THINKING REGIONS IN THE 21st CENTURY. A MEDITERRANEAN APPROACH

The Mediterranean Sea area is widely understood to represent a distinctive geopolitical region, especially in International Relations studies. It is conceived as a region with common features and a dynamic of its own. However, there are also many approaches that refuse that idea and see the Mediterranean as a fragmented space, an intersection of three continents, where many countries get in touch, but without any common goal or shared perspective.

Although this could be considered as a problem regarding the Mediterranean, it actually goes far beyond that.The first focus of this paper is the discussion of regional studies and the meaning of *region* itself. This has been a subject studied for decades in many fields, but no definition has been found. Region as one between other methods of space classification.
Once the concept of the region is defined, the problem around the definition of regional building is presented. A process where territorial codification takes place at the same time as symbolic and institutional construction.

Speaking about the Mediterranean easily reminds us of Braudel and his masterpiece, *The Mediterraneans and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.* Thanks to him the Mediterranean has been considered, in the last four decades (the book is from 1972), as a fascinating and significant region. A place of union and coexistence in a well defined area. However, the way of tackling the area is not always understood like he did, and several approaches can be considered. The narratives or the story telling of the Mediterranean can be described as a composition of multiple spaces.

The European Union has understood and dealt with the different ways of considering the Mediterranean area. Recognizing that for many years it has turned his back on that space. The interest for the Mediterranean was so late. It was not until the eighties of the last century when some coastal States came to be part of the European Union, by that time still named the European Community. Since then, the Institution has carried out different, sometimes confusing, policies towards the Mediterranean, but without a clear definition.

In 2007 during his election speech as President of France Nicolas Sarkozy, proposed the creation of a *Union of the Mediterranean,* as a continuity of the Barcelona Process. He wanted to demonstrate to the other European Partners, the huge interest of France in this area. It is important for one to take into consideration that by this time other European policies were being invested in the area. But as Sarkozy had announced it, it seemed that he wanted it to go one step beyond.

The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the different ways of comprehending the concept of region in its different meanings. And try to apply them to the construction of the Mediterranean in its perpetual regional transformation. Trying to understand as Giaccaria and Minca points out why since "there is no a solution to the question of how to define the Mediterranean space, maybe it's better to try to reflect the reasons why a stable and reassuming mapping of the area has never been possible." (Giaccaria and Minca, 2001; 345).

Regions

Very often regions are defined as bounded or delimited areas with specific and unified characteristics that make them seem different to other areas (Johnston and others, 2000). Fixed and closed areas of analysis as container spaces instead of mobile places were interactions happens.

Regionalization could be considered as a partitional but also as an aggregative process. The first refers to a world structured into separated spaces, bounded regions. Meanwhile the later involves they all can fit together and conform a totality or a net of regions, besides this compartments. Thus regionalization is understood as classification, some parameters have to be fixed before doing this. Any kind of classification needs a prior identification of the objects and that means a previous judgment.

One can imagine many different arguments about what regions are and how they can be used. But in order to be more specific while trying to approach to a final concept, it is useful to bring Agnew's dissertation up (2012) about the five most common usages of the concept of regions. Those which have dominated across the social sciences for the last decades:

Macro-regions as units for the pursuit of total history.

With this sense regions emerge based on functional relations that are keeping with the same characteristics along the time, and allow distinguishing one region from another. Regions become separate objects, as pieces of a puzzle that are easily differentiable.

Functional regions.

This way of understand regions is so closed to the previous one but the main difference lies in the object. Here we consider the region not because of its history or spatial configuration but due to some of the phenomena that happen on it. Where urbanization, industrialization and trade are, perhaps, the most common.

Regions as geographical areas of similarity.

Place is delimited by some fixed containers where some patterns of demographic, social or political behavior are considered to follow the same guidelines.

Regions associated with the New Regionalism.

This usage focuses on the growth of the initiatives, carried on the regional level, that manage economic challenges in a globalized world.

Regions as a place where subnational identities arose.

Although most of the interpretations of regions lie on supranational entities or organizations, and besides the globalizing trend, there is also at the same time, movements demanding for their differences in smaller scales. Regions as categories of practice where people define themselves as a group, without regard for the classical boundaries.

