European politics suggests that the EU is using its Neighbourhood policy to manage its outside borders, and to control its neighbours and shape their policies towards the European model. When continuing this line of thinking, it could look like the EU is imposing its values and culture onto non-European countries in return for money, in order to have more influence there without physically ruling there. But I believe those involved in the actual projects didn't feel strong about this, and are happy to use these opportunities for better socio-economic development in their own region, without losing their own identity in any way.

As stated before, I believe the aspects of migration is inherent to the Mediterranean setting, and therefore I involve it in my research. But it seems the refugee crisis did not have a big direct impact on the programme at all. The programme is not designed to deal with social and political programme, it is beyond the reach of this programme's content and budget. A relevant distinction that is to be made in regard to the migration crisis, is the one between emergency and development. The direct intake of refugees that have risked their lives coming to Europe and arrived on Sicily is not something the programme is influenced by or designed for. However, on the matter of development, the people involved did have a lot to say. It is very important to show young people from mainly African countries that there are many opportunities in their own countries and create and enhance these via

programmes like this one. Europe or any other land should never be illegal territory for any migrant, but we have to make clear that there is no certainty of a better future in Europe, and to empower youngsters in their own region, since they are still very vulnerable when migrating. Migration is a very delicate issue, and everybody recognized this, even though they were not able to account for it in the project's contents. For the next call of 2014-2020, it is attempted to involve this aspect more into programme content, both on emergency and development, and more is done to show that the programme is not neglecting this issue.

Related to this migration issue are the mobility issues that people involved in the programme have experienced. The equal basis of all participants is affected by the visa restrictions that Tunisians have to deal with and Italians, or any other Europeans, do not. When Tunisian partners have to travel to Sicily for their meetings, seminars or workshops, they need to apply for a visa early in advance and they have to go through this bureaucracy every time they go. In addition to this, they have to face a border police that can be questioning them, which again the European counterpart does not have to deal with. The programme that is showing the cultural connectedness, and in fact how close two regions from different continents can be, and what a bridging factor the Mediterranean sea can be, is affected by the EU visa policies, which on the contrary reveal the European castle and the severity of the border again. What these mobility restrictions show, is a double standard. The ENI offers a cooperation programme on equal basis, but still one party is privileged in mobility and the other affected. This made planning of meetings and travels more challenging and caused a lot of frustration under participants. It has been put forward that for the next call, different measures will be took, to make sure participants of the programme need to apply only once during the running of their projects, to make smoother.

### **Personal experience of Sicilian-Tunisian culture**

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

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

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

When travelling through the island, I used the busses a lot. I did need to adjust to this, because there are several bus companies, and you need some time to find out which company does the route you need to take, where to buy your ticket, and where in the city of your destination you are dropped off, which is not so evident mostly. But I have to say it is very affordable in comparison to the Netherlands. Public transportation here is faster but more expensive. Another thing I had to adjust to was the customs of going to restaurants. Being from the Netherlands, I am used to have dinner a lot earlier than the Italians do, and also take less time for it. I went for dinner together with hosts or people I met a few times, and it is really nice. I believe Sicilian people are at their best when going for dinner, you get a few hours of enjoying each other's company and everybody is full with excitement and laughter.

The hospitality of both Sicilian and Tunisian people I met is truly amazing. Everybody I met went out of their way to help me with my research as good as possible. Not only did they take plenty of time for me, they were prepared to provide me with any documents or papers that could be useful and are willing to keep if I need anything else. Their habits of treating guests is really good and you immediately feel very welcomed. Using Airbnb helped a lot with this, because with this concept you always have a local nearby that you can ask anything you need to know. The accommodation I have stayed at were all very different, but all more than enough for me. The one that stands out for my experience was in Ragusa. I stayed with Marco, a young entrepreneur, who owned a combined shop and café/restaurant/lunchroom kind of setting, where he sells fresh food and you can enjoy a nice meal. We spent some time together in house, sharing breakfast at his shop, cooking each other some meals and we walked together through the valley of Ragusa, to Ragusa Ibla, the old town that is built onto a hillside, where buildings are connected through a network of stairs. To nicest thing about this experience is that I really felt at home for the short time I was there, and I could to some extent live like a local, which is the best way to get to know a place. In Trapani, I was hosted by a very nice couple, who took me along for dinner once with their friends and where extremely friendly people. It are mainly these experience I cherish the most.

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

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