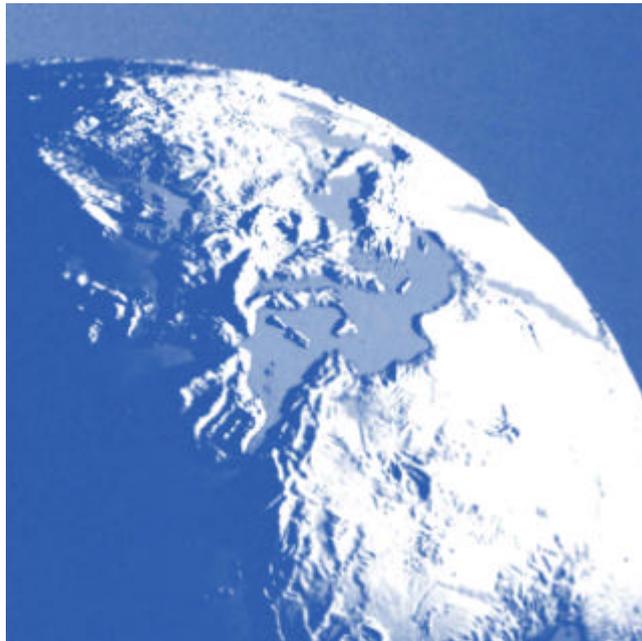




## URBAN SPRAWL IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION



Blue Plan  
Regional Activity  
Centre

Sophia Antipolis,  
March 2001

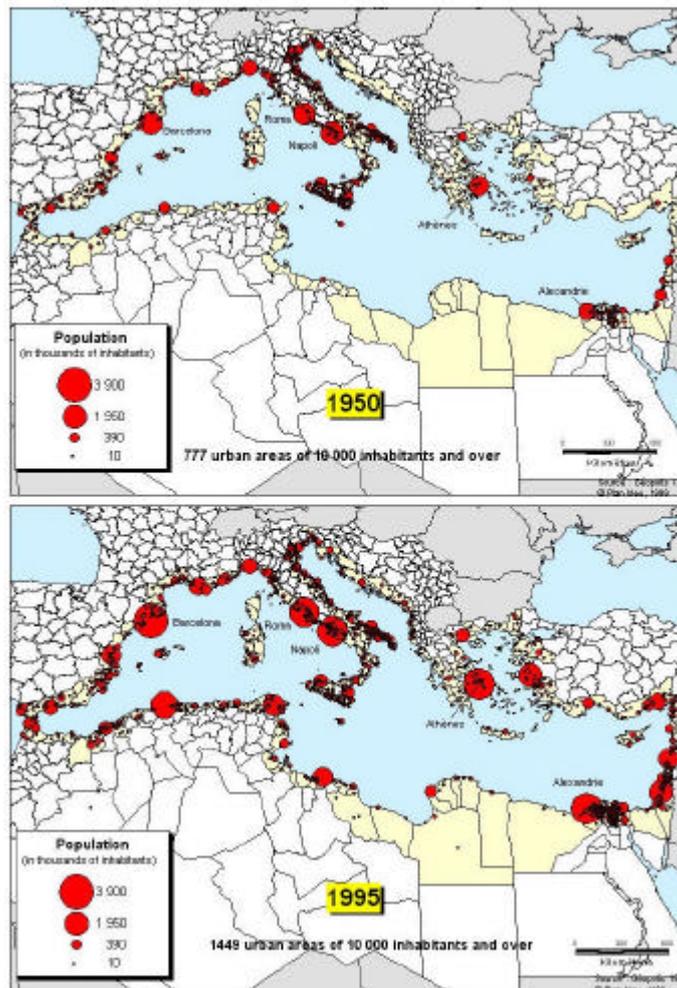
# Urban sprawl in the Mediterranean region

## 1 A spectacular phenomenon blending permanent habitat with tourism...

The urban sprawl process is especially wide-spread and worrying in the Mediterranean region for a raft of reasons, some of which are more particularly specific to this region of the world.

