Mediterranean Action Plan

URBAN MANAGEMENT
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Recommendations and Proposals for Action formulated by the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD), and adopted by the Twelfth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention
(Monaco, 14-17 November 2001)
URBAN MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

I. BACKGROUND AND FINDINGS

A. Mobilising actors and means of action towards achieving the sustainable urban development

Today, throughout the Mediterranean basin, in spite of several pioneering initiatives (Tripoli, Malaga, Essaouira, Ismailia, Rome, ...), the relevant stakeholders have not been in the position to offer their full support to the policy of sustainable development. It should be possible for the local authorities to express a strong political will regarding more transparent choices for the town and its inhabitants. They should be able to “tailor” it according to the size of the agglomeration and the specific situation. A particular attention should be paid to the small and medium-size towns (50% of the urban population of the region lives in agglomerations with less than 300,000 inhabitants).

The stakeholders are often municipalities which are either isolated or under the “sectorialised” tutorship of ministries and other administrative bodies which operate too separately from each other, while the sustainable development requires a more “transversal” action and a synergy between the local communities grouped at a suitable level and the State, provinces or regions, which should be true partners in land-use management and, accordingly, urban planning.

The civil society as a whole – population, associations, professions, enterprises – is not yet fully involved in practice as required by the Rio Declaration (chapter 28 of the activities). Very often, throughout the Mediterranean, the local Agendas 21 are good checklists, but are not followed by a decisive action. Citizen groups, organised as early as possible, enables to better formulate requirements and expectations over a long-time period and with respect to the mobilisation of available funds (participatory budgeting).

Training of stakeholders not yet aware of the ideas of sustainable development, and strengthening of the local capacity building are prerequisites of a good participation.

The international financial means, and especially the European support, identify very seldom urban programmes as such, although the local communities are the best places for implementing transversal projects that, for example, link transports, habitat and greenhouse effect, or water demand pricing and social equity. Euro-Mediterranean meetings like, for example, the Ministerial Conference to be held in Athens in 2002, could be good occasions for a new opportunity for the towns which, by the year 2025 in the Mediterranean will account for 70% of the population and where a large part of the problems relevant to the sustainable development will be concentrated.

As regards the resources, the national and local financing in the region is still controlled by, often outdated, fiscal frameworks. Changes are expected in order to enable the local communities, depending on the situation, to redirect the revenues and useless expenditures to environmentally friendly services or social objectives like the poverty reduction.

B. Acting towards a better management of urban dynamics

Urban planning, from Hippodamus of Millet to la Cerda in Barcelona, has marked the organisation of the Mediterranean towns, and still today the physical planning is an indispensable affirmation of the public interest in the towns where speculations and individual initiatives could not become lasting components of the systems which are becoming more and more complex. Over the past 30 years, urban and regional planning in the Mediterranean has provided good examples of what physical and land-use plans could be. The coast, which is generally exposed to most of the urban pressure in the
Mediterranean, calls for an ever stricter control (coastal laws, coastal programmes, "contrats de baie"/a tool for protecting and managing the coastal areas, created in France some 10 years ago; the contract is made by the local authorities concerned - municipalities, urban communities,...). However, placed within a time frame, as requested by the sustainable development, “the plans” should be reconsidered and formulated as strategies and programmes paying greater attention to the dynamics, organised or spontaneous, of urbanisation and to the ever faster changes of the civil society. The participative planning is a present day request expressed ever more frequently and strongly.

The Mediterranean towns and regions will draw long-term benefits from exchange of new experience (Catalonia 2010, Egypt 2020, etc.) and from regional strategic programmes with time horizons of 2010 or 2025 (in France, Egypt, Morocco, etc.).

Some issues, characteristic of the entire Mediterranean basin, were examined more thoroughly.