But this might be a much elaborated differentiation. Broadly speaking, and looking the different references, it is easy to recognize two ways of understanding regions:

The first one brings up the idea of regions as homogeneous blocks, delimited spaces that have a persisting distinctiveness, thanks to its physical characteristics, but often it is also extended to its cultural or social ones.

Regions exhibit a self-evident uniform block of terrestrial space; formal structures "in the sense that they are the result of aggregating smaller geographical units according to statistical similarity without attending to what it is that binds the region together with respect to functional ties." (Agnew, 2012; 7). Regions seem as real, tangible, touchable, empirical visible

parts of the Earth's surface.

The second one, links regions with constructionist or postmodernist theories, where regions are mere societal inventions. Regions do not exist by themselves they are operational scales that depend on the relations, networks and flows that are developed and define them.
It is a socio-political convention that structures the world into many geographically variegated scales. Hence, regions are understood as processes, mutable and subject to changes and reformulations along time, but also into the space.

Therefore, regions become a classificatory device, that can be understood in several ways: as communities, territories, networks or societies.

For understanding the construction of regions it is useful to turn to Paasi who explains that the institutionalization of regions consists of four stages: "the development of territorial, symbolic, and institutional shape and its stablishment as an entity in the regional system ands social consciousness of the society." (Paasi; 1990; 1).

Paasi states that regional building is a process in perpetual transformation due to that regions emerge, transform and finally disappear. They are never given administrative units, they are considered as dynamic social categories. Thus regional formation is just a chapter into the regional transformation and at the same time one can considered four stages that shape that institutionalization. Those four steps do not necessarily have an order and could coincide in time and it is just impossible to understand them without considering also other sociospatial unities as local, state or international ones. Basically, trying not to be reductionist, those four stages are:
The development of territorial space. That means the localization of practices within a delimited space. Thus, this area conforms some boundaries that identified it as a differentiated unit in the spatial world structure. Boundaries are a key element in the formation of any structure. They defined what it is inside and those things (or people) that remain outside.
The formation of the symbolic shape. Any region needs the creation and acceptation of some symbols or signs, that constitute the imaginary, it brings the framework that associate the concept with the object. The most important one could be the name, but also the borders itself can become a symbol, not to forget flags, shields and other emblematic symbols.
The emergence of institutions. We can understand them in two ways: the formal establishment as mass media or civil organizations, or as those referring to practices of cultural, economics and politics. Those last ones, can create flows as markets or tangible institutions as administration headquarters.
The establishment as a region. That means its constitution in the regional system with the corresponding appearance of a social consciousness. Therefore, the region starts to be identified by their own inhabitants or memberships, but it is also recognized by outsiders or other institutions that conform the system.

But what will this institutionalization serve for? This process could be framed into the world regional building. Sometimes a problematic and contested activity for parceling, regulating and representing space (Jones, 2006) but also a powerful tool to respond and take part of the globalization, the new economic and geopolitical architecture.
Regional building "highlights the social construction of regions, the representational practices utilized by state actors, and the contingent relations between agency and narrative

in constructing geopolitical space." (Jones, 2006; 418). It means the creation of new narratives new patterns of socialization and interactions that the dominant actors will try to drive into their interests.

It is possible to maintain older structures or create new ones in the geopolitical order, with new institutional, transactional and cultural boundaries in which relations are defined and the frames of economic and political action determined.

Mediterraneans.

> *A territory is created by people in time is therefore a historical product*
> *of social and political interactions.*
> Schmitt-Egner (2002)

The area has received many names depending upon the shores, cultures, situations or point of views, as a reflex of its diversity. But this might be because there is not just one Mediterranean, there are a lot, as many as each person wants to construct. Creating prompt or generating discussion one can even state that the Mediterranean does not exist. But how is it possible to think that?

While talking about the diverse possible mediterraneans, it could be interesting to remind Matvejevitch and his "Mediteranski Brevijar" where he evocates an imaginary Mediterranean in a journey across its history. That will emphasize the literary meaning of regional building. It remarks how narratives are in the origin of the construction of consciousness of places.

As Matvejevitch does in his book, one can draw a sketch of several ways of understand the Mediterranean region. The most remarkable or representatives of the different conceptions could be attending on how many partitions the space is divided:

- Mediterranean as one area.

