

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN: "MEDITERRANEAN IDENTITIES - ENVIRONMENT, SOCIETY, CULTURE"

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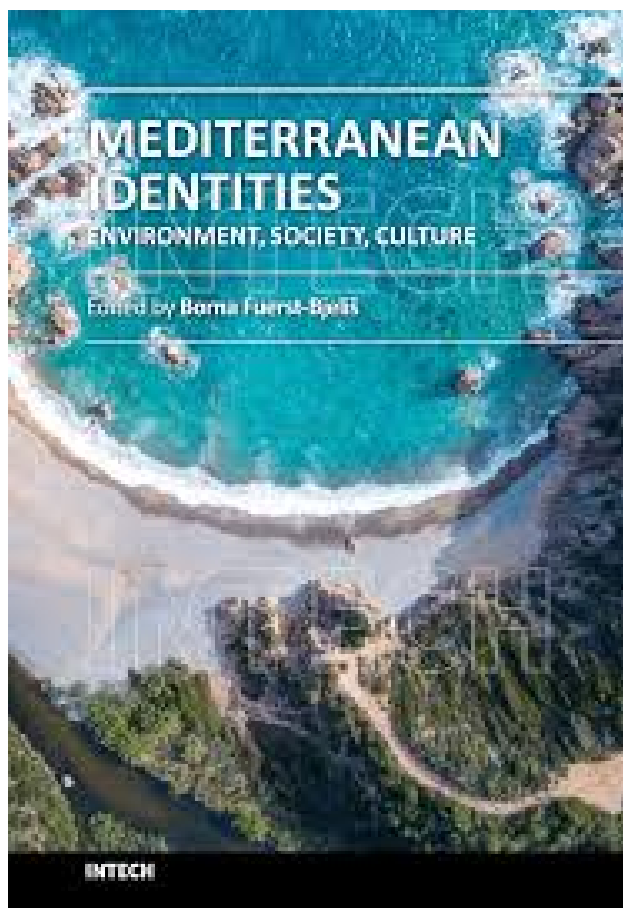
Mediterranean Identities – Environment, Society, Culture

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As stated in the preface, the book "Mediterranean Identities – Environment, Society, Culture" (edited by prof. Borna Fuerst-Bjeliš, University of Zagreb, and published by InTech) is envisioned



"to embrace the environment, society and culture of the Mediterranean in their multiple and unique interconnections over the millennia and to contribute to the better understanding of the essential human-environmental interrelations throughout the history of the Mediterranean". In order to tackle this complex issue, the book has gathered contributions from 49 scientists from Europe and Asia and from different fields of science. They include Geography and Environmental Sciences, History, Cultural Studies, Biology, Ecology, Agricultural and Forest Sciences, Architecture, and Medicine. In order to deal with such complexity (prof. Fuerst-Bjeliš writes in the preface that we cannot talk about the Mediterranean identity, but rather about Mediterranean identities), a complicated, if not heterogeneous approach was employed where the book was divided into four sections covering four different topics.

The first section is called "Rethinking the Mediterranean" and it deals with the history and culture of the area. Trindade Lopes and Almeida (Chapter 1) give an interesting insight into the multicultural nature of the Mediterranean, and emphasize its African and Asian roots, aiming to reclaim the importance of these "other" legacies. They see the modern identity-based narratives in contemporary Europe as (wrongly) based on combined Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, which disregard their African and Asian roots. Mallia-Milanes (Chapter 2) discusses the questions of (dis)continuity of primacy of the Mediterranean in the international economy in the early modern period in the context of the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the great discoveries. These two chapters are then followed by Powley, Van Cappellen and Krom's review of the relations between the water inflow, outflow, and biological productivity of the Mediterranean Sea (Chapter 3). This chapter illustrates what can be considered a minor shortcoming of the entire book. It is an excellently written chapter adapted to the book-writing style – it tries to give a wider context and explains scientific terms which could be unknown to scientists from other fields (and even provides a glossary of terms at the end of the chapter). However, it has no thematic consistency with the section 'Rethinking the Mediterranean', and even more, it would be difficult to put it in any other section of the book as well. This chapter is then followed by a 'return' to the historical and cultural analysis of the topic through Pizzato's interesting analysis of the Mediterranean as a symbolic space and source of meaning on Italian culture (Chapter 4).

