



United Nations Environment Programme



UNEP(OCA)/MED WG.16/2
10 April 1990

Original: ENGLISH

MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

Consultation with non-governmental organizations
Athens, 2-3 May 1990

NGOs - Education and Environmental
Awareness in the Mediterranean

This report was prepared for the Centre d'études et de Recherches Internationales et Communautaires, University of Aix-Marseille, by Christian JOLY, Assistant at the Faculty of Law and Political Science of the University of Aix-Marseille.

INTRODUCTION

In environmental protection, education and awareness occupy the privileged position of an indispensable component. The object of this note is to illustrate the role of NGOs in this area. An examination of the main intergovernmental texts concerning environmental protection in the Mediterranean allows us to formulate right away certain introductory remarks. On the one hand, the call to the NGOs to help implement the objectives of the Mediterranean Action Plan was formulated already in 1977^{1/}; however their role in this connection is not clarified. On the other, specific reference to education and awareness as vectors of environmental protection is made several years later in 1982 in a document with sectoral importance^{2/}; one must wait until 1985 to have an implicit suggestion in a general text^{3/}. Nowhere is there to be sure explicit mention of NGO action in the field of environmental education and awareness; however it is not excluded either and the results of field studies clearly show that on the contrary the role of NGOs in this connection is especially important: out of 54 NGOs consulted, 53 answered that they carry out activities in this sphere. However let us now define the concepts of education and awareness.

Both education and awareness cover a wide semantic area; education refers to education theory and teaching methods on the one hand and to awakening, training, initiative, civics and teaching of politics on the other. Training in turn refers to the intellectual and moral education of the individual, to the means by which it is acquired and to the results obtained. Now, awareness suggests the need to provoke a reaction to a given problem by providing first of all relevant information.

Thus, education and awareness refer to different aspects of the same process which is always to transmit a message and both terms will be used indiscriminately in this study.

Which are the NGOs with which we are concerned here? In our perspective there are two sets of problems: Firstly, we must define what we mean by NGO; in the UN Charter it is the international, non-governmental organizations which act as consultants to an international body. However, the same term is frequently used to refer to the bodies, which in the French case, are covered by the 1901 law and which through their object and actions have an international vocation^{4/}. The concept is thus not well defined and even if we examine the intergovernmental texts (Mediterranean Action Plan, other texts concerning international actions for the Mediterranean region) we can still not give a definitive answer. In fact, the notion of NGO and the notion of association cover very different situations. Nor, we must add, do they have the monopoly of education and awareness activities, since the environmentally

1/ Report on the Intergovernmental Meeting of the Mediterranean Coastal States on the Blue Plan (Split, 31 Jan. - 4 Feb. 1977), points 26.3 and 28.4.

2/ Mediterranean Specially Protected Areas Protocol (Geneva, 3 April 1982) esp. Art. 11.

3/ Genoa Declaration (13 Sept. 1985), points 4, 6, 10, 13, 14 and 15.

4/ Cf. Ch. Joly, Organisations non gouvernementales françaises et développement, Economica 1985, p.14.

oriented political parties, the "Greens" and certain unofficial groups all pursue the same objectives. In this study, we use the terms NGO and association indiscriminately; thus some associations considered here are true NGOs in the sense given in international law texts, others are affiliated to them and still others are associations in the current sense of the word.

This option which is useful in demarkating the field of our investigation, still leaves another question to which we must now turn.

The reference, made to NGOs in the intergovernmental texts, such as the Report of the intergovernmental meeting of the Mediterranean States on the Blue Plan^{5/}, is included in the paragraph which deals with national institutions^{6/}. This implies that the NGOs referred to here are NGOs in the sense of the UN Charter and raises the question whether the texts envisage the participation of national associations in the implementation of the Mediterranean Action Plan. Even if the question appears academic, it becomes important if we assume that the governments might wish to encourage action on the part of all national association movements for the realisation of the objectives of the Action Plan.

The choice we made also brings about another difficulty; the notions of NGO and association suggest that we are dealing with types of organization and groups of individuals, of sectors of the public. However, there is great variety in how associations came about. There are associations created by private initiative, others by public authorities, national or local and NGOs established by intergovernmental initiative. If we take the example of France, we can mention the Centres permanents d'initiation à l'environnement (C.P.I.E.), which are associations covered by the 1901 law and set up by ministerial decree; at international level, the Fédération pour l'éducation à l'environnement en Europe, set up 10 years ago by the Council of Europe, illustrates the ambiguity of the concept regarding the autonomy of these bodies vis-à-vis public authorities. In other words, the study of education and environmental awareness by NGOs and the various associations is not limited to the study of the activities of groups totally independent from the intervention of public authorities.