The very considerable phenomena of "coastalisation" (concentration of population and economic activities on coastal spaces) and tourist urbanisation adds to a demographic growth that is especially severe in the southern and eastern areas of the Mediterranean rim countries (the population of the 21 riparian countries went from 285 million in 1970 to 427 million in 2000 and will probably reach 524 million by 2025, according to Blue Plan trend scenario) and the phenomenon of urbanisation (urbanisation rates should go from 64.3 % in 2000 to 72.4 % by 2025).

Urban areas of more than 10000 inhabitants  
in the Mediterranean coastal regions in 1950 and 1995



The marked contrast between, on the one hand, vast areas of hills, plateaux and mountains suffering from considerable structural handicaps (constraints connected to relief and climate) and, on the other, narrow coastal and river plains (in general representing less than 5 to 10 % of the total area) explains the importance of the "coastalisation" phenomenon in a globalising economy.

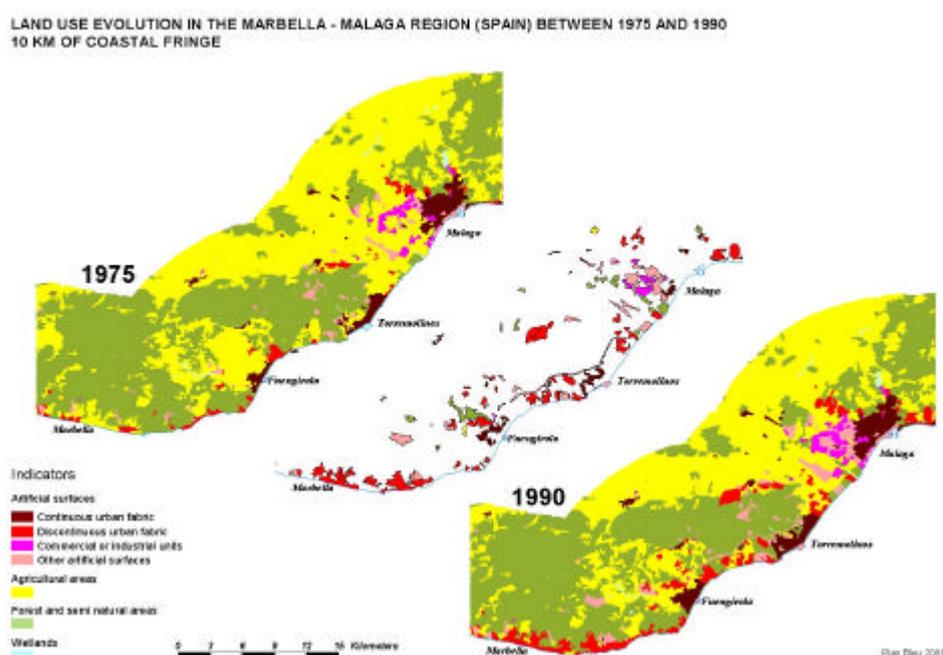
The destructuring of the traditional rural economies and societies of the inland areas has been and still is a major factor in the coastal urban growth of numerous Mediterranean countries, and "coastalisation" has been all the stronger for the fact that these countries have opened themselves up to the global economy significantly and early on. Mediterranean France and Italy, then Spain and Greece (whose entry into the European Union contributed to increasing the regional imbalances rather than reducing or slowing them down) were thus deeply affected. These phenomena of urbanisation and "coastalisation" are now especially relevant in Turkey and in other countries on the southern and eastern sides of the Mediterranean. War in Lebanon and the events in the Balkans have also played an amplifying role for the countries in question.

This "coastalisation" of populations and the economy has also been reinforced by the major works of developing the coastal plains (irrigation, drainage, de-mosquitoising, large-scale transport infrastructures...) and the very rapid development of national and international tourism. With 150 million tourists visiting the coastal regions, the Mediterranean is in effect the primary tourist destination in the world, and the influx could double between now and 2025 according to Blue Plan forecasts.

