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**PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE THEME:  
"INFORMATION, AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION"**

**Task Managers: MIO-ECSDE and CREE**

## PRELIMINARY REPORT OF TASK MANAGERS ON THE THEME "INFORMATION, AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION"

### I. Introduction

It is crucial in terms of sustainable development in the Mediterranean that our information should be improved and that public awareness of environmental problems should be increased, whilst at the same time the public should become more actively involved in better protection of the environment and our natural resources.

That is why the theme of "information, awareness and participation" is one of the handful of essential questions on which the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development has decided to focus its work. It has, therefore, set up a working group on this issue, headed by two task managers, the CREE and the MIO-ECSDE, supported by the MAP Coordinating Unit.

The aim of this note is, therefore, to provide the latest state of play on the actual theme of work and on a possible working method for the thematic working group.

It should be pointed out that these are only the preliminary ideas of the task managers, since the working group has not as yet met. In fact, according to its work schedule, the MCSD has decided to use 1997 to study the questions of sustainable management of coastal areas, and water management. "Information, awareness and participation" is one of the themes to be tackled during the second stage, between 1997-99.

More specifically, the ideas outlined in this paper are proposals from the task managers to be raised for discussion and, if so required, amended during the second meeting of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development. The thematic group will deliberate during the period 1997-98 on the basis of guidelines drawn up by the MCSD.

In any case, the first task of this thematic working group will be to ascertain the situation pertaining in the various Mediterranean countries in terms of information and public involvement; this task will be facilitated by work now ongoing under the aegis of MIO-ECSDE, the conclusions of which will soon be available.

### THE BASES OF OUR REFLECTION

#### II.1. Why inform, raise awareness and participate?

One of the first tasks of the working group will be to establish the scope of the theme to be studied. The title- "Information, awareness and participation"- covers certain notions and objectives which require clarification, and at the same time involves certain actors and groups which will have to be identified.

Agenda MED 21 states that "meeting the objectives of sustainable development in the Mediterranean will require widespread mobilisation of public opinion and the effective involvement of all members of society: individuals, groups and organisations".

Since they help to actively involve the public, it seems logical that "information, awareness and participation" amongst the public should be increased.

The recommendations which the thematic working group is expected to table at the end of its deliberations must therefore meet the strategic aim of mobilising the general public on the implementation of sustainable development and the protection of the Mediterranean environment.

Although this aim may well be shared by all Mediterranean States and partners it does, however, go without saying that its implementation must take account of the different national and local situations.

## II.2. What do we mean by information, awareness and participation?

"Information" in the environmental field is a particularly broad-ranging theme. In general terms, it relates to all the messages passed on to the public to warn them of the existence and nature of a given problem.

On the question of information relating to the environment the thematic working group must consider how to improve the public's access to this information on two fronts:

on the legal front; the state of national legislation on access to information and administrative documents for individuals or groups within the framework of procedures laid down by law,

on the material front: the major information systems in the Mediterranean (data bases, monitoring networks...), the production and circulation of information, partnership between States, research organisations and NGOs, the setting up and workings of data bases, etc...

"Awareness" denotes forms of communication and activity which aim at making the public aware of the quality of the environment, immediate or otherwise, and its fragility, and conscious of the impact of deterioration, of the complex nature of environmental phenomena and of the fact that they are inter-related. Awareness-raising is the first step towards environmental consciousness and responsibility. Awareness-raising can use the vehicle of the mass media (press, radio, television), or specifically organised events, but it may also develop on a more-or-less spontaneous basis amongst individuals on a given occasion.

"Participation" means citizens' commitment to a one-off or on-going action, in different forms. As in the case of information, citizens' participation depends partly on the legal framework, through public consultation procedures, or through participation in study or decision-making bodies. Public involvement in the protection of the environment and of natural resources is also of an informal nature, in that the individual in his own everyday behaviour may adopt environmentally-friendly practices. The working group will work on these two fronts.

