

The future of the Mediterranean will depend largely on cities

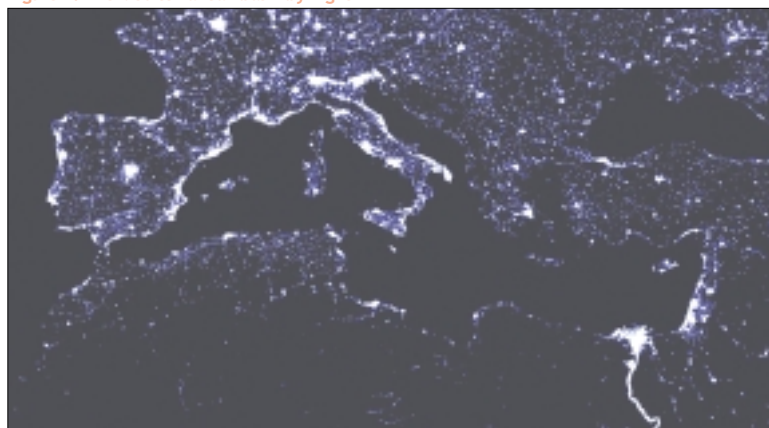
While half of the world population is in process of becoming urban, in the countries bordering the Mediterranean two out of three inhabitants are already city-dwellers. By 2030, three quarters of the Mediterranean population will be urban.

Managing the acceleration of urbanization in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, meeting the needs attendant upon it, containing diffuse urbanization on the Northern rim, limiting excessive concentration in large cities and the rising inequalities, reducing vulnerability to environmental risks, taking into account the near and more distant environmental impacts, are major challenges of urban development patterns in the 21st century.

Two out of three Mediterraneans are city-dwellers

In the 21 Mediterranean rim countries, the total urban population, that is population living in agglomerations of over 10,000 inhabitants, passed from 94 million in 1950 (44% of the population) to 274 million in 2000 (64%).

Figure 1: The Mediterranean basin by night



Source: NOAA www.nqdc.noaa.gov

From Spain to Greece, the Northern Mediterranean countries, which had reported a steady urban growth until the 1970s, today's present quite moderate growth rates (0.7% over the period 1970-2000) that are likely to continue in future.

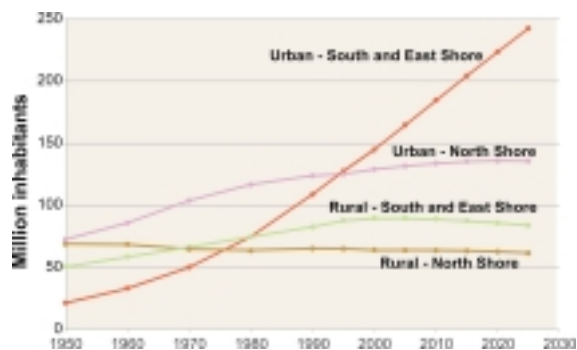
From Morocco to Turkey, the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries report accelerated urbanization (3.6% over the period 1970-2000). In spite of the decreasing fertility rate in most of these countries, population growth will only slow down after 2030, if not 2040. The driving force behind urban growth is increasingly endogenous, fed by internal redistributions, inter-urban migrations and a rural-to-urban migration, which is either decreasing (Egypt, Tunisia) or being maintained (Turkey, Syria, Morocco).

By 2025, urban population would reach over 243 million in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean countries (145 million in



2000) and about 135 million in the countries of the European rim (129 million in 2000) (Figure 2). A third of this growth would take place in the Mediterranean coastal regions.

Figure 2: Urban population in the Mediterranean countries – Projections



Source: Plan Bleu

With nearly 100 million extra city-dwellers between 2000 and 2025, including additional 23 million in Turkey, 36 million in Egypt, 10 million each in Algeria and Morocco respectively, the cities of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean will be undergoing major social and environmental changes. In spite of economies of scale, the marked concentration of populations generates difficult problems in the fields of employment (youth unemployment over 30% in several countries), infrastructure and services, pollution, and domestic waste. The urban model, which is supposed to induce improvement of standards of living, actually experiences difficulty to operate without real economic development. In the face of insufficient job creation, the 'informal' sector serves as crisis absorber, making it possible the survival of millions of people (informal jobs are estimated at about

30% of the urban active population in Turkey, 45% in Egypt and Tunisia, and 40% in Algeria and Morocco).

Small towns and large cities

Progress has been made in providing services in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries over more than twenty years. However, strong imbalances persist between large and small cities, between city centres and suburbs, or between wealthy neighbourhoods and deprived ones. These inequalities are further exacerbated by the concentration of activities, financial resources and wealthier populations in a limited number of cities.

