AVITEM Agence des Villes et Territoires Méditerranéens Durables

Concept note N1

The gathering of Mediterranean stakeholders for a common voice at the World Ocean Summit: 'The voice of the Mediterranean'

How can a new cultural relationship between sea and land be rebuilt for greater territorial resilience?

UNOC Workshop No. 4 - Muğla
6-7 May 2025

By way of an invitation to the workshop: 'Just as the Mediterranean sun is the same for all men, the effort of human intelligence must be a common heritage and not a source of conflict and murder. Is a new Mediterranean culture compatible with our social ideal achievable? - Yes. But it is up to us and you to help make it happen.'

Albert Camus – *Jeune Méditerranée*, monthly newsletter of the 'Maison de la Culture' in Algiers, No. I, April 1937.

1- Context of the approach

The third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 3) will be held in Nice in June 2025, under the co-presidency of France and Costa Rica. The UNOC already appears to be one of the most important international events for the protection of the oceans and, more broadly, for the resilience of coastal areas. Indeed, on this occasion, the coalition of global coastal cities and territories will be launched under the aegis of Christian Estrosi, Mayor of Nice and President of the Nice Côte d'Azur Metropolis. Within this coalition, the territorial actors of the Mediterranean, in all their components, must be able to express their voices and converge towards common commitments in order to be and appear as a pioneering region of resilience facing climate change: a region of influence.

AVITEM has been entrusted by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and by its members, in particular the Nice Côte d'Azur Metropolis and the SUD Region, with contributing to the preparation of the Mediterranean section of the coalition of global coastal cities and territories.

The approach proposed by AVITEM therefore has a twofold objective:

- the acculturation of Mediterranean actors and the acceleration of territorial public policies for climate mitigation and adaptation.

- the collective production of a summary document of the 'Voice of the Mediterranean' approach, supported by Mediterranean cities and territories, and to be presented at the UNOC

The notion of commitments needs to be clarified. Within the given time frame, it is difficult to imagine them being constraining or quantified, like the UN Climate Change COPs. We can more reasonably think of a series of guidelines for public action, the collective signing of a document constituting adherence to shared principles and a moral commitment to engage in common courses of action.

For this initiative, a number of actors such as the Ocean and Climate Platform, Medcities, IRD, MedECC, Plan Bleu, CPMR, etc. have been brought together under the coordination of AVITEM for a collective intelligence work that ensures the relevance and visibility of this approach. Others will be called upon for the preparation of the last workshop in Mugla (Turkey).

Indeed, we have planned four thematic workshops in the perspective of the UNOC:

1. The first was dedicated to drinking water management. It took place in **Marseille (France)** in May 2024, in co-production with the Mediterranean Water Institute, Medcities and PS au. Experts, researchers and public decision-makers were brought together for a 'Marseille Declaration' signed by a series of local authorities and researchers. This was circulated at the World Water Congress in Bali 2024;
2. The second focused on the sea-related risk management. It was held on Thursday 17 October 2024 in **Alexandria (Egypt),** in the mythical Library. Mechanical risks — rising waters and tsunami — and chemical risks — management of marine pollution, particularly plastics — were discussed. An 'Alexandria Declaration' was drawn up, with input from a dense network of local universities and researchers, such as the Alexandria Centre for Ocean and Marine Research.
3. The third workshop will be devoted to territorial restructuring in the context of high-risk areas. This workshop will be held in **Nice (France)** on Friday 14 March 2025.
4. A fourth and final workshop on the relationship between culture and coastal risks, particularly through the land-sea relationship, will take place in **Muğla (Turkey)** on 6 and 7 May 2025.

The summary of these workshops will make it possible to bring 'The voice of the Mediterranean' to the UNOC.

2- The urgent need for a shared project in the Mediterranean and the role of culture in this shared project

The Mediterranean is today suffering from climatic, demographic, social, economic and cultural challenges, and is now seen as a **region under pressure**. Its wealth and its inhabitants are **threatened by various factors,** both **natural and anthropogenic** in origin.

Firstly, pollution in all its forms. According to a WWF report (2018), the Mediterranean Sea is the most polluted in the world, not only by microplastics and plastics, but also by heavy metals and GHG emissions. The plastic concentration here is four times higher than in the 'plastic island' of the North Pacific, the famous '7th continent'!

