

EU-project calls for greater coordination on coastal issues

July 9 2014



The Mediterranean is in need of uniform criteria and methods for delineating its coastlines, according to Professor Rachelle Alterman of the EU-funded Mare Nostrum project. Professor Alterman is calling on the governments of EU countries to establish a task force that will work towards achieving greater legal and cadastral coordination among EU countries on coastal issues.

'Mare Nostrum' was the name used by the ancient Romans to refer to the Mediterranean. However nowadays, there's no dominant empire but some 22 individual countries in the Mediterranean Basin. They share a number of challenges to their shores, including strong development pressures, vulnerability to sea-level rise and other impacts of climate

change and other threats to an already-degraded coastal environment. Yet they're not necessarily using the same approaches to address them.

Speaking at the Plenary Meeting of the Permanent Committee on Cadastre in the EU on 24 June in Athens, Professor Alterman noted, 'Seas are shared, and so should be the rules for delineating the coastline. These should create a legally sustainable balance between environmental goals, [climate change](#) challenges and property rights. Without more uniformity the many layers of international and national laws and policies to protect the seas and coasts cannot be consistently implemented across the EU.'

The Mare Nostrum project comprises 11 partners from Malta, Greece, Israel, Jordan and Spain, including leading research institutes, local municipalities, environmental NGOs and port operators. The project's primary goal is to contribute to bridging the policy-implementation gap between the ideals of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and its effects on the ground. The differences in demarcation criteria for the coastline have immense implications for key policies in the ICZM, and other EU and national laws.

The project team has found that, in Greece, for example, only about 20 % of the coast has been demarcated. By contrast, in Spain, some 97 % of the coastal demarcation has been completed. However, the legal rules in Spain - though environmentally sound - cause an inherently fluid line, which must be altered according to major storms.

This has an impact on private and public land ownership and results in major uncertainties for municipalities, landowners and enforcement agencies, particularly with regard to the prohibition of construction within a setback zone, the control of planning and development and environmental controls.

Exploring coastal demarcation is just one aspect of Mare Nostrum's work. The team follows a 'bottom up' approach in its efforts to bridge the legal-institutional implementation gap between the high expectations of the ICZM and realities on the ground.

The aim is not to create more laws but to improve implementation of existing laws, as Professor Alterman has previously explained: 'The Mediterranean has more regulations, more laws about its coastal area than any other area in the world ... Mare Nostrum tries to create knowledge and action to make coastline preservation work on the ground. It doesn't want to make new laws, it wants to learn and teach how to better implement existing regulations and improve them gradually'.

Over one year after the initial 'kick off' meeting in Israel, the Mare Nostrum team continues to steadily work towards achieving ambitious social and geopolitical impacts such as: enhanced public awareness of coastline management issues; increased accessibility of spatial planning data and enhanced dialogue between competing interest groups.

Provided by CORDIS

Citation: EU-project calls for greater coordination on coastal issues (2014, July 9) retrieved 24 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-07-eu-project-greater-coastal-issues.html>

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