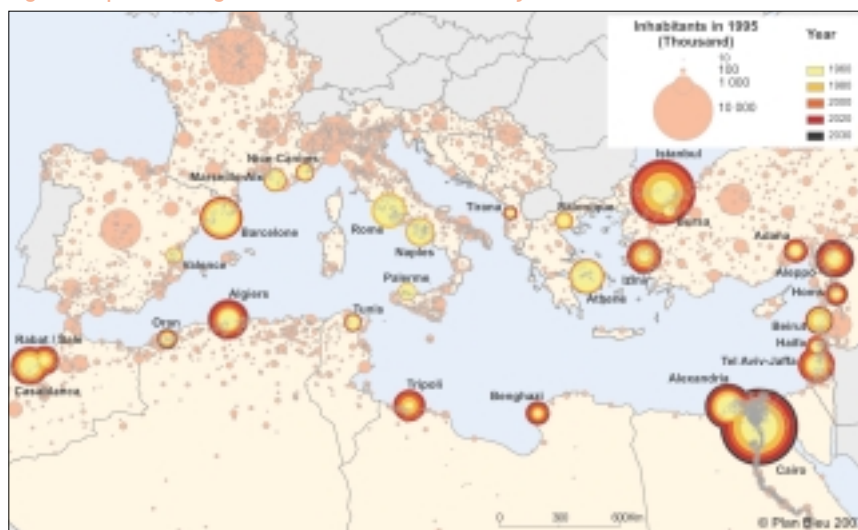
The observer's attention is often focused on the countries' political or economic capital cities and the several-million metropolises, which are thirty in the Mediterranean, though they accommodate only a third of the urban population. About 18% of city-dwellers live in 85 intermediate-sized cities (from 300,000 to one million inhabitants), and nearly half of the urban population lives in over 3000 cities of less than 300,000 inhabitants (Figure 3). In the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, the medium and small-sized cities – numbering 1450 – are experiencing a steady growth, whereas they lack resources and technical capacities. The extent of decentralisation in these countries is still quite weak, particularly on the financial level.

Sprawling and vulnerable cities

Throughout the Mediterranean region, cities, which used to be compact, are spreading like oil stains, with sprawling towns and ribbon development along the coasts. They invade their surroundings, absorb previously independent small villages (Figure 4) and use up suburban agricultural land. Urban sprawl extends homework commuting distances and multiplies transport facilities, which, in turn, generate significant air pollution on local level and sharply increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

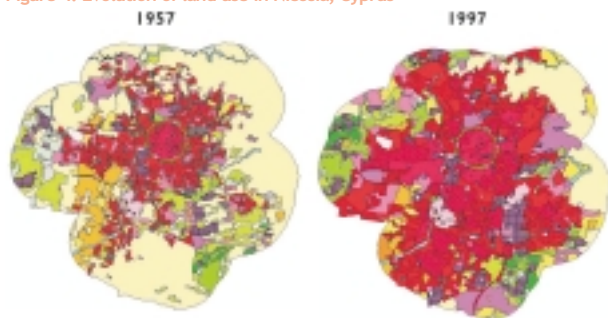
In urban areas of the Northern rim, where natural demographic growth in towns has now almost ceased, trends have been marked for thirty years by a scattering of both population and employment, and by the spreading of urbanized areas further and further away. Main

Figure 3: Population changes in some Mediterranean cities - Projections to 2030



Source: Plan Bleu from Geopolis 1998 and UN Population Division. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision* (<http://esa.un.org/unup>)

Figure 4: Evolution of land use in Nicosia, Cyprus



Source: EU-Joint Research Centre (MOLAND), Ispra, Italy

drivers of urban sprawl include: more and more private car use, more affordable land prices far from the centre, households and enterprises choosing their location according to facilitated mobility. But the process is also the result of public sector mechanisms for road equipment, housing and taxation, which actually facilitate urban sprawl.

In the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, the expansion of cities is mainly induced by the dynamism of unregulated housing. According to countries and cities, between 30 and 70% of city-dwellers cannot have access to housing unless they resort to parallel informal channels for the purchase of building land plots. This results in the development of derelict areas on the outskirts, with difficult access to water, sanitation and other basic facilities.

The highly populated unregulated housing areas are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards, such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, etc. Between 1975 and 2001, out of 480 extreme events recorded in the Mediterranean, a large majority occurred in France (86), Turkey (63), Italy (57), Spain (47), Greece (43), Algeria (36) and Morocco (23). As for the number of fatalities, the countries most affected have been Turkey, Italy, Algeria, Greece and Egypt. Fatal disasters – earthquake in Izmit in 1999 and in Algiers-Boumerdès in 2003, floods in Algiers in 2001 – have unveiled a poor implementation of town-planning and building rules.