Having thus defined our framework and on the basis of the data available^{7/}, it is now possible to analyze the content of the message transmitted by NGOs (part I) and then to examine the methodology used to make the message known (Part II).

5/ Cf. p.1, note (1).

6/ Cf. points 26.3 and 26.4, then 44.3 and 44.4 of the above mentioned report.

7/ This work is the result of the analysis of the answers to a questionnaire sent to 120 NGOs from around the Mediterranean Basin. Half of them responded. The conclusions were also based on the documents that these NGOs provided. Most of the NGOs are really associations in the sense of the French law.

I. THE CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE

The analysis of the content of the message should illustrate the similarities and differences of the messages emanating both from intergovernmental texts and NGOs (A); then we will give a typology of these messages (B).

(A) Similarities and differences

We must firstly state the fact that almost all NGOs recognize the role of education and awareness as part of the action aiming at protecting the Mediterranean environment. All of the actions of the NGOs in fact contain an implicit message: efforts should be made to develop a collective awareness and an individual responsibility of the public.

It is a strong, omnipresent statement. Curiously, as was already stated in the Introduction, the intergovernmental texts are a lot more timid; thus neither in the 1976 Barcelona Convention, nor in the 1977 Report of the Intergovernmental meeting of the Mediterranean Coastal States on the Blue Plan is there a clear reference to this idea. The report insists on the need to develop training activities, within the technical and scientific fields of training ^{8/}. In this connection, the 1985 Genoa Declaration comes much closer to the NGO position: it is thus considered that "the protection of the Mediterranean requires major support of Governments' efforts through a much greater acceleration of the action-oriented activities ... the media and the public at large to reverse the trend of deterioration of the sea and of its coastal areas;" (point 13). It is thus an appeal to the populations and the visitors of the Mediterranean regions "to become more aware of the exceptional natural, economic and cultural values of the Mediterranean and to commit themselves individually and collectively to its protection;" (point 14).

It is possible to conclude here that today there is convergence between States and NGOs on the absolute necessity for education and environmental awareness. We must therefore look into the substance of the message, i.e. on which aspects of environmental protection or deterioration it will focus.

It is not at all surprising to note that the perspective of international texts is global and that the message contained therein is composite; thus in the Preamble of the Barcelona Convention we find 4 elements of this awareness:

- "The economic, social, health and cultural value of the marine environment of the Mediterranean Sea Area";
- the responsibility "to preserve this common heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations";
- the threat posed by pollution "to the marine environment, its ecological equilibrium, resources and legitimate uses";

^{8/} Esp. points 30.1 and 43 mainly.

- "the special hydrographic and ecological characteristics of the Mediterranean Sea Area and its particular vulnerability to pollution".

The Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution from land-based sources, signed at Athens on May 17, 1980 adds the following three elements:

- The impact of the rapid increase of human activities in the Mediterranean Sea Area, particularly in the fields of industrialization and urbanization, as well as the seasonal increase in the coastal population due to tourism;
- the danger posed to the marine environment and to human health by pollution from land-based sources and the serious problems resulting therefrom in many coastal waters and river estuaries of the Mediterranean Sea, primarily due to the release of untreated, insufficiently treated or inadequately disposed domestic or industrial discharges;
- the impact of the differences in levels of development between the Coastal States and the economic and social imperatives of the developing countries.

Because of what they are, NGOs do not have the same perspective. Two remarks must be made here: on the one hand, NGOs most frequently approach the problems of Mediterranean environment from a vantage point which is specific to each one of them: it could for instance be the protection of Mediterranean forests (as is the case of the French Association "Forêt Méditerranéenne") or the protection of the flora and fauna in a specific area (the case of the French Association "Les jardiniers de la mer"); such NGOs are essentially concerned with only one aspect of environmental protection which of necessity affects the content of the message that they transmit. It is on the other hand striking to see that in this message there is hardly ever a reference to actions carried out by governments within MAP; even if it is likely that there is in fact convergence of the messages on both sides in the pursuit of common goals, this is not expressly stated.

Let us now turn to the main types of messages given by NGOs

B. MESSAGE TYPOLOGY

Five types of messages appear in the education and awareness activities carried out by NGOs. It should be noted that certain NGOs use several messages, while for others, the content of the message is a characteristic feature of the organization; in other words there is great variety.

