
Preface

What is the Mediterranean? What is defining it? Perhaps no region in the world is so complex and meaningful. These kinds of questions do not cease to be asked by the scholars since the influential work on the Mediterranean civilization by Fernand Braudel from the last century. He opened quite new perspectives on the question of identity of the places, introducing the leading role of the environment, which he thought is embedded in the core of the civilizations. The perception of the Mediterranean leans equally on the nature, its climate, vegetation, and sea but also on the culture and history, lifestyle, and finally on the landscape that embraces both, the nature and culture. To approach the question of identity, it seems that we have to give importance to all of these. There is no Mediterranean identity, but Mediterranean identities. Although, at first glance, it seems that it is more than clear what the Mediterranean region is, everyone has a kind of an image of it; some authors argue that it is not even a region, because it lacks homogeneity that is essential for regions with expressed identity. In fact, it is true, but that is exactly what gives individuality to the Mediterranean. Mediterranean is not about the homogeneity and uniformity, but about the unity that comes from diversities, contacts, and interconnections. And this applies to marine and terrestrial species, waters, as well as for peoples, cultures, and lifestyles. The book 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. Environment is one of the most important parts of the story. Everything takes place in the environment. In the distant past, subsistence was conditioned by the environmental opportunities much more than today. However, the contemporary lifestyle and activities and even sociopolitical relations are still in some extent, of course, designed by the environmental opportunities or constraints.

The choice of 17 chapters of the book, written by a number of prominent scholars and scientists, clearly shows the necessity of the interdisciplinary approach to the Mediterranean identity issues. The book reflects some of the current thinking on the subject, based on a vast body of literature, but also opens new insights and perspectives. Each author approaches the issue in his own, original way complementing each other. Chapters have defined a number of current key issues that make the basic structure of the book.

The book consists of four sections. The first section on “Rethinking the Mediterranean” brings four chapters discussing the identity and uniqueness of the Mediterranean from different perspectives—cultural and natural. The authors Trindade Lopes and Almeida have given a strong accent on the Mediterranean as a contact area and its multicultural nature but have particularly emphasized its African and Asian roots, aiming to reclaim the importance of these other legacies (than Greek and Roman) to the construction of the cradle of the civili-

zation. Mallia-Milanes discusses the questions of (dis)continuity of primacy of the Mediterranean in the international economy and exchange in the early new period in the context of the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the great discoveries. Powley, Van Cappellen, and Krom presented original new insights and a review of the unique relations between the water inflow, outflow, and biological productivity of the Mediterranean Sea. Comparing with other semiclosed and closed seas as well as the oceans, they clearly pointed to its uniqueness. On the other hand, Pizzato demonstrates the considerable performative effect of the Mediterranean as a symbolic space and source of meaning on Italian culture as well as in the process of Italian nation building between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. The second section addresses "Biodiversity: Nature at the Crossroads." As Mediterranean is considered a hotspot of biodiversity, this is the largest section, consisting of five chapters. Three chapters discuss marine ecosystems with different scope, and two others deal with terrestrial ecosystems. Mannino, Balistreri, and Deidun give comprehensive and overall review of marine biodiversity in relation to the changing climate and biological invasion, while Spanò and De Domenico address particularly the central Mediterranean biodiversity "crossroad" and Gönülal and Dalyan deep-water biodiversity. Martín-Forés questions the traditional approach of the negative impact of introduced plant species and establishes a new paradigm that changes traditional belief. She analyzes Mediterranean biomes on all the continents and the impact of main interchanges that occurred throughout the history on the landscape (change). The chapter by Çiçek and Cumhuriyet contains new contributions in terms of systematization of threatened species of Mediterranean amphibians and reptiles. The questions addressed are significant for understanding the human-environmental issues of the Mediterranean region. The third key issue is represented in the next section on "Risk and Hazards." Risks and hazards are the reality of the Mediterranean throughout its whole history. Particular attention in this book is given to the drought and fire relation as well as to the questions of wildfire prevention and recovery. 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 and thereby safeguard their multifunctional benefits for future generations. Varol, Ertuğrul, and Özel question the methods of predicting the number of fires and burnt area, mainly through the drought indices. Gonçalves and Sousa point to the increasing trend toward larger fires in the Mediterranean due mainly to climatic and land-use changes. The case study in Portugal highlights the importance of vegetation regrowth in a short time after the fire to maintain both forest systems and soil conservation. Oliveira, Laneve, Fusilli, Eftychidis, Nunes, Lourenço, and Sebastián-López present the results of the PREFER project, as 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. On the other hand, Duarte addresses another important Mediterranean issue of vulnerability of soil and water and erosivity problems in Mediterranean climatic conditions, pointing primarily to the exchange of high rainfall and drought periods. The last section addresses "Cultural Ecology and Mediterranean Lifestyle: Within and Beyond." 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 review chapter by Royo, Soriano, and Alvaro, we can read about the wheat, one of the oldest domesticated crops at the very core of the Mediterranean diet with the immense significance for the Mediterranean culture and

identity. The topic of Mediterranean diet and its widely known health benefits is further developed by Echeverria, Dussaillant, McGee, Urquiaga, Velasco, and Rigotti. *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.

The book has brought to the front the contemporary key issues of the Mediterranean region. Millennia-long human-environmental interrelations have built, shaped, and designed a kind of Mediterranean lifestyle, landscape, and distinct multifaceted identity. The book has also stressed the most serious concerns of the Mediterranean today—threats to biodiversity, risks, and hazards—mostly increasing wildfires, due to the climate, lifestyle, and land-use change and finally depletion of traditional Mediterranean practices and landscapes, as constituent parts of the Mediterranean heritage.

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