- Sprawl prevention. In the compact Mediterranean town the territory spreads through pavilion housing, cars, tourism, and especially the very strong demographic growth (an increase of 100 million urban inhabitants in the South until 2025), prices of land. Urban spreading is often to the detriment of the neighbouring agricultural land in the coastal planes, already scarce in the region. Other negative consequences are the risk of marginalisation (uncontrolled, often illegal housing), the high vulnerability of urban areas to natural and technological risks, and an increased greenhouse effect due to longer trips in motor vehicles. The “reconstruction of the town on the town”, the importance of town cores require renewed urban strategies. A long-term maintenance of the peripheral agriculture is often the most economical way of securing aeration of the town, upkeep of “landscape areas”, and reconnecting, in a positive sense, of the town and the countryside.

- Urban transports are one of key issues of sustainable development. Increased numbers of private cars, already considerable in the region or expected to become so (until the year 2025 an increase of more than 400% in the number of cars in Morocco, and an increase of more than 40% in the cargo transport and 30% in the human transport in the Southern Europe), will bring along a considerable risk of air pollution in the part of the world where, in summertime, meteorological inversions are important.

- Demographic explosion, uneven distribution of revenue, unemployment, have led in the towns, sometimes in the degraded ancient centres, and sometimes in marginalised suburbs, to the appearance and development of uncontrolled housing. In view of a progressive reintegration of often unhealthy housing, the local communities have to develop appropriate social and environmental policies that would benefit from being adopted with the involvement of the concerned population.

- The desired revival of the urban centres, but sometimes also the degradation of the housing fund or implosion due to traffic congestion, are very strong facts. The “reconstruction of town on the town” is necessary; yet it could pose risks if a careful and subtle strategy is not applied with regard to the historic heritage, both ancient and more recent. The local authorities, as well as the State agencies (historic monuments, archaeology) should join forces, and the State itself should play its role in order to secure that the clear laws on historic heritage is respected. It is evident that if the approach is global, in the Mediterranean the stakes are higher since this region is the most important tourist destination in the world. Furthermore, the directly interested population should be more involved in the protection and rehabilitation measures.

- Finally, some more aspects typically Mediterranean like the harbours and harbour zones which, often in decline, had to or still have to be “rehabilitated” or converted to open the
Mediterranean towns to the sea. But also to give all their space to inter-Mediterranean maritime navigation that could, in the years to come, have a renaissance in a new form, especially if we want to avoid air traffic congestion already indicated by an annual increase of more than 8%, or negative environmental effects of the cargo traffic along the coastal roads.

C. Improving public urban services management

The Mediterranean towns evidently share most of the urban management dysfunctions with the rest of the world, but especially those in the southern and eastern shores are characterised by the great problems relevant to following the rhythm of urban growth and to the lack of their own means. The priority problems regard the water supply, sewerage and solid waste management, and urban transports.

Faced by this situation, and within their efforts to mobilise means needed to finance infrastructure and urban services or to initiate social policies in their competence, the Mediterranean urban municipalities, even those that have managerial competence, search for external resources, and sometimes partner enterprises for the management. The States play a decisive role for a good management of the services, in the planning, regulation, financing, and distribution of competencies among various levels of administration.

The public urban services of municipalities or groups of municipalities could be managed either directly by the municipality personnel or by transferring those duties to public or private enterprises. In fact, it has been realised that neither the rules of the public market, concession charts, monitoring of sub-contractors, public accountability of the heritage, nor technical control are sufficiently taken into consideration in this respect. As for the methods of assessing the public opinion and impact assessment, these are still insufficient.

The need was also realised to implement legislative measures in order to improve financial and control capacities of the administrative bodies in charge of services management. The ways should be explored of how to secure the necessary control by the communities where some partners tend to impose inadequate conditions in terms of costs or sustainable development.

The pricing (adapted to economic and social criteria) and the administrative or techno-economic tools of control are the instruments on which the good implementation of sustainable development will depend.