This is perhaps the most objective way of describing the Mediterranean would be paying attention to the physical circumstances and considering the twenty-two countries which have a coastline into the sea[1]. A list of states with its own borders, very different organizations and relations between them. However, even this classification could be reinterpreted or extended to other areas, considering some cultural, economical or historical ties. Thus, it is possible also to include Portugal, as the entrance of the Mediterranean, and Mauritania or Jordan.

- Two Mediterraneans.

A starting point could be Garcia Picazo's theory where she distinguishes between an unified and an integrated Mediterranean. The Mediterranean sea as a localization area of the planet but not as an area itself. An area where some countries shared a space with linked and common borders and interactions but not an integrated area. Thus it is possible to divide the sea into two: north-south, centripetal-centrifugal, unity-diversity, meeting and rupture, etcetera. (Barbé, 1999; Garcia Picazo, 1999; King, 2001; Pace, 2006; Stocchiero, 2009).

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[1] Those twenty-two countries from north-west to south-west are: Spain, France, Monaco, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Palestinian territories, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Lybia, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

Due to the complexity of the Mediterranean and its heterogeneity, it is normally divided in two parts. The North, seen as relatively homogeneous, self-contained and spatially coherent. And the East and South, that are labeled just as South and seem as a fragmented space. Thus, the sea acts as a border making a division of the Mediterranean that becomes a reductive dichotomy. The old division of east and west has just changed to north and south, the sea became a fractured zone with highly differentiated contrast, a crossroad or a frontier between two dissimilar worlds.

Thus it is possible to talk about two kinds of relations between this line:

On one side, would be the united Mediterranean. The one of exchanges, coexistence, confluences meetings and circulation of ideas, people, languages or objects. The place where states stay side by side cooperating in a polyphonic scenario. Also the region described with a centripetal movement (King, 2001) where some common dimensions as geography, environment or history, and even culture some people would stress.

On the other side it is the fragmented Mediterranean. The one characterized by diversity and confrontation. Symbolized by conflicts, contradiction, ruptures, domination, wars and frontiers. A place where states interact face to face, in a centrifugal movement where it is almost impossible to put order. A cacophony where differences are emphasized and no common points are accepted.

- Three Mediterraneans.

On one hand this projection is possible because the Mediterranean is the meeting point of three continents, Africa, Asia and Europe. A vision that cuts the sea into three and that it is stressed by textbooks or some data of international organizations such as United Nations or the World Bank.

On the other hand, the Mediterranean could also be divided into three but in a very different sense. Bromberger (2007) makes a beautiful metaphor of the Mediterranean with three objects: a bridge, a wall and a mirror. The first two options resemble to the above section, with two Mediterraneans. The bridge resembling the united one, and the wall which one who represents the conflict. But the mirror adds a new idea to that division, it underlines the cultural complicities. It brings an anthropological vision that considers the Mediterranean as a cultural area endowed with a massive homogeneity.

- Four Mediterraneans.

King and his colleagues (2001) present Joannon and Tirone pragmatic division into four areas. A division based basically in politic-economical terms and the relations within the different states. Thus the map results with four quadrants:

The north-west, which represents the states who form part of the European Union, considered as develop and advanced countries.

The north-east, a group where Turkey clearly dominates but where the exyugoslavian states can also be included. Although with dissimilarities, they could share, at least in theory (or for western research) the communitarian model of development and an eventual aspiration to become EU memberships.

The south-east, a heterogeneous group of states, involved in several conflicts, in and outside their borders, among them stands out the Arab-Israeli one.

The north-west one, correspond to the Maghreb, a group of five countries, with some homogenic characteristics (demography, economy or migration) but which the last years, and especially the last one, has developed in different branches.

- Seven Mediterraneans.

It is curious that no five or six division have been found in order to develop this paper,

but even so two different seven division can be explained.

Balta (2005) continuing the literary vision of the Mediterranean prefers to talk about seven shores instead of areas, those work as join and division lines. He considers the north-south division as a reductionist schema and focuses on cultural, and moreover religious factors, to establish his division: the north-east or balkan mediterranean; the north-west or latin arc; the euroasitic or one of the east shores, composed just by Turkey; the other east shore, asiatic; then Egypt, that will conform the south-east just by its own; the south-west or Magreb and finally, two independent islands, Malta and Cyprus.

