

MEDITERRANEAN COASTS STILL UNDER REAL ESTATE PRESSURE



Housing development and the tourism boom threaten the 46,000 kilometers of the Mediterranean coasts, putting at risk natural sites and traditional activities.

The Mediterranean coast, a coastline territory stretched throughout 21 countries, attracts one third of world tourism.

The number of international visitors could reach over 500 million by 2030, when in 1970 the number was only 58 million, according to the Plan Bleu (Blue Plan), an activity center supported by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

“But the current tourism model is highly unsustainable, and the excessive growth of the sector will worsen the environmental pressure,” reports the center.

The river population continues to grow at an alarming rate. Between 1970 and 2000, the number doubled on the southern and eastern shores, going from 32 to 75 million, according to Plan Bleu. And even though the fact that more restrictive laws are being enforced in some countries has improved the protection of some areas, including the protocols established by the Barcelona Convention, there are still abuses to the ecosystems.

Over 8,000 km of the most traveled coasts in Spain were subjected to multiple pressures, beginning with the construction boom of the 1970s, until the burst of the real estate bubble in 2008.

The inland coastline already has constructions in more than 500 meters in several provinces. Such is the case of Malaga (in the southern region) with houses covering 81% of its coasts, as highlighted by an autonomous body in 2016, the Urban Environmental Observatory (OMAU, in Spanish).

An enormous white hotel with 21 floors, symbol of the anarchic and illegal construction of the beginning of the century, was built in a protected natural park of Andalusia, in Algarrobico.

The Supreme Court ruled that it was illegally built, and should be demolished, “but the structure remains standing because multiple lawsuits are open in order to determine whether the owner should be compensated, and due to the lack of political activity,” said Pilar Marcos, representative of Greenpeace Spain.

In Lebanon, it's almost impossible to go to the beach without paying. "Only 20% of the coast is freely accessible, the rest is privatized mainly because of the tourist complexes," explained Jad Tabet, president of the Order of Engineers and Architects of Beirut.

In 2012, a government report from the Ministry of Transport said that five million square meters of coastline is illegally built on. "The State is completely absent against private interests," he regrets.

Yet a new tourism complex project in the northern region of Anfeh has raised concern for environmentalists. This resort threatens one of the oldest salt flats in the Mediterranean, located in an archaeologically rich area, a heritage for Lebanon, with one of "the cleanest water of the Lebanese coast," explains marine biologist Sammy Joe Lycha.

Since 1986, France has enforced a coastal law, which, according to the authorities, "protects the coastline from urbanization", a territory that covers more than 15,000 km, "despite the real estate pressure".

But the abuses continue. On the island of Corsica, U Levante, **an environmental defense association, has finally won a 20-year lawsuit, with the court ruling an order to demolish a large house built by a Swiss investor in a protected area along the coast.**

Meanwhile, on a beach in the municipality of Calvi, an illegally built inn with an annual income of 700 million euros continues its operations. The authorities imposed a fine of 1,000 euros per day to the establishment since June 15.

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