D. Strengthening the Mediterranean and Euro-Mediterranean co-operation for a sustainable urban development

For several decades now, the co-operation among nations has become an instrument for improving the social, economic and environmental development. The United Nations Charter, the declarations and action plans from Stockholm (1972) and Rio (1992), Vancouver (1975) and Istanbul (1996) are some of the important milestones of the sustainable development of countries and towns.

The towns level is essential, and its interest was shown in Curitiba and Rio in 1992, in Istanbul (1995), and confirmed in New York in 2000 (Habitat+5). The local authorities and urban NGOs should be present in Johannesburg as they were in Rio and Istanbul. The Rio+10 Conference in Johannesburg will be an occasion to reaffirm that interest, and the Mediterranean States would benefit from a joint approach, and from showing also their own efforts at the regional. The Conference could provide a new impetus to the sustainable urban development.
At their level, the Mediterranean countries have already undertaken initiatives of co-operation, launched in Barcelona in 1975 and confirmed, from the point of view of sustainable development, in Tunis in 1994, and again in Barcelona in 1995. This also refers to the Euro-Mediterranean process.

However, a significant benefit would be drawn from bringing this co-operation down to the level of towns. Twinning of towns (more than 200 towns), existence of a network created in 1991 (Medcities), opened a path that could now be enlarged by a joint effort made by the towns, provinces or regions, and States.

This approach does not require the creation of an ad hoc institution or a RAC, but the use of guidelines prepared by the States, identification of urban programmes by the European and international donors, and a boost, on a voluntary basis, for thematic networks comprising regional and national towns and experts. Little by little, the associations and other representatives of the civil society, as well as the socio-economic partners would draw benefit from their active participation in this co-operation.
II. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Mobilising actors and means of action towards achieving the sustainable urban development

Recommendations addressed to the Contracting Parties

1. The sustainable urban development calls for the elaboration and implementation, by the urban municipalities and groups of municipalities, of medium and long-term development strategies, plans and programmes. These actions, of the Agenda 21 type, should be initiatives shared and contracted by all of the concerned stakeholders (services of the State, local communities, various actors of the civil society, socio-economic partnerships). They should have the integrated character, not only at the national interministerial level or at inter-services local level, but also between national, regional and local levels. The Contracting Parties are invited to promote and facilitate the elaboration of this approach.

2. Recognition of the role of various actors of the civil society in the urban governance should take form of their involvement in the process as early as possible. It is advised that this participation be in the form of a continuous consultative and management process. The local Agendas 21, and other similar initiatives such as Urban Strategic Plans, could become dynamic exercises for the realisation of this participative democracy.

3. The Contracting Parties are encouraged to create the necessary conditions for the strengthening of the administrative, technical and financial capacities of the municipalities. Strengthening of the local capacities should be implemented at all levels and involve directly the new stakeholders which have emerged from the process of decentralisation (local communities, community organisations, local or neighbourhood associations, ...). The capacity building mechanisms require transparency and actions aimed at popularisation of and sensibilisation to the issues and challenges of sustainable urban development, as well as specific training adapted to the role and prerogatives of the various local stakeholders (leaders, technical municipal services, associations, ...).

4. Present urban municipalities’ financial resources are largely insufficient to cover increasing needs for sustainable urban development, and in particular for fighting the urban poverty. Contracting Parties are invited to review and, where needed, to increase the financial resources allocated to local authorities. This could be done, inter alia, by increasing transfers from the state budgets to the local authorities and/or by using innovative local economic instruments. The international donors are invited to increase their funding targeted at specific urban development programs.

Recommendations addressed to the Secretariat

5. MAP should prepare an overview of the recent evolution and distribution of international (multilateral, bilateral and decentralised) and national financing intended for the urban development in the Mediterranean. Criteria could also be defined in order to better guide the future financing towards sustainable development.
B. Acting towards a better management of urban dynamics

Recommendations addressed to the Contracting Parties

6. Each Mediterranean country is invited to prepare guidelines, aimed at upgrading the existing planning tools in their towns in order to move towards global, integrated and prospective strategic planning taking into account the social, economic and environmental aspects.

