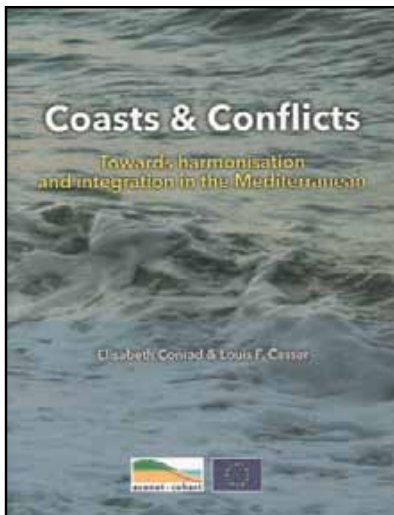


Coasts & Conflicts Towards Harmonisation and Integration in the Mediterranean

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Environmental management only began in Malta in the 1990s, when a lot of damage from development, and the related expansion in tourism, had already been done to our coastline. Tourism-related developments such as hotels, restaurants and clubs constantly strive to claim valuable stretches of the coast, as do property development and many other activities. With changing demographics and an increasing population, the battle for the coastline can only be set to intensify.

Huge pressures and threats are thus constantly placed on our coastal resources, together with their ecosystems. A study quoted in this publication points out that in some Mediterranean countries – including Malta, Libya, Greece and Cyprus – over 80 per cent of the population lives along the coast. The majority of Malta's one million tourists per year reside temporarily along the coast.

It is essential that all tourism development takes serious account of environmental concerns and not merely planning issues. This book aptly includes both "conflicts" and "towards harmonisation" in its title, which gives a good idea of its aim, which is to provide a way forward to achieve a holistic solution to coastal management, integrating the needs and competing interests of various "stakeholders" in the coastline to achieve the aim that is of interest to everyone: sustainability.

Fortunately, environmental concerns are now part of the national agenda. To prevent the further decline of our coastal systems, it is vital to secure the political will to promote and establish good coastal management practices. It is also necessary to adopt a holistic approach, integrating many different stakeholders, needs and approaches, always bearing in mind that the coastal system is dynamic and that changes in one part of the system will have an effect elsewhere in the system.

The term "holistic" implies that not only ecological or marine biological issues should be taken into account, but social, economic and cultural factors must also be included in all proposed strategies for coastal management.

The authors say: "With the collapse of fisheries, the degradation of habitats and consequent loss of species, the loss of crucial storm buffering functions and a variety of other such blows, the human race has had to wake up to the startling reality that resources are not limitless and that we may have already pushed coastal ecosystems beyond the thresholds of their survival."

This book provides an overview of coastal management issues and techniques in the Mediterranean, aiming for sustainability. In the words of the authors: "Solutions will only be found through coordination and integration". It is aimed at a wide audience and the many different players involved in managing coastal resources throughout the Mediterranean, not only the Maltese Islands, and will certainly be a valuable addition to the library of any groups or individuals interested in coastal management.

The coast is defined as the "physical interface between land and sea". The coastline is of economic importance to many communities that have settled along it throughout history – for tourism, recreation, fishing and other marine-related activities.

Coastal environments have a complex history – the coastline, together with coastal towns and cities, has played a central role in the social history of the Mediterranean, the so-called "cradle of civilisation". Fernand Braudel was the first historian to, almost 60 years ago, famously study the Mediterranean, taking into account the intimate connection between history and geographical space. He dedicated the first part of his seminal study of the history of the Mediterranean to man's relationship with the environment, and the second part to the region's social history.

Today we are faced with the challenge of a changing climate, which is predicted to have major impacts in the long term on the environment, including our

coasts, which will be affected in no small measure by changes in climatic and oceanic systems caused by global warming. In particular, the predicted rise in sea level may have a major impact on coastlines throughout the Mediterranean, particularly in low-lying areas. These geographical changes will, of course, also bring about social change.

According to this book, "the need for judicious management of coastal areas has never been more critical." This requires an understanding of three key features for effective management systems to be put into place: firstly, an understanding of the physical geography and ecosystems of the region; secondly, an understanding of the social and cultural context; and thirdly, the interaction between the natural and human dimensions.

Furthermore, "the Mediterranean increasingly exhibits symptoms of unsustainable development most of which seem to have roots that go no further back than the last two centuries of human development, and that are concentrated within the past four decades. It is the irony of human progress extending blindly and optimistically, without a realisation that there can be no human progress without a healthy environmental support system".

The book is divided into two parts. Part I looks at the background to coastal management issues and Part II discusses specific techniques of coastal management. It contains a good selection of illustrations and presents useful discussions on various approaches to coastal management, including ICAM, gives examples of regional, national and localised management initiatives in the Mediterranean and also focuses on the Econet-Cohast methodology of conservation of coastal habitats. It analyses different components, challenges and definitions of ecosystem management and gives case examples from different countries.

The authors also study concepts and methods of stakeholder involvement in coastal management, including identifying, engaging and interacting with stakeholders. Further chapters discuss landscape approaches to coastal management, environmental assessment, conservation strategies and geographic information systems and remote sensing.

The publication is part-financed by Interreg IIIB Archimed through the project Econet-Cohast, which seeks to address the need to establish and adopt environmental management tools and methodologies in the central and eastern Mediterranean.