## 1 Affecting both northern and southern sides of the Mediterranean rim

A certain number of examples make it possible to illustrate the scope and insufficient control of the urban sprawl phenomena presently at work in the Mediterranean region.

### The Marbella-Malaga region (Spain)

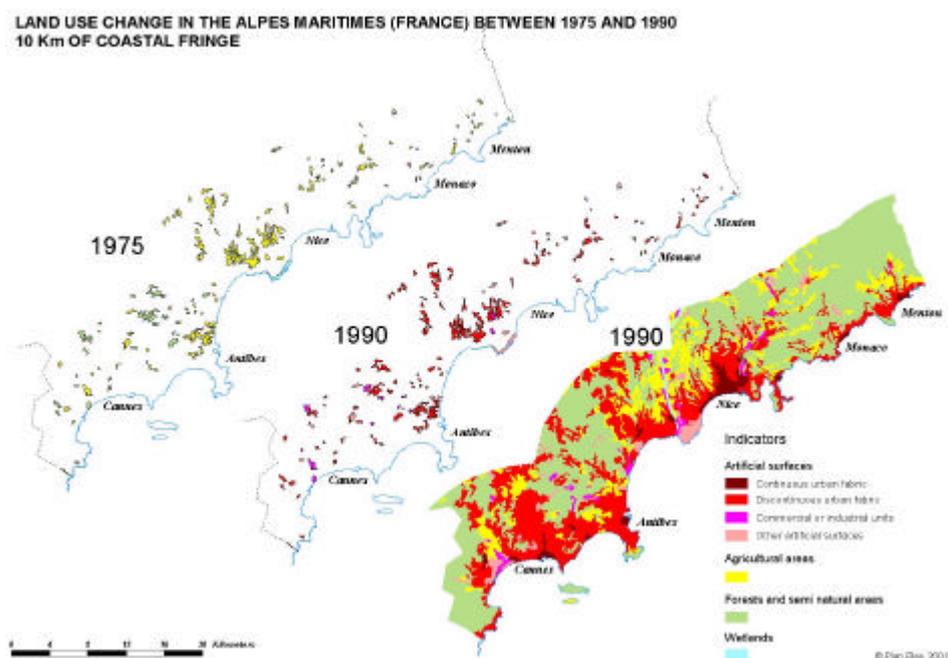


The satellite images from the European "Lacoast" programme (Corine Land Cover images) make it possible to show the extent and speed of the artificialisation on this section of the Andalusian coast (Spain). On the 1-km strip, the artificial section grew from 37 % of the total in 1975 to 68 % in 1990 (i.e. a growth rate of 83 per cent). This increase has come mainly at the expense of farming land (going from 26 to 9 per cent, a loss of 64 per cent), forested areas and semi-natural environments (which have shrunk by 22 per cent) and water surface areas (from 1.2 % to a total of .2 per cent).

