

The Mediterranean, a Cluster of Networks

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From Phoenician seafarers, Romans, Arabs and Ottomans, to small states such as Navarre, Venice, Genoa and Aragon, each has left its mark on the Mediterranean region, in many cases through significant cultures that have lasted for hundreds of years. These historical ties have led to the creation of trading networks, population exchanges and a sense of shared culture that still endures today.

At the same time, all of these activities have taken place within an environment, which in spite of the major impact of humankind, is still identified as one of the places in the world in which is concentrated the most biodiversity. This authentic Mediterranean area has received recognition in the form of regional environmental policies and funding initiatives, as well as governmental and intergovernmental structures and NGOs belonging to the area.

Regional environmental conventions and programmes have been running since 1976. The first international environmental convention signed after the World Summit held in Stockholm (1972) was the Barcelona Convention of 1975, approved by twenty Mediterranean states. The Convention has had many legal consequences, such as the support and upgrading of national regulations. In 1976, the first UNEP Regional Seas Programme was created (the Mediterranean Action Plan, or MAP) to support the implementation of

agreements made at the Convention. Since then, there have been other pan-Mediterranean agreements, such as the Geneva Declaration (1985), the Nicosia Charter (1989), and the Mediterranean Agenda 21 (Tunisia, 1995), as well as the formation of a Sustainable Development Commission (1996). The Convention to Combat Desertification has an Annex devoted to the North Mediterranean.

The EU has acknowledged that cooperation with the countries in the South and East Mediterranean is a priority issue, and after the European Mediterranean Summit in November 1995 it launched an ambitious cooperation programme (MEDA). The World Bank operates in the region through a special unit, the Mediterranean Environmental Technical Assistance Program (METAP), in coordination with the European Commission and the European Investment Bank.

In addition, most or virtually all Mediterranean countries have signed or approved the main international conventions. These include the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Migratory Species, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, among others.

All these conventions provide a comprehensive political framework for action in the Mediterranean Region, and enable the World Conservation Union (IUCN), through its Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, to perform a technical support role for implementation of their provisions, in partnership with NGOs and governments.

During the nineties, several NGOs initiated pan-Mediterranean initiatives. Many of these NGOs are members of

the IUCN, such as the WWF International Mediterranean Programme, the MEDForum Network of NGOs, the Mediterranean Information Office (MIO), and the MedWet Programme for the Mediterranean's Wetlands (EU and Ramsar Convention), programmes such as Parks for life, the Cilento Declaration or the Europarc Federation.

In total, there are about 2,200 NGOs within the Mediterranean area. There are also Mediterranean networks for other issues, such as water (Global Water Partnership, MedTAC) and the fishing industry (through the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, FAO). These networking initiatives offer services and exchange between specialists and organisations to improve management and conservation of specific areas.

The institutional networks work closely with networks that are considered ecological, and which include physical places such as the system of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI) of the Barcelona Convention, the Ramsar sites and the MaB biosphere reserves (UNESCO Programme on Man and the Biosphere).

There is therefore a series of important initiatives for the Mediterranean region, with a broad diversity of strategies. However, no comprehensive overview exists for the identification of shortcomings, synergies and other needs within the field. Thus, while the North coast has a strong institutional framework (consolidated NGOs and robust scientific and university institutions, EU directives and funding, effective networks of protected areas, and so on), in the South and East, we find only a weak network of NGOs and a worrying

lack of human and financial resources, which prevents the implementation of an effective strategy for conservation and sustainable use of the region's shared biodiversity and natural resources. We should not forget that the Mediterranean Sea, covering 2.5 million square metres and with approximately 46,000 kilometres of coastline, is one of the ecosystems that possesses the highest concentration of biodiversity in the world.

A recent example of the convergence of viewpoints from either side of the Mediterranean was the Conference on Protected Areas (held in Murcia in March 2003), organised by the IUCN's Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation in order to draw up a common Mediterranean vision of experience in the management of protected areas, for subsequent presentation at the World Parks Congress held in Durban (South Africa) in September.

The Murcia Conference was an event that symbolises a common desire to promote cooperation within the Mediterranean Basin, and was a major step towards defining a Mediterranean vision for the management of protected

areas. About 120 representatives from twenty-two countries took part in the various workshops, and five main issues were agreed upon to be addressed at a regional level: connectivity, governability, gaps in the system, training and funding. During the forum, more than thirty case studies concerning protected areas and management experiences were presented, technical documents were analysed, and the basis for a future action plan was defined. The Murcia Conference was presented in 2003 as the reference for the meetings and activities that have been organised up to date between experts working in protected areas on both sides of the Mediterranean. It was the first time that a Mediterranean vision was presented at an international forum such as the World Parks Congress, applying a process characterised by the use of regional mechanisms for offering specific, practical and effective programmes capable of taking regional circumstances into account and maintaining an eco-systemic view of the Mediterranean.

In the Mediterranean area it is necessary to strengthen cooperation be-

tween existing networks, as they have many goals and priorities in common, such as shortage of funding. This rationalisation of the various actions performed by the institutions operating in the basin (obviously we are referring to voluntary cooperation) could on occasion take the legal form of a memorandum of understanding or of specific joint projects, or even of bilateral or multilateral agreements.

The responsibility for protecting the environment does not lie only with government agencies or academic and scientific institutions. In order to progress toward a more effective and sustainable management of the Mediterranean region's natural resources, more participatory bodies need to be created, in order to provide a role for interested groups through advisory committees, local thematic task forces and other resources. Through the promotion of networks, it would be possible to work not only on exchanging experiences, but also on empowering civil society and building a common vision of sustainable development in the Mediterranean of the twenty-first century.

MEDITERRANEAN ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS

IAMF, International Association for Mediterranean Forests:

<http://www.aifm.org>

Global Water Partnership - Mediterranean:

www.gwpmed.org

ENDA Maghreb, Environment, Development and Action in The Maghreb:

<http://www.enda.org.ma>

Euro-Mediterranean Information System on the know-how in the Water sector (EMWIS-SEMIDE):

<http://www.emwis.org/>

European Environmental Bureau:

<http://www.eeb.org>

FoEME, Friends of the Earth Middle East:

<http://www.foeme.org>

Friends of the Earth Europe-Mediterranean Programme:

www.foeeurope.org/mednet

Greenpeace:

<http://www.greenpeace.org>

MCSD, Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development:

<http://www.unepmap.org/>

MEDCOAST:

www.medcoast.org.tr

MEDForum, Mediterranean NGO Network for Ecology and Sustainable Development:

www.medforum.org/

Medmaravis, research and conservation of island and coastal ecosystems in the Mediterranean:

http://www.geocities.com/med_avis/

Blue Plan for the environment and development in the Mediterranean:

<http://www.planbleu.org/>

Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP):

<http://www.unepmap.org/>

MedWet Programme for the Wetlands of the Mediterranean:

www.medwet.org

RAED, Arab Network for Environment and Development:

<http://www.aoye.org/Raed/elba.html>

REMPEC, Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean sea:

<http://www.rempec.org>

The Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE):

<http://www.cedare.org.eg>

MIO-ECSDE, The Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development:

www.mio-ecsde.org

The Mediterranean Technical Assistance Programme (METAP):

<http://www.metap.org/>

The Short and Medium-term Priority Environmental Action Programme (SMAP):

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/smap/>

World Conservation Union, Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation:

<http://iucn.org/places/medoffice/>

WWF, Mediterranean programme:

www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/europe/where/mediterranean/index.cfm