7. The Contracting Parties are invited, within their regional development policies, to encourage balanced development of towns and regions, so as to prevent the excessive concentration on the coastal areas and/or the explosion of too large urban agglomerations.

8. Contracting Parties and Mediterranean towns, with the support of international programmes and the participation of the population concerned, are encouraged to increase efforts to prevent natural and technological risks. They are invited to prepare and implement rehabilitation programmes for degraded or unhealthy neighbourhoods in central and peripheral neighbourhoods of significant poverty, and contingency plans in risk-exposed urban areas. The preservation of the urban historic heritage should take into consideration not only the heritage or tourism objectives, but also aim at improving the living conditions of the local population.

9. Rehabilitation programmes for harbour fallow land should be established by the towns concerned, bearing in mind at the same time their interest in the use of the space, urban opening to the sea, and the possible future renaissance of the inter-Mediterranean maritime navigation.

10. The Mediterranean towns are encouraged to prepare and implement, in cooperation with the civil society stakeholders, municipal “greenhouse effects” combating plans. These plans should integrate all aspects of resource management (waste minimisation, recycling, energy saving, limiting urban sprawl...). They should also adopt specific plans for improving the urban mobility and transport, favouring the modes of transport that require less space and energy. Those plans would be harmonised with the principle of mixing of urban functions and uses.

Recommendations addressed to the Secretariat

11. MAP is invited to assist countries in preparing the guidelines for upgrading the planning tools and in publishing and disseminating them. It is also encouraged to prepare cost-effectiveness analysis of urban sprawl.

12. MAP should promote the exchange of experience in the field of policies for controlling urban sprawl, upgrading of poor neighbourhoods, the preservation and rehabilitation of historic settlements, and harbour rehabilitation and their integration in urban structure.

C. Improving public urban services management

Recommendations addressed to the Contracting Parties

13. The States should strengthen capacities of the authorities (national, regional, local) in charge of urban services and clarify, whenever needed, the institutional framework in order to improve the service quality and management efficiency.
14. In the case of management transferred to a private companies or public-private partnerships (PPP), the municipalities or groups of municipalities should secure that the contractors integrate sustainable development concerns in their mandates, and that they are capable of implementing efficient monitoring methods (progress and performance indicators, tariff control, etc.). When evaluating bidding applications the selection criteria should not be solely based on the “least cost” principle, but also on taking into consideration social and environmental goals and costs of sustainable development. The cost recovery principle in pricing public urban services should ensure access to services for the poorest citizens.

Recommendations addressed to the Secretariat

15. MAP should compile regional databases on management of public services and its costs in the Mediterranean towns which would facilitate the comparative analysis of the efficiency of these services, as well as of the pricing policies applied.

D. Strengthening the Mediterranean and Euro-Mediterranean co-operation for a sustainable urban development

Recommendations addressed to the Contracting Parties

16. The existing co-operation networks, both general (Medcities) and thematic (Medener, Healthy Cities, Medsafe, etc.) would be strengthened. They would be supported, as necessary, by European or international financing.

17. The local authorities and associations are encouraged to be better connected with and benefit from the programmes of international co-operation in the Mediterranean: identification of urban programmes by donors would facilitate this task, as well as the work of various instances concerned, such as Euromed Partnership, UNEP, UNDP, UNESCO, The World Bank, EIB, METAP, CEDARE.

18. The Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development, supported by the Mediterranean towns, could address the Euromed Partnership better use the existing funding possibilities for promoting and supporting urban sustainable development in the Mediterranean region.

Recommendations addressed to the Secretariat

19. The sustainable development is not a uniform model, but it should be tailored to local conditions. MAP should encourage exchange of experience by organising, inter alia, thematic workshops and web conferences for the towns sharing common problems and similar objectives, and maintain the information exchange, whenever possible together with the existing networks.