

Titolo: Characteristics and effects of twin cities integration: the case of Reggio and Messina in Southern Italy

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JEL: R12, R53, R58

Keywords: *twin cities*, functional integration, polycentrism, urbanization economies, Reggio Calabria, Messina.

Abstract: Meijers *et al* define *twin cities* as cities that “are located in close geographic proximity to one another and were once quite distinct and independent, but have grown into each other over time” (2013, p. 39). The international literature on *twin cities* is rather wide, and includes several case studies (Buursink, 1994; Meijers et al, 2013; Joenniemmi e Segunin, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2013; Schultz, 2002, 2009). The case of Minneapolis and Saint Paul in the US, for example, is one of the most popular cases, but several cases were identified and studied in – or cross-bordering - European countries (Mannheim-Ludwigshafen, Frankfurt Oder-Subice, Tornio-Haparanda, Rouses-Giurgiu, Kirkenes-Nikel, Valenca-Tui, Valka-Valga, etc.), and even in Asian countries (for example, Blagovechchensk-Heihe, at the Eastern Chinese-Russian border).

This literature is also strongly linked both to the one concerning the polycentric metropolitan areas (Champion, 2001; Cowell, 2010; Egermann, 2009; Metrex, 2010; Tsavadaroglou, 2011) and to the one about agglomeration economies (in particular, urbanization economies) (Camagni, 1992; Melo et al, 2009). The question of the interconnections and interdependencies, in other words the question of the twin cities integration constitutes the key issue that stimulated the research works of several scholars, with the aim of defining the best strategies and policies to reach the optimal integration among twin cities.

In Italy, this issue has been rarely studied, although some cases of twin cities exist, such as the case of Gorizia-Nova Gorica (Gabrovec, 2013; Lipott, 2013), Muggia/Milje (Gabrovec, 2013), and Reggio Calabria and Messina (Limosani and Gambino, 2013; Signorino and Lanzafame, 2010). One of the most emblematic and known cases is the last one, Reggio Calabria and Messina, the two urban areas facing each other on the two sides of the Strait of Messina, in Southern Italy. It is a case still “unsolved”, that is to say, a case of twin cities yet scarcely integrated, in institutional and functional terms. One could say that “geographical, infrastructural, and institutional walls” yet exist between these two cities, although for more than one and a half century they have been part of the same country. This case has been rarely studied and discussed by local and national scientists and stakeholders, although its relevance in the regional and national geography (considering, for example, that the total population in the two metropolitan areas amounts to about half million inhabitants, being so one of the first urban areas in Southern Italy). In particular, questions such as which type of integration should be pursued (Institutional? Functional? Cultural? Related only to transport services? Or to other public services? etc.), and which benefits can arise from it for the local economy and for the entire population of the two cities. This is something extremely anomalous nowadays in Italy, when important institutional reforms

concerning the integrated governance of wide metropolitan areas are being implemented. The question of the construction of the long-planned suspension bridge across the Strait of Messina, which dominated in the national public opinion in the last decades, might help to understand why this issue was disregarded.

This paper firstly presents and discusses the literature about twin cities, taking in particular into consideration the question of the types of integration between them, and their effects. Secondly, it focuses on the case of Reggio and Messina, presenting it and analysing, by means of quantitative and qualitative data, the potential for integrating the two cities, and the range of possible positive effects that can arise overcoming the “barriers” and the “walls” still existing between them. The paper therefore aims at “filling the gap” deriving from the lack of relevant studies in this field, with respect to Italy.

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