The second section, "Biodiversity: Nature at the Crossroads", consists of three chapters discussing marine ecosystems and two of them deal with terrestrial ecosystems. Seeing that the Mediterranean is considered a hotspot of biodiversity, it is the largest section of the book. Mannino, Balistreri and Deidun have written a well-rounded chapter on marine biodiversity in relation to the changing climate and biological invasion. They also include a part on the geological history of the Mediterranean. Spano and De Domenico (Chapter 6) focus on the importance of the Strait of Messina and the Sicily Channel and their link to biodiversity in the Central Mediterranean. Gönülal and Dalyan address deep-water biodiversity in the Mediterranean (Chapter 7) in a way which is more appropriate for an encyclopaedia-type entry, rather than a book chapter. It is followed by Martin-Fores' analysis (Chapter 8) of the positive impact of exotic species on ecosystems in the Mediterranean which seem to enhance its biodiversity. Similarly to chapter 7, Çiçek and Cumhuriyet give an overview of threatened species of Mediterranean amphibians and reptiles (Chapter 9).

The third section, "Risk and Hazards" focuses mostly on drought and fire relation as well as questions of wildfire prevention and recovery. The only chapter not dealing with fires is Duarte's analysis of vulnerability of soil and water as well as erosion problems in Mediterranean agro-forest systems (Chapter 10). Sferlazza, Maetzke, Miozzo, and La Mela Veca discuss the resilience of Mediterranean forests to climate change and present the results of the project LIFE ResilForMed in terms of developing the best management practices that may help Mediterranean forests to adapt to climate change (Chapter 11), Varol, Ertuğrul, and Özel (Chapter 12) question the methods of predicting the number of fires and the size of burnt area, mainly through different drought indices. Gonçalves and Sousa point to the increasing trend toward larger fires in the Mediterranean mainly due to climatic and land-use changes (Chapter 13). This section ends with Oliveira, Laneve, Fusilli, Eftychidis, Nunes, Lourenço, and Sebastián López who present the results of the PREFER project, an initiative and a kind of platform aiming to improve fire hazard mitigation measures and to promote comparable appraisals between different regions, based on a set of high-quality information and data sets (Chapter 14).

The fourth and final section - "Cultural Ecology and Mediterranean Lifestyle: Within and Beyond" is the most eclectic one. The chapter by Rojas-Cortorreal, Navés Viñas, Peña, Roset, and López-Ordóñez gives new insights into the Mediterranean urbanism in relation to the environmental characteristics and the potential use of vegetation in designing the urban climatic comfort in the case of Barcelona. It is followed by chapter 16, where Royo, Soriano, and Alvaro describe the importance of wheat, one of the oldest domesticated crops at the very core of the Mediterranean diet, with the immense significance for the Mediterranean culture and environment. The topic of Mediterranean diet and its widely known health benefits is further developed by Echeverría, Dussaillant, McGee, Urquiaga, Velasco, and Rigotti (Chapter 17). Mediterranean diet is nowadays accepted as a generic term and as one of the pillars of the Mediterranean identity has spread far beyond the Mediterranean region itself.

This book had a challenging goal to put the most important aspects of the Mediterranean culture, society and environment under a common denominator. Placing the chapters into four different thematic categories helped in creating a thematic consistency, but could not have been done perfectly. As the editor, prof. Fuerst-Bjelis, states in the preface, no region in the world is as complex as the Mediterranean, so editing this book was probably not an easy task. The result is an interesting, sometimes thought-provoking, but not always thematically and stylistically consistent book. However, it can be said that even the structure of the book reflects the complexity of the region it studies, and the chapters in "Mediterranean Identities – Environment, Society, Culture" (published under an open access publication model) will definitely find its way to a wider audience.