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UNIVERSITY  
of Prince Edward  
ISLAND



# COVID-19 Island Insights Series

No. 2, November 2020

## Egadi Islands

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The COVID-19 Island Insights Series is an initiative spearheaded by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law & Governance (SCELG) and the Institute of Island Studies (IIS) at the University of Prince Edward Island in collaboration with Island Innovation. The initiative brings together critical assessments of how specific islands around the world have performed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the extent to which their recovery plans can promote resilience and sustainability in the long term.

For more information on SCELG see  
<https://www.strath.ac.uk/scelg>

For more information about the IIS see  
<http://islandstudies.com/>

For further information about Island Innovation see  
<https://www.islandinnovation.co/>

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Egadi Archipelago (comprised of Favignana, Levanzo, Marettimo, the Formica islet, and the rock of Maraone)

Population 4.337 (of which about 3400 in Favignana)<sup>1</sup>

Size 38.32 km<sup>2</sup> (of which 19.8 km<sup>2</sup> is Favignana)<sup>2</sup>

The Archipelago is a municipality that is part of the Province of Trapani and is located on the western side of the Sicilian Region.

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### COVID-19 data<sup>3</sup> and timeline

Number of cases 0 [0% of the population vs about 0.5% in Italy and 0.12% in Sicily]

Number of fatalities 0 [0% of the population vs about 0.06% in Italy and 0.006% in Sicily]

Schools closed on 4 March 2020; are reopening in September (only summer camps and a few pre-schools were authorized to open in mid-June)

Travel restrictions enacted on 22 March and lifted on 2 June.



EGADI ISLANDS<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Data obtained from the ISTAT website, <https://www.istat.it/it/dati-analisi-e-prodotti/contenuti-interattivi/popolazione-residente>

<sup>2</sup> Data obtained from the ISTAT website, <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/156224>

<sup>3</sup> Data obtained from <https://lab.gedidigital.it/gedi-visual/2020/coronavirus-i-contagi-in-italia/>

<sup>4</sup> Map downloaded from [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isole\\_Egadi#/media/File:Aegadian\\_Islands\\_map\\_it.png](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isole_Egadi#/media/File:Aegadian_Islands_map_it.png)

## COVID-19 on the Egadi Islands

Restrictions in Italy were mainly imposed nationally. On 8 March lockdown began, including in the Egadi Archipelago. Anybody coming to the Region<sup>5</sup> had to inform authorities of their arrival and self-quarantine for 14 days. Sicily also reduced the frequency of ferries to the Egadi and stepped up sanitation procedures. All passengers needed a certificate declaring why they were travelling and had to remain inside their vehicles during the crossing. Checkpoints to control temperature were installed at the ports of departure.

Italy's most restrictive phase was issued on 22 March, when the National Government<sup>6</sup> established that no one could move out of the municipality in which she/he was located, unless they were essential service workers (e.g., health workers, law-enforcement officers, etc.), or had specialized health needs.

Each family became an island. Isolation was already a way of life for the Egadi residents who are used to spending winters among themselves. However, the islands were even more silent than usual as lockdown was well respected and the many islanders who spent months on the mainland could not return home. The few outsiders – mostly policemen and doctors who travelled from the mainland – were regarded with suspicion. Fear was high as health facilities are very basic on the islands and patients requiring specific treatment need to be taken to Trapani (via ferry or helicopter).

### Key socioeconomic pressures in the Egadi Islands during COVID-19

Food was not scarce. The few farmers and cattle keepers of the islands continued their work providing fresh products to their fellow islanders and daily ferries carried the usual goods. Fishermen reduced their activities as the absence

of tourism and the closure of restaurants reduced the demand for fresh fish. After the first few weeks, the municipality, together with not-for-profit local and national organizations, distributed grocery vouchers to the families most in need (though there was some criticism raised over who deserved them and who did not) and organized a system of *grocery on hold* (*spesa sospesa*) whereby a person buys basic grocery goods and leaves them for someone in need to take.

The Egadi were COVID-19 -free when Italy entered Phase 2 on 4 May. Timidly, shops were reopened, kids rediscovered the sun, and streets were once again walked. However, life did not come back to normal quickly. Schools did not open, and tourism was still a dream (or a nightmare). In Mediterranean paradises like the Egadi, summers are fully devoted to tourism, which is the main, if not only, source of income for almost the entire population. In summer 2019 the population of the Egadi increased to more than 66.000 people (of which only 4.000 were residents)<sup>7</sup> and fear was high as it seemed that these numbers would not be reached again in 2020.

The first few tourists who reached the Egadi at the end of May (mostly people who have a second house there) were regarded as COVID-19 carriers and were kept at a distance.

However, as always, reality triumphed over fear, and by mid-June islanders accepted and welcomed the still few Italian (mostly Sicilian) tourists who came to visit the Archipelago – with COVID-19 restrictions well in place: face masks in shops and restaurants (luckily not while seated at the table), physically distanced facilities on the beaches, extra sanitization measures in hotels, and fewer seats on ferries. Most souvenir shops and restaurants reopened, bringing back some vitality to the streets.

<sup>5</sup> *Sicilian Region Ordinance number 5-13/03/2020*

<sup>6</sup> Ministerial *Decree number 6*

<sup>7</sup> Libero Consorzio Comunale di Trapani, available at: [http://www.consorziocomunale.trapani.it/provinciatp/immagini/FAVIGNANA\\_agg2019.pdf](http://www.consorziocomunale.trapani.it/provinciatp/immagini/FAVIGNANA_agg2019.pdf)

In July and August the holiday season had a drastic increase of tourists. So drastic that restrictions had to be raised (beaches were closed in the evening of Ferragosto – a national holiday – and masks were required to move around the streets of Favignana’s centre.