King (2001) by other side, presents the seven models of Mediterranean described by Brunet. It is not that he thinks that the Mediterranean can be divided into 7, but that it could be understand in seven different ways, that he resembles to natural elements. It is interesting to bring them up as a way to synthesize what has been explained in this section:

A schott (a lake in some desert areas of North Africa or Middle East). It is a Mediterranean understood as a closed basin with few external relations.

A strait, a maritime space between two continents.

A lake, a place where maritime connections take place.

A isthmus, or a bridge between continents, a meeting point.

A frontier, a hostile barrier that separates spaces.

A core area, the center of a region organized around poles of development.

A tension area, a region with areas of different levels of development.
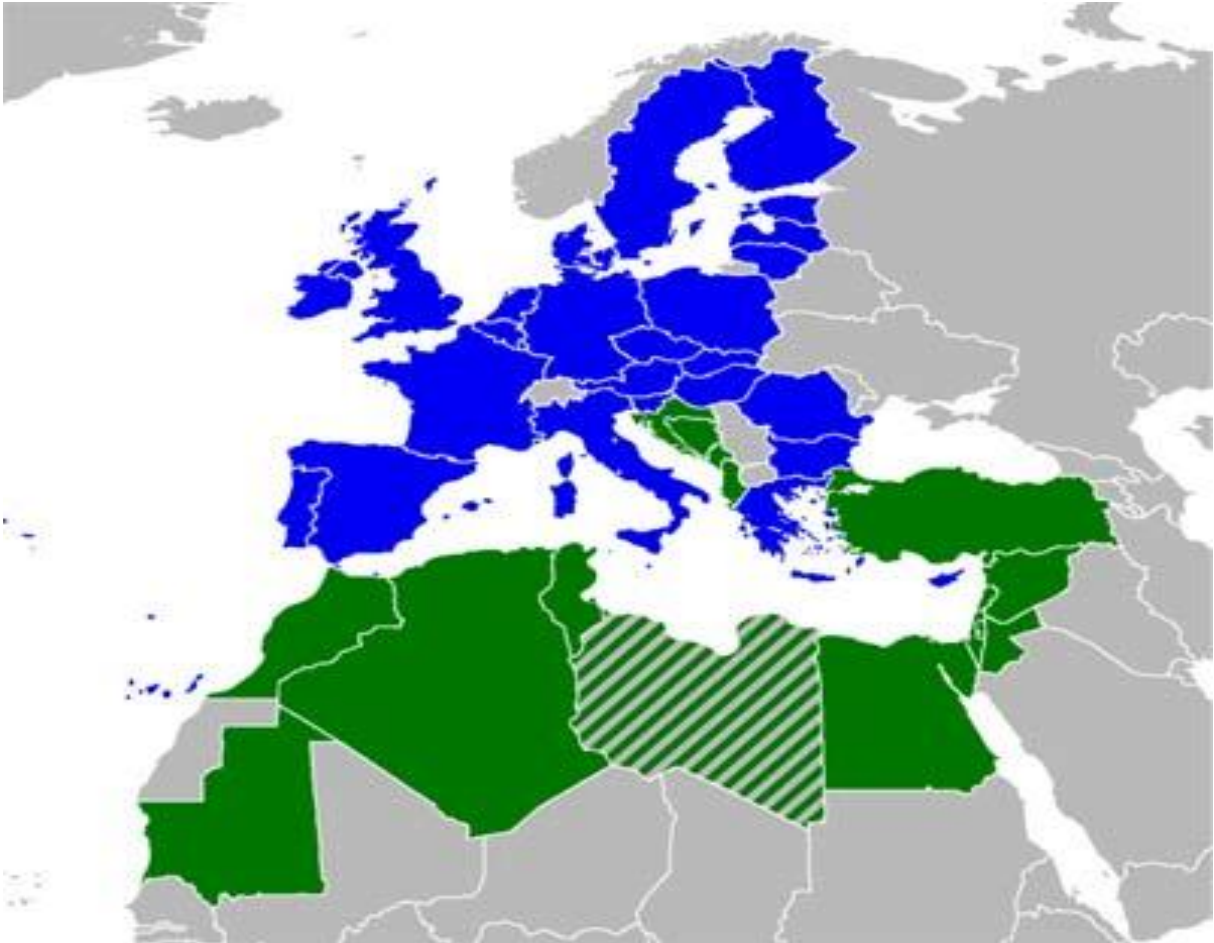

Union for the Mediterranean.

