

Introduction

Maria-Àngels Roque. Editor-in-Chief of *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, IEMed

Jeremie Fosse. President and co-founder of eco-union

The Mediterranean is a unique geographical and cultural area in the world comprising 22 countries and over 450 million people. It has a long history that has brought about progress and development on both sides of its shores. However, it is still an area with a fragile balance affected by numerous crises that are endangering its future. Several factors contribute to this. At an environmental level, climate change and human pollution are undermining access to natural resources, water and local food production. At a social level, political instability and armed conflicts are fomenting migration and tension. At an economic level, the lack of regional integration and the low diversification of the industrial sector are impeding equitable and inclusive development.

Perhaps climate change is a salutary lesson that helps us transform the current paradigm and be more respectful of nature. This is one of the greatest challenges facing humanity to maintain its sources of vitality and well-being. As the experts who contribute to this issue state, one of its serious consequences will be the increase in social inequalities between and within the different nations, along with particularly negative effects for some vulnerable groups such as women and children. Nevertheless, in the last decade, together with the deterioration of ecosystems, local good practices have also emerged as well as attempts at global agreement to counteract these problems, such as the recent Paris and Marrakech climate summits and the future summit to be held in Bonn.

In this issue of *Quaderns de la Mediterrània* entitled “Nature and Sustainability. Co-existing in the Mediterranean”, the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) and the eco-union association, both with long experience in a range of Mediterranean issues, wish to contribute a series of reflections. This interdisciplinary analysis has the participation of thinkers, philosophers, biologists and experts in several technical and social disciplines to address the different challenges experienced by the Mediterranean Sea. The dossier seeks to offer collective and shared answers for greater sustainability and equity in the Mediterranean region. This major objective must be considered by all society actors with the aim of finding solutions to problems that affect not only those currently living in these areas but also future generations.

The thinker Edgar Morin, in the interview that we published in issue no. 16 of *Quaderns de la Mediterrània* on “Ecology and Culture”, calls for the need to develop ecologised thought in the 21st century, based on three points: first, the reintegration of our environment into our anthropological and social awareness; second, the ecosystem

resurrection of the idea of nature; and, third, the decisive contribution of the biosphere to our planetary awareness.

Limited space in this publication means that we must concentrate on the issues that we consider more urgent as well as some representative good practices that can help us face this great ecological challenge. Therefore, we have grouped the different articles into four sections: 1) “Towards an Ecological Awareness”, 2) “For a Clean Mediterranean”, 3) “Challenges to Obtain New Resources”, and 4) “Public and Private Sustainability”.

To achieve ecological awareness, the philosopher Jordi Pigem warns us that “we must take advantage of this era of crisis and transformation, in which everything is open, to guide the transition of our society to a serene maturity, to a reconciliation with what surrounds us, and to a planetary balance that can sustain us.”

The ecofeminist philosopher Alicia Puleo notes, in relation to climate change, that the misnamed “natural” catastrophes no longer affect only geographical areas traditionally known for their extreme climate phenomena, ravaged by hurricanes, floods or draughts, but the whole planet. Driss Khrouz, Director of the Fondation Esprit de Fes, regrets that, despite the diverse attempts at global consensus, the fact that the United States has decided to abandon the Paris Agreement at the last minute seriously endangers its feasibility. The Doctor of Socio-ecology Ramon Folch stresses the importance of the two landscape functions: homeostatic self-maintenance and educational scope, in any place and particularly the Mediterranean.

The marine ecologist Lydia Chaparro and the project coordinator at the Asociación de Ciencias Ambientales Luis Jiménez Meneses warn us about the great pending issue: to save the Mediterranean from marine litter and pollution. Biodiversity and waste management is a world problem that affects all the oceans. This is why the environmentalist Lily Venizelos sets out a series of joint initiatives undertaken by different NGOs in the Mediterranean region.

Hussein Abaza, Former Chief of the United Nations Environment Programme, suggests in relation to the Middle East and North Africa ways for governments to follow a sustainable green path. To this end, it will be necessary to adopt a nexus approach between water, food and energy that ensures the presence of complementarities and synergies between the three sectors. In the same vein, the expert in environmental issues in the Arab world Najib Saab shows how the change towards a green and sustainable economy was largely sparked by the sheer need to address critical problems and shortages in resources such as water, food and energy.

Aleksandar Rankovic, from the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations, following the so-called nature-based solutions that have been receiving increasing attention in recent years, points out how Morocco and Tunisia are two of the countries that have given greatest attention to the use of ecosystems in their climate strategies. For his part, Vicent Garcès, from the Mediterranean Citizens’ Assembly Foundation, based on a forward-looking approach, explains the proposal of northern and southern Mediterranean countries to promote initiatives of responsible and sustainable food that

help us replace the agro-industrial model, which is a threat for the food diversity of these Mediterranean countries.

Within good practices, the entrepreneur Gunter Pauli introduces the project El Hierro, in the Canary Islands, a project based on wind energy and with a successful result that has stimulated local industries.

We are provided with several examples of publicly or privately promoted sustainability with Maria Serena Mancini and Alessandro Galli, from Global Footprint Network, based on the Ecological Footprint Accounting applied to Montenegro. Professor Michel Scoullou, Director of the UNESCO Chair and Network on Sustainable Development, Management and Education in the Mediterranean, refers to the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, approved by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) ministers in 2014.

Maria Àngels Roque, from the field of anthropology, sets out a debate between different public and private actors in the Serra de Tramuntana, Mallorca. She attempts to show the stance and play of political and economic power based on the hunting tourism developed in this area. Although the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies is necessary, Susanne Hirschmann, from Som Energia, wonders who the main player in this new power game that will change the energy system will be: big companies or the people?

We close the dossier with the talk between the thinker Jorge Wagensberg and professor Joan Martínez Alier who focus on diverse crucial moments in the relationship of human beings with nature, reminding us that we only have one planet.

Everything leads us to a key issue: the need to promote good management of our common area, the Mediterranean. Without a radical change of direction, the Mediterranean will witness a worsening of the conflicts and injustices and the decline of our civilisation. In contrast, a healthy, inclusive and sustainable Mediterranean will contribute to peace, progress and shared well-being. Therefore, we need this horizontal, transnational and local cooperation to jointly address both the global and local problems. Only in this way, through a shared commitment, can we tackle the fundamental issues to ensure that the Mediterranean is not only a cradle of great civilisations but also a place where future generations can fulfil their desires in harmony with nature.