### The French Riviera (France)

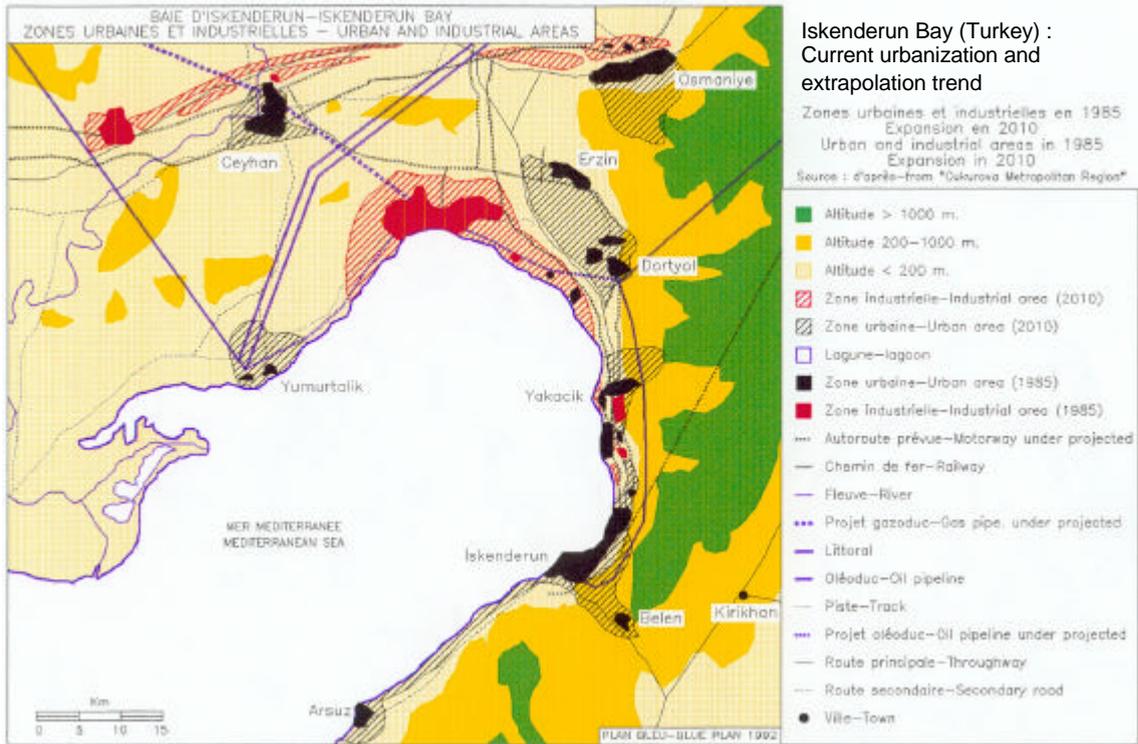
Urban growth on the southern French coast, induced particularly by rural migration and the development of coastal residential tourism, has been long established and is extensive. In a century, the coastal municipalities of the "Côte d'Azur" have had their coastal population multiply by 7 while the back-country has lost 4/5 of theirs, sometimes more.

With the artificial areas representing 35 % of the 10-km coastal strip, the Alpes-Maritimes coastline is the most artificial of all French coastal départements (the average being 10 % on the French Mediterranean coast).



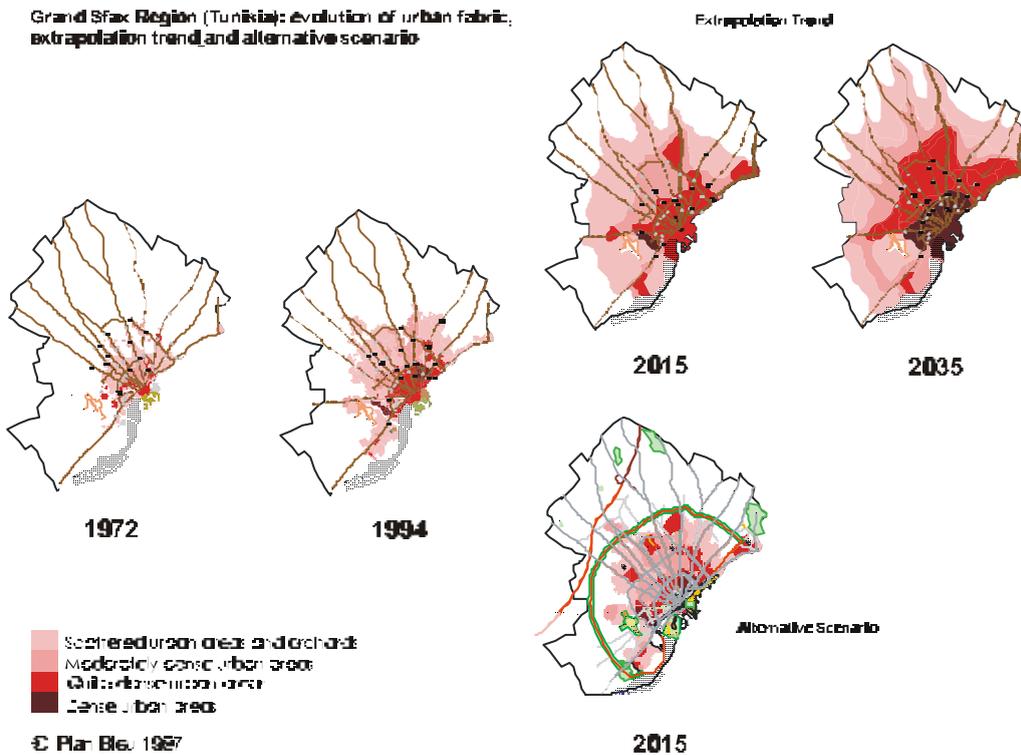
With the coastal saturation threshold already reached, urban sprawl is moving inland ("moyen pays") mainly at the expense of agricultural land (the progressive disappearance of horticultural, tree farming and market-garden businesses), which on the 0- to 2-km strip went from a total of 12 % in 1975 to 8 % in 1990. On the other hand the better-protected woods and semi-natural spaces have resisted better.