The 5 types are the following:

1. Lyrical and sentimental

The message here aims at making the public more aware of nature as our heritage and of the need to preserve it; using terms and images which are especially significant in this connection, the Beirut Charter is a good example; its preamble reads as follows:

"The Mediterranean, with its human scale, privileged among all seas for the mildness of its climate, blessed by nature with spectacular beauty, has had on its coasts from the beginning of time the air, the earth and the sun in harmony, for the physical well-being and the intellectual and spriritual uplifting of the "Mediterranean man".

On its coasts a human consciousness was born which created rich civilizations which developed there, clashed and succeeded one another and so gave birth to a cultural type of man and an art of living which is recognizable among others".

In the section where education and information measures are proposed, the text states that:

"Thus it is by calling upon their intelligence and conscience as free and responsible men through a wide reaching and sincere information campaign that the people living around the Mediterranean can hope, when peace is re-established, to live happily on the coasts of this generous sea".^{9/}

2. Alarmist

It aims at alerting the public about the dangers linked to environmental deterioration, informing the people about all the causes of pollution but focusing on the evil, not to say irreversible, consequences of pollution on environmental quality. In this connection, the degree of the alarmist character of the message may be less or more pronounced; it may be limited to words of caution: for instance "to make the public aware of the pressing need to save the Mediterranean" ^{10/}; or it can use mostly catastrophic terms: the objective of the Beirut Charter is expressed as follows: "to alert the public about all the real and grave causes of pollution in the Mediterranean and the inevitable consequences for the survival of man and the cities that live from the sea".

3. Environmental, scientific and technical

There are different shades here: it is either strictly environmental (physical sciences oriented) and concerns the knowledge of botany and/or zoology, or truly scientific and refers to research. It may also mix leisure and quest for knowledge through its attempt to demystify for the public the sciences and technologies linked to the physical environment. MILSET (Mouvement international pour le loisir scientifique et technique), an international umbrella organization of scientific associations active in the scientific field and targeting the young, is such an example.

^{9/} Beirut Charter (6 June 1973) for the protection and development of the Mediterranean, adopted by the World Intercommunal Conference for the protection of the Mediterranean against pollution organized by the FMVJ, the Organization of Arab cities and the city of Beirut (Beirut, 4-6 June 1973).

^{10/} Final recommendations of the sub-committee for the study of means to combat pollution of the Mediterranean Sea of the Interparliamentary Union, Nicosia, 25-27 Feb. 1980.

4. Economic

Its aim is to see to it that economic concerns are not disregarded in the effort to protect the environment: economics is thus an ally of the environment. CPIEs (Centres permanents d'initiation à l'environnement) disseminate such a message: "A new concept is used, that of moving along with nature rather than defending nature. There is room for a new alliance of environment and economy building bridges between nature to protect and nature to manage, between economic development and environment, between city and rural areas". For a more effective protection of the environment there is the need for a better knowledge of the economics of nature (which is the target of the Association "Forêt méditerranéenne" when it raises the following questions: which are the strategies of the various players involved in the Mediterranean forest? How much is spent on it and in which areas: equipment, forestry, forest fire prevention and fighting?); reactivation of economic activities linked with nature also goes in the same direction (and here again the "Forêt méditerranéenne" calls for an awareness campaign concerning the economic value of forest products).

5. Anarchist - revolutionary

It preaches a radical ecology which goes back to the origin of problems, interprets them and proposes solutions. It questions "the social dynamics which is the root of environmental decay" and argues for a synthetic and global approach to the issue:" ecological concerns are a response to the current conditions of environmental degradation caused by the system of capitalist production; education must aim at not reproducing the patterns of society prevailing today which are an obstacle to man's uplifting, his creativity, to meaningful relationships among individuals on the one hand and between individuals and nature on the other. This approach is mainly that of the Spanish Association ERA (Asociacion ecologista de la Rioja).

II. Message transmission : methodology

The method used by the NGOs for making their message known is based on two types of action : a diffuse action (A) and a targeted action (B).

A. A diffuse action

Awareness and education can in the first place take the form of a diffuse action, both through the recipients of the message (the public at large) and through the means used to reach the objective.

1. The recipients : the public

The need to inform and educate the public appears in intergovernmental texts in 1982 ^{11/} and is fully confirmed by the Genoa Declaration, which based on the principle of a collective and individual conscience in environmental protection launches an appeal to the 350 million inhabitants of the Mediterranean Coastal States (point 14).