The term "education" does not appear in the title of the working group set up by the MCSD. It seems, however, that "environmental education" should be an integral part of any policy aimed at awakening the grass-roots' environmental awareness and getting them involved. The Tbilisi conference on Environmental Education which was organised in 1977 under the aegis of UNESCO defines the objectives in the following terms: *"the fundamental aim of environmental education is to get individuals and groups to understand the complexity of the environment, both natural and man-made, a complexity which stems from the inter-action of its biological, physical, social, economic and cultural aspects, and to permit them to acquire the necessary knowledge, values, behaviour and practical capabilities to allow them to effectively and responsibly become involved in preventing and solving environmental problems and in managing environmental quality"*.

The question then arises as to whether or not issues related to environmental education should be included in the thematic working group's mandate. The term "environmental education" has two meanings:

firstly, it is a synonym of "environmental teaching", a general term which refers to the methods and principles which foster awareness and the acquisition of knowledge on environment-related issues. This environmental teaching can come about within the family, during activities organised for young people or adults (training courses, workshops), through publications, etc...It is generally referred to as "informal education".

secondly, it refers to the formal education system, in other words the way in which the environment is "taught" at school as far as upper school level, i.e. for pupils in the basic education system (excluding specialised university or technical training).

Given the important role which schools play as a socialising factor for young people and a forum for training future generations, we feel that the thematic working group should include both of these meanings in its deliberations.

Schools must act as an essential vector for the principles of sustainable development. Since it will be considering environmental education, the thematic working group will thus be called upon to look at the role of the education systems in Mediterranean countries in terms of environmental teaching, as well as the way in which environmental matters are taught in schools.

## **ACTION STATIONS: PROPOSED MEANS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **III.1. Fostering the citizen's ability to act to the advantage of his immediate environment**

The complexity and interdependence of environmental phenomena and the way in which major international campaigns highlight environmental problems affecting the whole planet have a dual effect: they are able to alert public opinion and help build ecological awareness, but they have also managed to dispel the idea that the environment is a complex and distant system where the citizen has only limited scope for action.

Experience has shown that, when all is said and done, mobilisation of the public depends on the citizen's awareness of his being able to directly influence his immediate environment.

For this reason the working group should favour the local, specific approach to information and awareness. The aim is to make every Mediterranean citizen, through his own individual behaviour, play a daily role in the protection of his immediate environment, contributing to the careful and rational use of natural resources. We must make each citizen aware of how his activities affect the surrounding environment, convince him of his ability to take positive action and provide him with the means to implement good environmental practices in his everyday activities.

This suggested approach, which builds on the actual surroundings and concrete experience, does not contradict the idea of a regional strategy or a type of Mediterranean "solidarity"; on the contrary- the similar nature of the environmental problems faced by many regions around the basin make it easy to envisage the idea of a Mediterranean community, and the exchange of tools and teaching experience on common themes. At the same time implementation, preferably under the guidance of local groups and relays, must always be finely tuned to the local context.

### **III.2. Finding and mobilising relays**

One of the difficulties of this subject for which the thematic working group on "Information, awareness and participation" is responsible lies in the multifarious target groups involved, since we are basically talking about every single Mediterranean citizen in his different guises-child or adult, man or woman, consumer or producer, etc...

Any policy on this subject must be based on relays of various profiles:

relays specialised in the environmental field: NGOs and environmental associations,

relays which are not specialised in the environmental field but which have strong local influence: local authorities, professional farming organisations, local associations and neighbourhood organisations: and regional or national relays: regional authorities, professional organisations,

an essential relay: schools,

the mass media.

#### **Local and regional authorities**

Local and regional authorities will be important partners in the implementation of recommendations coming from the national commissions on sustainable development set up in each Mediterranean country. They play an essential role in informing and consulting with the public, in encouraging citizens to manage the local environment by developing environmentally-friendly extra-curricular activities when this falls within their competence. The authorities around the basin are already very much involved in this type of activity. The working group which includes MEDCITIES and the Centre des Regions Euromediterraneennes pour l'Environnement (CREE) should build on the achievements of the Mediterranean authorities and the forms of cooperation which they have already established.