While Fernand Braudel described the Mediterranean as a thousand things together.
We might even wonder wether it really exists politically and economically.
Prodi (2002)

As Paasi has shown, the institutionalization of regions is crucial as a mode of legitimating their existence in the process of regional building. This is even more necessary regarding the creation of political identities. The European Union has always realized about that geopolitical fact and has been trying to pay some attention and regulate the Mediterranean since 1960. However it was not until 1995 when the European Union launched a real regional building initiative with the Barcelona Process.

From this first initiative, until the most recent one, the Union of the Mediterranean, which will be addressed soon, one problem has appeared: how to create one common area, which should be based on three pillars: markets, democracy and regional multilateralism, what has been named as europeanization. This offers "opportunities for achieving specific socioeconomic objectives, extending political influence, and promoting views that give direction and meaning to state capabilities and capacities." (Jones, 2006; 428).

In addition, the European Union has been anxious to find ways of increasing the development in the Mediterranean. Especially after September 11th 2001 and its consequent securitization of the foreign policy, and due to the continue deterioration of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The goal was to extend the European patterns, change the organization, operation and political methods of the countries surrounding the area. As dependency theories, the European Union model produces the conversion of time into space that brings the idea that

backward or traditional areas will end into advance or modern ones, like in a temporal continuum. According with Said ideas, the Mediterranean regional building will be constructed based on some premises of the two fragmented Mediterranean model, which considered a developed and stable north poled threaten by an underdeveloped and chaotic south.

Source. http://es.barcelona.com/eventos_en_barcelona/union_por_el_mediterraneo

Perhaps with that prejudice but also, with at least at first sight, an innocent attempt to bring together all the shores, the Union for the Mediterranean was launched on July 2008 at the Paris Summit. It was as a continuation, or even as a replacement (its impasse was almost accepted by all politicians in Brussels) of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Thus, it is also known as Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean. In many studies it is considered as a reshaping of the Barcelona Process, others just state that is a completely new institution. Whatever it is, it was pointed out in the introduction, this project was born from an initiative from Sarkozy on May 2007 with the aim of changing the Euro-Mediterranean relationship. Before going into a deeper description of the Institution in order to analyze some of its aspects, it could be interesting to understand why this institution was created.

Sarkozy launched this idea in a speech just after he had won the French elections and he developed it in his first visit to one of the countries of the area, Morocco, in October of the same year. The initiative was initially called *Union of the Mediterranean,* and it would involve

all the States with border links to the Mediterranean sea. That first aspect deserves to be analyzed thus the name would explain many of the initial problems. It became so representative, because it finally changed the *of* to *for.* Which has such a geographical meaning.

Firstly it was conceived as a project where only the Southern States of the European Union would participate. This problem was raised when the rest of the Member States realized that they did not want to lose the chance of extending their influence or international policies. Sarkozy had planned an institution that would work with concrete projects around the Mediterranean that would only include the countries in the basin which had the goals of the Barcelona Process and would tent to marginalize the other initiatives of the area. Furthermore, as he had presented, it would not be a Communitarian policy but it would use funds of the European Union. The European Union, and especially Germany, did not agree to delegate such an important area to just one of the Members. This would have meant to break the habit of having Brussels as the place where the decisions are made and it could arise similar initiatives in other areas, with a spillover effect at the Easter countries, which could break the European harmony. (Emerson, 2008).

Along the first quarter of 2008 the organization seemed to risk, French and German positions which remained distant. However, during the spring meeting of the European Council the problems were solved and there was a final proposal. At the end the Union has been launched as a Communitary initiative and has changed its name to Union for the Mediterranean. It does not only include States of this area (*of)*, it will be a project of the whole EU but all its Members will be working *for* the Mediterranean.

In Paris, July 2008, the Union for the Mediterranean was finally reached. Just the meeting for its institutionalization has been considered a success. All the Head of the State and Government of the states involved met together to adopt the joint declaration of the Union. It could be considered as an insignificant detail but it reveals the importance that was awarded. With this initiative a new way of understanding the relations with the states of the Mediterranean was starting to appear.