^{11/} Mediterranean Specially Protected Areas Protocol, Geneva 3 April 1982, Art. 11: "The Parties shall endeavour to inform the public as widely as possible of the significance and interest of the protected areas...."

Of course, in practical terms, the NGOs that are active in this direction hardly aim at reaching all of the people living around the Mediterranean Basin; however, the principle remains to reach, through diffuse action, as many people as possible. Thus one constant becomes clear, whether we talk about informing the public, educating the citizens, making the people aware of the problems, participating and taking educative action on the part of the public, or fighting the public's ignorance and awakening its conscience and awareness in environmental matters: this constant is to reach, without any discrimination whatever, the largest number of people.

2. The means

The means used to reach this objective are various and none causes any surprise; in fact one finds all the communication instruments currently available: mass media, (press, radio, TV), information/publicity campaigns, special theme days, fairs, circulation of books, studies, pamphlets, stickers, posters, disks, video clips, conferences, public debates.

In addition to these activities for the public at large, several NGOs carry out actions targeted at specific groups.

B. Targeted action

These are activities of education and awareness aimed at specific target groups. Environmentally oriented NGOs target mainly 5 groups of people; firstly the young, which is a privileged target, secondly the tourists, then teachers and researchers, then technocrats and decision makers. To make all those categories aware of the problem NGOs use specific means.

1. Groups targeted

- The young: Several NGOs insist on the determining role of the young generations; this type of education can start very early, when children are 6 or 8 years old.
- Tourists: The concern of NGOs in this connection is parallel to the Declaration of Genoa recommendations; in fact, point 14 mentions the 100 million tourists which annually visit the Mediterranean region. The need to educate this seasonal population about the protection of the Mediterranean environment is very wide spread among NGOs but none rejects tourism as such in its approach to the question.
- Teachers and researchers: the international texts insist on the need for environmental education; NGOs are active in educating the educators at all levels. This type of education can take on specific forms especially by being integrated into the framework of cooperation between coastal industrialized states and coastal developing countries.
- Technocrats: NGOs have various approaches here; either they are for giving emphasis on more specialists in environmental matters capable of designing plans for combating pollution and environmental degradation, or they insist on the need for technocrats whose training makes them capable of working in an interdisciplinary spirit on the integrated problems concerning man and the biosphere.
- Decision makers: the target group here is elected government officials, administrators and industrialists.

In conclusion, it is clear that some NGOs differentiate their message depending on the target group by using different means to get it across (for instance through the circulation of magazines whose technical level varies); other NGOs try to reach a category which is intermediate between the layman and the scientist by targeting precisely those who, because of their professional activity, if they became aware of the issues involved, would it is hoped have a direct positive impact on the environment ^{12/}.

2. Specific means used to educate the above mentioned special groups.

Obviously, the means used in campaigns for the public at large are not excluded, but there are also the following specific actions:

- Activities in conjunction with or complementing school curricula: NGOs believe that school and university curricula should include environmental protection and combating pollution issues. In practical terms, the associations help implement this plan through the organization of inter alia courses both theoretical and practical. On the other hand, the latter are sometimes designed as complement to school courses which are thought inadequate and aim at inciting the pupil to choose a science-oriented course of study. These activities can either raise the awareness in terms of general environmental problems or specific aspects of the area where the child lives.
- Leisure used for familiarization with the environment: All NGOs stress the need to familiarize oneself and to understand nature by acquiring a scientific and technical approach based on observation, questioning, experimentation and analysis. The aim here is to develop a scientific culture, to promote the understanding of the living environment all of which is carried out within the framework of nature walks, field trips, exchanges etc.

In conclusion, 4 questions could be raised which could shed additional light on the main lines of thinking discussed in this paper:

- What is the role of education and environmental awareness in the activities of NGOs? Is it exclusive, at the centre, in the margin? (To us, on the basis of the sample available, it seems considerable.)
- Is action carried out by NGOs effective?
- Is it possible to differentiate with reference to the content of the message and the methodology used for its transmission depending on the countries and areas considered?
- There seems to be a trend toward networking of associations; what is its impact on education and awareness activities?

^{12/} It is the case of the Association Fôret Méditerranéenne, which believes that the magazine it publishes (Fôret méditerranéenne) targets those in charge of activities and projects concerning Mediterranean forests.