As the fear for losing their touristic revenues decreased, fear of COVID-19 raised again among the inhabitants. Just like Sardegna, the Egadi could have become a COVID-19 hotspot (with only 3 first-aid health facilities in the whole of the Archipelago).

### **Post Covid-19 recovery on the Egadi Islands: A different approach?**

Even though, during the last weeks of lock down, a lot was said about turning Egadi tourism in more sustainable ways, of lowering numbers and incorporating local knowledge and skills, the wave of tourism was welcomed according to usual habits.

However, *business as usual* tourism may not be the best way forward. The Egadi Marine Protected Area (EAMP) – at 53.992 hectares, the largest in the Mediterranean Sea – encompasses the whole Archipelago and is testimony to the sustainable practices that local people have had for centuries. Sustainability has meant sustainable fishing, little farming and non-intensive agriculture, all practiced by a small population. The arrival of tourism in the last 10 years and its transformation to *mass tourism* risks breaking the fragile equilibrium with local ecosystems.

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic could be a way to boost the plans that the EAMP, together with the Municipality<sup>8</sup>, some residents and local organizations, has strived to implement. Social distancing – as the director of the

tourism sector of Legambiente (one of the main conservation NGOs in Italy) said<sup>9</sup> – has a lot in common with the distancing necessary to reduce environmental impacts.

EAMP, which is in charge of taking care of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (in accordance with the Protocol of the 1995 Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean), is doing its best to lead the Egadi towards a sustainable, tourism-based recovery with the overall policy goal of promoting a more comprehensive, not low-cost, type of tourism. EAMP is developing a list of local youth to be employed to patrol physical distancing on beaches and is working on communication strategies to make tourists aware of new rules and risks. Together with the Municipality, as well as the National Agency for the Development of New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development, and as part of a wider state-funded project called *Sicilian Eco-innovation*, EAMP is further developing its efforts to create an environmental quality label to promote sustainable local activities.<sup>10</sup>

A way forward could be making the tourism season longer and expanding the types of offers, as well as shifting from low-cost to more luxury facilities in order to cover costs with a lower number of tourists. The Egadi are able to offer more than just sun-bathing and swimming, but also snorkeling, cycling routes, hiking, gastronomy, sport, ethnoanthropological sites and historical artistic beauties. The Western Sicily Touristic District (an institution aimed at promoting local tourism) has launched a new digital campaign called “Caribbean? No, Western Sicily,”<sup>11</sup> aimed at showing that in COVID-19 times the western side of Sicily can offer as much as many famous, faraway parts of the world.

<sup>8</sup> Some of the Egadi’s plans for Covid-19 recovery were halted by the fact that the mayor and public servants close to him were arrested for corruption shortly after lock-down.

<sup>9</sup> *Turismo alle Egadi: il ruolo dell’Area Marina Protetta – Isole Egadi*. Webinair, Comune di Favignana Isole Egadi, 21-05-2020.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ampisoleegadi.it/?idx=1448>

<sup>11</sup> For the campaign “Caribbean? No, Western Sicily”, see <https://nonsonoicaraibi.it/>



## Post Covid-19 recovery and the Sustainable Development Goals

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These forward-looking tourism plans are to be seen in coordination with the many environmental projects that EAMP is running in the Archipelago – concerning environmental education, environmental protection and valorization, research and monitoring, promotion and communication, and patrolling.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the municipality signed the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy joining the efforts for the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Finally, Favignana has a plan for sustainable transports, a quite efficient recycling-oriented waste management program and is involved in sustainable energy development projects.

While the above-mentioned already existing projects and activities are not attached to any official localized version of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the links are self-evident. In fact, the arrangements being planned on the Egadi and those already present promote the achievement of numerous SDGs, including Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), Goal 12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns), Goal 13 (Climate Action), Goal 14 (Life Below Water), and Goal 15 (Life on Land) in an integrated way. What might still be lacking is the full, conscious and active participation of local residents: while many are directly involved, others still feel left behind and are not aware of the actions being taken. The population, as anywhere in the South of Italy, mostly shares a feeling of suspicion and abandonment *vis à vis* the national and regional governments, which are still lacking appropriate plans for the sustainable requalification of the Egadi.

## Useful Sources

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- “Caribbean? No, Western Sicily” Campaign, available at <https://nonsonocaraibi.it>
- Comune di Favignana Arcipelago delle Egadi official website, available at <http://www.comune.favignana.tp.gov.it/hh/index.php>
- Egadi Marine Protected Area official website, available at <http://www.ampisoleegadi.it/?idx=102>
- Italian Ministerial Decree number 6, available at <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2020/03/22/76/sg/pdf>
- Libero Consorzio Comunale di Trapani, data on the tourism sector, available at: [http://www.consorziocomunale.trapani.it/provinciatp/images/FAVIGNANA\\_agg2019.pdf](http://www.consorziocomunale.trapani.it/provinciatp/images/FAVIGNANA_agg2019.pdf)
- Sicilian Region Ordinance number 5-13/03/2020, available at [http://www.comune.favignana.tp.gov.it/favignana/po/attachment\\_news.php?id=1443](http://www.comune.favignana.tp.gov.it/favignana/po/attachment_news.php?id=1443)
- *Turismo alle Egadi: il ruolo dell’Area Marina Protetta – Isole Egadi*. Webinar organized by the Comune di Favignana Isole Egadi (21-05-2020), available at <https://www.facebook.com/ampisoleegadi/videos/243020976792026>

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.ampisoleegadi.it/?idx=1588>

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