Multiple keys to achieving sustainable urban development

In the face of problems related to over-concentration of populations in large cities, two types of response are often practiced:

► Creation of *new towns*: Egypt has implemented this policy since 1979 in order to de-congest Cairo; France created, in the 1970s, a dozen new towns around Paris; Algeria envisions the creation of new towns on the outskirts of Algiers and on the Hauts Plateaux, and

Morocco has planned to build future cities on the outskirts of Rabat. These fully planned public undertakings seem only rarely to attain the desired goals, especially mixed-use development, job/housing balance, real urbanity.

► Drawing up *master plans*: In cities of the Southern Mediterranean, this tool has often proved to be ineffective, especially because of the lack of regulatory and financial means for implementation and, above all, the lack of land tenure control. In the Northern Mediterranean, the contradictory effects of sectoral policies deployed in urban areas often make town planning intent rather void.

Today, new approaches seek to integrate the principles of an ecologically-sustainable development in urban design and city transformation processes, and promote participatory process in order to stimulate the involvement of the inhabitants.

► *Local Agendas 21* have emerged following the Earth Summit of 1992. Around the Mediterranean, some 500 local governments would be engaged in this kind of environmentalist process. Sometimes, these initiatives can be fairly targeted, like in Izmit, Bursa and other cities of the highly vulnerable region of Marmara in Turkey, where Local Agendas 21 have been redirected, since 2000, to prevention and preparedness for natural disasters.

► In the wake of the boom in car travel, land use planning policies are now seeking to influence mobility at source, through an urban organization that generates less travel. *Twin-planning of city and transport* has recently been introduced in industrialized countries (Netherlands, Great Britain, Norway) as well as in developing countries (Brazil, Singapore) in order to contain excessive car use. Emphasis is laid on a densification of the urban fabric, particularly around mass transport stations and connecting points. In the Mediterranean, a better matching between urban planning and transport planning is being sought in Barcelona and Tunis.

► In the *mass transport* sector, tramway projects have been on the increase in recent years (Alicante, Valencia, Barcelona, Montpellier, Marseilles, Nice, Rome, Naples, Palermo, Athens, Cairo, Tunis, Algiers, Constantine, Oran, Rabat . . .), with good results in terms of reduction of jams, energy consumption or polluting emissions in city centres. However, traffic problems on the outskirts continue to worsen.

► *Policies of regeneration and renewal* of the urban fabric point out a promising course of action with a view to containing suburban expansion, mitigating environmental impacts and improving the living environment. Barcelona, Marseilles, Genoa, Naples, Aleppo, show examples of policies aimed at renovating

old towns, revitalizing town centres, enhancing public spaces, rehabilitating seafronts, most often founded on the factoring of the historical and cultural heritage of cities.

Quality of life in Barcelona

Besides the emblematic reclamation of its seafront, Barcelona has founded its urban project on the recovery of open public spaces (promenades, squares and parks) and the creation of urban centrality poles.

A participatory urban land use planning approach, on a fine neighbourhood scale, has been developed in order to favour the diversity of functions and populations, secure the accessibility of public spaces and facilities, and preserve quality of life. New quality-of-life indicators measure, for instance, the ratio between roof square metres and sociability square metres (pavements of over 2.5m-width where two people may walk and talk).

Beyond the variety of approaches, these initiatives show that the city can contribute, significantly, to the environmental sustainability of development. The issue, therefore, is not so much the number of city-dwellers but urban lifestyles that are wasteful of natural resources, and the way cities are managed.

Yet, in view of the expansion and fragmentation of urban areas, the issue of a socially sustainable city still remains unaddressed. On the Northern rim, what can be done for making that the underprivileged have access to environmentally high quality housing, for instance? In the Southern and Eastern rims, what can be done for making that the populations of deprived areas have access to water, sanitation, etc? It is precisely in these quarters that will take place the daunting task of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, in particular that of reducing poverty by half before 2015.

Backing up the efforts of Southern and Eastern Mediterranean cities

The future will rely on policies being implemented at the very local level: the entire city, the heart of the city, the neighbourhoods. It will be closely connected with a long

term vision, a more strategic urban planning, a fearless leadership and participatory approaches aimed at involving the inhabitants in city affairs.

However, in view of the immense challenges of sustainable development, local endeavours require large support. A change of scenario requires simultaneous efforts by cities, provinces or regions, and States, with support from international cooperation, not only decentralized cooperation (city-to-city, inter-regions), but also inter-State cooperation.

The Mediterranean area would benefit in this regard from a pan-Mediterranean cooperation programme that could mobilize national and European support for medium-sized cities and urban areas in crisis (along the same lines as the European programme URBAN), and thus strive more effectively towards sustainable urban development.

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Blue Plan Notes



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