The Union for the Mediterranean will try to build a political organization in the area, bringing to the regional system a new unit that will try to implement different plans among and within the Mediterranean States. It has brought a new wave of action, of relation and at the same time will cohabit with other programs that are already taking place in the area. The initiative starts from the premise of two isolated worlds, with the intention of overcoming. It appeals to a common history or roots which facilitate the rapprochement, to take again entailments; in short, to overcome the difference that has been built or perceived for centuries. The main goal is the creation of a shared "area of peace, stability, security and shared prosperity, as well as full respect of democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms and promoting of understanding between cultures and civilizations." (Union for the Mediterranean, 2008b; 1)

So in conclusion, in the last years European Union policies toward the Mediterranean area have attempted several changes in order to respond all the new threats and expectations. (Stocchiero, 2009) Nowadays the Mediterranean political framework is shared by two instruments (besides the UfM it is also the European Neighbourhood Policy which has not been explained in the current paper). They have mutual goals, so they can overlap in

certain aspects, but basically they have different ways to achieve them. While the Union for the Mediterranean tries to reinforce the euro-mediterranean area as a whole creating a space of cooperation based on concrete projects that aim to improve the situation; the European Neighbourhood policy focuses in each country separately trying to develop their institutions in order to adapt to the European market. It could be said, that the former is a common project while the latter is an European one.

However, something strange appears while just looking for the Members of this organization. Several Mediterraneans have been explained but none of them were the ones consolidated in this institution. The delimitation of the Mediterranean space it is at least, surprising. Given that it is a communitarian initiative where the twenty seven States of the Union take part. That amplifies and moves away the center of the action, which is not *in* the Mediterranean. It is for that reason that the creation of a geopolitical area is in doubt, and seems more like a new tool for the European Union to extend its influential area.

Conclusions.

The major socio-political uprising of the Arab revolution has not other but emphasized further the geopolitical significance of the Mediterranean world. Moreover, as it happened two millenniums ago, with Mesopotamics, Egypt, Greek and Roman civilization, the Mediterranean has been again the center and the pioneer of a revolutionary movement that has spread as a domino all over the world. The cradle of civilization perhaps has revived.

Although the resignificance of the area in world politics, besides the formation of the organization, the area still remains separated. The regional institutionalization building has started, some administration has been developed; probably the most significant measure, the Secretary of the Union localized in Barcelona, have been started, but the rest of the stages specified by Paasi are not that obvious. It is normally heard about a Mediterranean culture, aspect in which is better not to stop its meaning, but with just a quick glance over the Union it is easily glimpsed that there will not be a new own notion of the area. What the EU tends to do is assimilate the *south* with the north, integrate it. Barbé (1999) has stated that several european voices predicted a possible world isolation of the Mediterranean countries if they did not assimilate to Europe, and perhaps, what it seems that this organization is trying to do, avoid, in a paternalistic or neocolonial way, the creation of a new periphery at the borders of the European Union. In other words, it could be understood as a new battle to control the Mediterranean.

Would the situation change with the new movements along the difference shores?
The asymmetry of power in the EuroMediterranean relations is being routinely contested by many Arab countries, also Turkey or Israel. And it has no more than incrementing with all the changes and proclaims that the arab spring has brought for the last year. It has tried to construct an entity without first solving some problems that seem essential, without sweeping away some barriers that do not allow an equal and symmetrical relation, the European countries have self-declared the directors of the game, but it has not finish yet.
However, not everything has to be criticized. It is true that top-down designations are rarely enough for a creation of an identity. Governments or other kinds of political

organizations could define the spaces, but some impetus from the local actors and all the societies have to take part. The organization has brought the tools or maybe just the excuse, and also the new technologies, to put the civil organizations together. Perhaps this is just the beginning of something big. After all, the Mediterranean identity remains in the roots of all this people, independently of political or economical interests and due to some claims that have arose the destruction of previous prejudices or the construction of bridges can become true.

To summarize, this paper not only have tried to describe a general overview of the situation in the area. It also involves a classification to approach the study of the Mediterranean in different ways. In which the outcome is more or less evident: spatialize the Mediterranean has been a problem for centuries and depending on the issue it includes or excludes some areas or regions. Furthermore, taking into account the current events this does not seem to change in an immediate future. Everyone concludes that there is no common definition so the question could be: Is it possible to refer to a Mediterranean imaginary? Is there any kind of *mediterraneanism*? Will the Mare Nostrum revive and bring those isolated people to shine together again? Only its water knows...

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