Iskenderun Bay (Turkey)



The map shows the incursion of urban and industrialised areas in Iskenderun Bay in 1985 and their forecasted expansion by 2010. Note the quasi-generalised artificialisation of the narrow eastern coastal plain, which is translated by the disappearance of excellent-quality farming land.

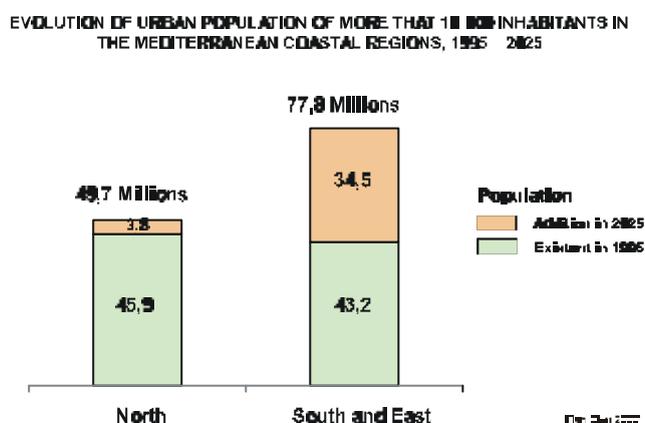
The greater Sfax region (Tunisia)



The greater Sfax region is less relief constraints than that in Iskenderun or Nice, and urban sprawl is less along the immediate coastline. Retrospective and prospective assessments show the scope of current changes and point to a future considered to be unsustainable both for the living conditions in the city and for the peri-urban farming and natural spaces (foreseeable disappearance of the "jneins", i.e. tree-farming and market-garden lands). Between 1972 and 1994 nearly 9,000 hectares of farming gardens were lost to urban sprawl with the artificialised areas going from 11 to 24 % of the whole in the same period.

This example reveals the speed of current changes, especially on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean rim and shows the need to learn to look forward to avoid especially negative irreversible developments.

The developments forecasted for 2025 show the scale of the challenges to be met.



## 2 Insufficient answers to sometimes irreversible effects

The negative effects of uncontrolled coastal urban sprawl are considerable and well documented in the Mediterranean, i.e. the degradation of urban life styles (especially the problem of transportation), the ever growing costs of urban infrastructures, the loss of a lot of farming land that is often among the richest in the countries in question, the disappearance of wetlands (more than half, 90 % in some places have already vanished), coastal erosion and the destruction of highly valuable natural habitats (shallow water, posidonia beds, sand dunes, turtle nesting sites, etc.), reduction of small-scale coastal fishing and global degradation of the quality of Mediterranean landscapes...

Faced with these trends, the policies of integrated management of the coastal areas, of sustainable conservation of the coastline, wetlands and peri-urban farming land, of promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development of inland areas and of integrating tourism and the sustainable development should be strengthened everywhere. The Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development endeavours to produce ideas and strategic proposals in this regard, and efforts are being made on the regional level and in most of the Mediterranean countries, but results are still very limited.