#### **Professional organisations**

When it comes to promoting the principles of sustainable development vis-a-vis Mediterranean business, professional and technical organisations working in the field in the agricultural, industrial, craft or tourist sectors should become prime centres for fostering the idea of protecting our natural resources.

This clearly shows the all-embracing nature of the theme "Information, awareness and participation" as compared with the other subjects under study within the MCSD framework, such as ecotourism, industry, and water resources.

The working group will no doubt have to contact the other thematic groups in order to define the relevant subjects and requirements in terms of training of trainers or technical staff.

#### **NGOs and environmental associations**

They play an invaluable and recognised role as vigilantes, collectors and distributors of information, and as relays for informing and training the general public.

On this account, the working group must think very carefully about ways in which to:

improve their access to information

support them in their task of informing and training the public and of raising awareness,

increase their participation at Mediterranean, national and local level in bodies responsible for drawing up policies on sustainable development and the protection of the environment, regardless of whether they play an advisory or decision-making role, or act as partners,

boost exchange and cooperation between NGOs around the basin,

facilitate their access to justice, where necessary, on environmental questions.

The participation of NGOs in the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development, and more particularly in this thematic working group on "Information, awareness and participation" (MIO-ECSDE, WWF, APNEK, Ecomediterranea) is a first step which will facilitate our deliberations on this point.

### **Local groups and non-formal vectors**

A major part of socialisation and education comes about in an informal but nevertheless essential framework: the family (particularly women), local and neighbourhood groups, etc...As these relays sometimes do not have any formal status, or are of a local nature, it is difficult to bring them under the umbrella of a regional strategy. The working group must look at the needs and consider possible ways of working on these vectors.

### **Schools and the formal education system**

If environmental education explicitly falls within the subjects to be tackled by the working group, it will have to consider ways of strengthening the role of the education system in Mediterranean countries in the provision of environmental education, for example by ensuring that notions of sustainable development become part and parcel of education, encouraging the creation of environmental teaching, encouraging the exchange of experience on teaching tools adapted to the Mediterranean context, etc...

### **The mass media, information and awareness-raising campaigns**

Media such as the press, radio and television are major vectors for the distribution of information and for raising environmental awareness. The wealth of subject matter provided by the Mediterranean, our natural, historical and cultural heritage par excellence, means that the mass media is very attentive to its future and can relatively easily be spurred into action. The working group will have to find ways to strengthen cooperation on this front and to coordinate initiatives on information and public awareness-raising campaigns.

## **IV. PROPOSED WORKING METHODS FOR THE THEMATIC GROUP**

On the basis of the strategic objectives previously proposed, the working group will have to define its working method and priorities. One possibility would be to work on each of the main relays bearing in mind its specific requirements, the aim being to define ways in which to :

facilitate the activities of those relays already active on the environmental front, such as the NGOs,

environmentalise" and train relays: the education system, local authorities, professional networks, etc...

These actions should aim at facilitating access to information, encouraging the setting up of exchange networks and the creation of common tools, and possibly the definition of rallying themes for common information or awareness-raising campaigns around the basin, always ensuring, however, that the correct balance is struck between a regional strategy and the need for local implementation at grass-roots level, in touch with the local situation.

The work schedule could be as follows:

May 1997: drawing up of the thematic working group's mandate by the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development,

spring-summer 1997: meeting of the thematic group to define its method of work, assess its financial requirements, establish its schedule, and possibly nominate experts to be drafted in,

October 1997: meeting of the thematic group to assess the situation in the Mediterranean, based on the work carried out by the MIO-ECSDE,

December 1997: working group participation in the international conference to be jointly organised by UNESCO and Greece, entitled: " Rio 5 years on, Tbilisi 20 years on: Education and awareness-raising for sustainable development",

1998: workshops (to be specified),

December 1998: tabling of proposals for policies and strategies on information, awareness and public participation.