

HELLENIC PRESIDENCY 2003
INTERNATIONAL HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
“COASTAL AREAS AND CITIES IN EUROPE”
Crete, 29-31 May 2003

CONCLUSIONS

Recognizing the importance of early action in European coastal zones, the Hellenic Presidency of the European Union (Ministry of Physical Planning, the Environment and Public Works) organized a High Level Conference in Crete on the 29-30th of May 2003 on Coastal areas and Cities to explore the next steps towards a European Strategy for Coastal Zones as stated in the Council Resolution (2001) and following the earlier initiatives of the Spanish Presidency High level Forum in Alicante (2002), under the Danish Presidency (2002) for cities and the Swedish initiative on small and medium size cities.

Coastal areas in Europe have attracted a special interest in the last decade or so from several points of view: 1) as areas of increasing concentration of human activities undergoing significant changes and facing conflicts over the use of space and natural resources 2) as areas of special environmental interest as transition zones from land to sea concentrating important natural habitats and areas of special value processes and functions for ecological and human ecosystems. As a consequence they require special provisions for planning in the broad framework of Integrated Coastal Zone Management. The necessity of special policies for coastal areas has been widely recognized at national and international levels as evidenced by a proliferation of related actions such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Mediterranean Action Plan of UNEP and several others.

Cities in coastal areas and islands in particular have a special interest due to the particular role they may acquire as growth poles and gates to their hinterland in a broader process of spatial integration but also as centers of growing economic activities such as tourism, transport and fishing. Furthermore, they are also important as areas, which face increasing pressures from a multitude of actors for development with diverse interests. As a consequence their planning should be seen in the context of broader spatial strategies.

The Conference concentrated on the exchange of experiences in Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Coastal Cities Planning assessing options for future developments and action in this respect.

A number of international and national experts and administrators gathered in Crete presenting their activities and experiences at a

- European level → EU Commission, Council of Europe
- Regional level → Mediterranean, Black Sea, Baltic Sea
- National level → Greece, Spain, Portugal
- Local level → Athens (and site level: Alimos area)

These constitute significant experiments of innovation in bringing together stakeholders from different sectors, administrative levels and civil society towards communication.

What has emerged during the conference is:

- The *need for ICZM* to achieve the sustainable development of coastal areas which is broadly recognized
- ICZM is a *continuous process* which has to include monitoring and assessment in order to improve and adapt it to changes
- ICZM provides a basic platform for reflection, as suggested also in the EU Council Recommendation
- ICZM provides a modern and *flexible framework to integrate* socioeconomic development and environment concern and it can also allow the development of synergies among plans, program and actions among all the sectors and at all spatial levels
- Different policies have been proposed to implement ICZM, but it is still *lacking a broader framework* which promotes an integrated management perspective for coastal zones
- Some barriers to ICZM realization are still present, such as:
 - Bureaucratic inertia,
 - Opposition to changes,
 - Conflicts coming from multiple interests,
 - Overlapping of local, regional and national competencies and

- Difficulties of cooperation among different bodies.
- A number of *key elements for an effective process* were identified at the conference, including
 - Capacity building,
 - Need for adequate information.
 - The bottom-up approach, that seems to give good results,
 - but it is also necessary to establish a legal and institutional context and
 - The involvement of all the stakeholders, included the local administrative bodies, in consultation and concertation is fundamental
- Different *tools* have been presented as useful for the ICZM:
 - *carrying capacity*, as it permits to evaluate the capacity of the environment to sustain human activities;
 - the Strategic Environmental Assessment, promoted by the Directive 2001/42/EC, that could enable the integration of the environmental variable in the decision-making; but there are still difficulties in its application, linked to the overlapping of local, regional and national competencies, to the effective editing of plans and programs and to the methodologies of application;
 - *planning* is another important tool, but in order to be effective it should be
 - accompanied with a variety of policy instruments
 - put in timely action
 - developed in a strategic manner with a long term vision and
 - take into consideration the interconnections across spatial levels.

-In addition to providing opportunities for experimentation with concerted action ICZM offers a challenge to find ways to spread innovative approaches to existing policy areas.

- The power of an instrument such as ICZM is also its applicability to other kinds of context of problems requiring integrated approaches in spatial

planning and management such as in mountain areas or cities, therefore enriching the policy experiences across a variety of fields.

- In coastal cities and areas special attention should be paid to the redevelopment of the waterfront in the context of the urban fabric, the development of the city in relation to its hinterland and the relationship of the coastal area to the region.
- There is the necessity of continuous efforts to implement ICZM in order to promote communication and exchange of experiences and to provide feedback at all levels of policy making.