At the same time, the air temperature has already risen by 1.5°C since the pre-industrial period and the sea temperature by +0.86°C (twice that of the global ocean). Projections for the middle of the century are 2.3 to 3.6°C for the air and 1.2 to 1.9°C for the sea (MedECC Special report on coastal risks, 2024). Sea level forecasts are also alarming. We could see an overall increase of 43 to 84cm above current water levels by 2100. If the situation in the Antarctic were to deteriorate further, these increases could even exceed one metre above current levels (source: MedECC Special report on coastal risks, 2024). This phenomenon is aggravated by coastal land subsidence. AGU Advancing Earth and Space Sciences has published a study* showing that almost half of low-lying coastal areas in Europe are experiencing subsidence – a sinking – of more than one millimetre per year on average. The phenomenon is more acute in port areas, where the average subsidence is around 1.5 mm/year.

These phenomena, which weaken the land-sea interface, are combined with those of flooding, erosion of the coastline and salinisation of groundwater. Additionally, the sea is directly weakened by overfishing and acidification of the water, which threaten marine flora and fauna.

All of this puts populations, and more generally all living things, in a **situation of increasing vulnerability**. The hazards mentioned above lead to the weakening of inhabited and arable land, directly endangering biodiversity and human life (environment, food).

This fragility is further increased by demographic and tourist pressure. Two thirds of the 540 million people living in the Mediterranean countries inhabit the coasts and the Mediterranean, with a third of world tourism, is the world's leading tourist destination (source: MedECC Special report on coastal risks, 2024).

Human activity is the main cause of climate change and, as a direct consequence, of coastal risks, which are rapidly increasing. The solutions, sometimes the most immediate or the most emphasised, are technological, defensive measures such as dykes and breakwaters, or the search for new ways of exploiting nature, such as seawater

desalination, etc. But in the face of the global context, other less obvious ones are becoming necessary, which involve profound changes in the processes and forms of territorial and social transformations. Moving towards greater resilience could be summarised in three points: giving meaning to action through the project, co-producing a common framework of resilience to guide each other's action, and finally taking action.

Coping with the intensification and increased frequency of crises **requires us to act together on a sea-wide scale. We need a common horizon, coordinated strategies and tactics that will enable us to set goals for 2050 or 2100, as well as to embark immediately on the path to resilience. The Mediterranean Sea requires this common effort.**

3- The Muğla workshop: rebuilding a new cultural relationship between sea and land for greater territorial resilience?

Sharing a common meaning requires a shared value system and democratic debate, which are the foundations of political action. The values underpinning greater resilience are proving to be a break with those of previous decades, yet they are still inspiring, relegating unbridled productivism in favour of an aspiration more in tune with ecosystems and the very capacity of the environment, the land and the sea. Humans are then involved in the environments they inhabit: like diplomats, they must negotiate politically with all their components (including non-human ones) for a desirable coexistence (Bruno Latour).

This paradigm shift is therefore fundamentally **cultural** in nature and requires a rethinking of the commons for a new collective imagination, capable of carrying out this project of resilience!

In Muğla, we will address the theme of rebuilding **a new cultural relationship between sea and land for greater territorial resilience.** This question of the land-sea relationship in the Mediterranean is not marginal if we are talking about a new collective imagination. The sea is, in fact, a powerful vector of Mediterranean unity. A unity built on great diversity: ‘The Mediterranean is [...] a thousand things at once. Not a landscape, but countless landscapes. Not a sea, but a succession of seas. Not a civilisation, but several superimposed civilisations... For millennia, everything has flowed into this sea, disrupting and enriching its history.’ (F. Braudel). This semi-enclosed sea has been the expression of everything that we Mediterranean people have been - port cities, trading ports, coastlines of intermingling of women and men, activities, territories where agriculture and livestock farming were invented. This historical and cultural heritage is rich, varied... universal.

Two main lines of reflection will be debated during the Muğla workshop:

- The changing role of art and culture in the context of territorial crises and transitions, highlighting their potential as tools for democratic debate, intelligence and alerting to situations and finally to transformations of a territorial action system;
- The safeguarding and promotion of tangible and intangible heritage as elements of a shared Mediterranean memory and as an active resource for a future re-centred on the issue of resilience.