

# Preface

This Blue Plan report brings together three topics: possible scenarios for the future, sustainable development and the Mediterranean. This preface would, and rightly should, have been signed by Michel Batisse, chairman of the Blue Plan till 2004. He guided the development of the entire project, but sadly died before the report could be published. Until his final days, he put all his talent and immense international experience into this task. He deserves our gratitude and admiration for his invaluable contribution to the analysis of Mediterranean issues.

I would also like to thank all the members of the steering committee and everyone who has contributed to this report.

As a prospective exercise, the project was faced with the same methodological questions that were present when the Blue Plan was developing various trend and alternative scenarios in 1989. But a different method has been adopted, which takes into account the lessons learned from past prospective exercises.

Far from being limited to a simple, mechanical projection of past trends, a *prospective* analysis aims to anticipate the feedback and adjustments that may be generated over time by the projected developments. For example, it is easy to imagine that a continuation of current consumption trends for fossil energy sources will produce tensions in energy markets that will result in increased prices, which, in turn, will put pressure on demand and generate multiple responses. These could include a greater competitiveness of alternative energy sources, a search for improved energy efficiency or even a reduction in the rate of economic growth because of increasing energy costs as a production factor. The same process could be imagined in the field of water resources.

The methodological difficulties associated with prospective analysis result from the need to achieve a precise introduction of economic variables and social compromises, together with physical projections, and to model the system's evolution over time. And it is precisely because of the lack of appropriate ways of achieving this that so much previous prospective work has encountered problems and produced results that were not particularly perceptive.

The Blue Plan has sidestepped these obstacles by presenting an alternative sustainable development scenario in this report, based not on mechanical market

reactions or future socio-economic changes but on the assumption that proactive sustainable development policies are implemented; this scenario is then compared with a baseline scenario that assumes a continuation of the trends in the relationships between economic growth and the growth in environmental effects that have been observed over the past 30 years. From this point of view, it reflects the approach of the Johannesburg Earth Summit, which relies on political engagement by nations and actors for a more sustainable development.

In this way, the report tackles the issue of sustainable development head-on. The Blue Plan's past work on the environment and development had drawn attention, well before the notion of sustainable development even appeared, to the interactions between population, economic development, and pressures on the coasts and natural resources such as water and the natural environment. This approach, which is systemic as well as forward-looking, corresponds in practice with the concept of sustainability with its three pillars: economic, social and environmental, a concept that has particular meaning for the Mediterranean.

Sustainable development in the Mediterranean has specific features. Particular pressures come from tourism, urban concentration in coastal areas, the development of irrigated and intensive agriculture, the trend to abandon or poorly manage mountain regions, overfishing and intercontinental (Asia/Europe) maritime transport. All these pressures are exerted on particularly limited and fragile resources: water, natural coastal areas and the marine environment.

Furthermore, the economy/environment interface cannot be separated from social issues. Among the social questions covered by the Millennium Development Goals adopted within the United Nations framework, unemployment among the young is the most burning issue in the Mediterranean area. In the southern-shore countries, 30 per cent of young people were out of work in 2003, a 'record' compared with the world's major regions (unemployment among the young is also significant in some European Mediterranean countries), while significant progress has been made in access to education, gender equality and public health.

As in every region of the world, the Mediterranean presents specific sustainable development problems.

The topics covered in this report illustrate the degree to which sustainability problems are of growing importance and the number of crucial natural resource issues.

In this regard, it is important to stress the difference between 'strong' and 'weak' sustainability, the latter allowing for the substitution of natural capital by human or built capital. This distinction is also relevant in the Mediterranean, for example, in the water sector. Today, with large scale desalinization of sea water in some countries of the region, we are seeing the gradual substitution of some natural capital (the fossil fuels used for desalinization) and built capital (the desalinization plants) for the natural capital that is being used up (freshwater in its catchment area). The often-mentioned perspective of water as a limiting factor for economic development is perhaps becoming more distant while there is a growing use of fossil fuel energy, which itself could soon reach its physical and economic limits. In this regard, prospective work is all the more important for examining possible future developments.

The adoption of a weak sustainability approach based on these mechanisms of substitution may therefore eventually turn out to be dangerous. The Precautionary Principle would suggest that, without veering from this path, the alternative approach of strong sustainability should be explored, initially through a more optimal use of water and energy resources rather than a relentless pursuit of permanently increasing supply. In other words, the questions hanging over the future of water- and energy-related matters call for the implementation of a precautionary policy, which is exactly what is needed in uncertain situations such as those presented in this report.

This situation of relative uncertainty linked to assumptions on substitution may be highly relevant to the management of renewable natural resources, but not to that of limited resources such as natural coastal areas, coastal agricultural plains and island landscapes;

these are doomed to vanish forever at the present rate of consumption of coastal space by urban sprawl, roads, tourism and harbours. Here what is lost is lost for ever. And we cannot rely on self-regulation and substitution in these fields as long as the market works poorly for matters such as the irreversible use of heritage 'goods'. Ethical principles such as the rights of future generations to have worthwhile natural heritage such as sand dunes, beaches and lagoons, should be implemented by public authorities exercising their responsibilities. The draft protocol on integrated management of coastal areas responds to this concern, a protocol that the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention need to adopt and implement as soon as possible.

The Barcelona Convention plays an important role in the Mediterranean region as a forum for sustainable development, as well as a framework for cooperation in the management of common goods such as the sea. It is vital that this Convention continues and develops its actions and that it receives essential support from the European Union. It is also vital that the governance of sustainable development issues is improved and benefits from the necessary resolution of the remaining conflicts occurring around the Mediterranean Basin, that an atmosphere of detente and cooperation follows, and that increased human and financial resources are devoted to more active policies for managing cities, public transport, rural facilities, education and health, and to reducing pollution.

If this report contributes to progress in raising awareness of sustainable development issues in the Mediterranean and the adoption of the necessary actions, the Blue Plan will have successfully fulfilled its mission.

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