SUSTAINABLE OCEAN ECONOMY | UN OCEAN DECADE COLLABORATIVE CENTRE BARCELONA

The Barcelona Manifesto

The Barcelona Manifesto on Urban Coastal Resilience and Ocean Sustainable Economic Opportunities

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1. PREAMBLE

The Barcelona Manifesto focuses on strengthening resilience governance in urban coastal areas, addressing both the built and natural environments of coastal cities and regions.

Coastal urban areas are gateways between land and sea. They are places where people, cultures, economies and ecosystems meet; where ports connect communities to the world; and where waterfronts hold memory. Coastal cities concentrate lives, infrastructure, knowledge and creativity, making them vital engines of sustainable prosperity and transformation.

Yet the same qualities that make coastal urban areas so essential also place them on the frontline of a changing climate. Rising seas, stronger storms, ecosystem loss and social inequality are no longer distant threats: they are defining challenges for the present and future of coastal life.

We call on upon local and regional governments to promote the understanding that actions to achieve resilient and prosperous coastal communities must no longer be perceived as societal costs, but as opportunities for sustainable growth, local employment, blue innovation, and long-term collective prosperity, and to work towards creating the enabling conditions for this transformation.

A new approach to the **economic resilience of coastal areas** is needed, moving beyond reactive responses towards a transformative vision that connects land and sea, links knowledge to action, fosters innovation, and mobilises public and private investment to support sustainable development and long-term prosperity **in a new model of transformative governance.**

We stand at the edge of the ocean and the seas at a decisive moment. The choices we make today will shape whether coastal urban areas become places of growing vulnerability or living laboratories of resilience, justice and renewal.

The ocean is changing. Our territories must change with them.

This Manifesto is a call to act with courage, imagination and solidarity. Resilience must mean more than protection from disruption: it must mean the power to adapt, transform and thrive. It must guide us toward coastal communities that are safer, fairer, greener and more prosperous for present and future generations.

2. SCIENCE IS TELLING US

Scientific evidence – and the status quo - shows that coastal urban areas are one of the frontlines of climate change. Rising seas, warmer oceans, stronger extremes, increasing pollution loads, and growing urban exposure are increasing risks to people, ecosystems, infrastructure and local economies. These risks are not isolated: they interact, compound and cascade across urban socio-economic systems.

Sea-level rise is accelerating. Global mean sea level is rising at an unprecedented rate in at least the last three millennia. As oceans warm and land ice melts, higher sea levels increase the frequency and severity of coastal flooding, erosion, saltwater intrusion and permanent inundation in low-lying areas.

Extreme events are becoming more damaging. Climate change increases the intensity of many climate-related hazards, including heatwaves, heavy rainfall, coastal storms and storm surges. When these hazards coincide with high tides, river flooding, land subsidence or poor drainage, they can generate compound events that overwhelm urban systems.

Coastal ecosystems are losing protective capacity. Wetlands, dunes, beaches, reefs, seagrass meadows and mangroves reduce wave energy, store carbon, support biodiversity and sustain livelihoods. Their degradation through urbanisation, over harvesting of marine resources, unsustainable tourism, pollution, warming, acidification and sea-level rise reduces the natural protection available to urban coastal areas.

Risk is socially unequal. The impacts of coastal hazards are felt most severely by communities with limited resources, insecure housing, insufficient services or weak political representation. Without inclusive adaptation, climate responses can reinforce inequality by moving risk from one place or group to another.

3. CHALLENGES

Governance challenges

Long-term investment. Coastal adaptation requires long-term vision and investment, stable financing and planning beyond short political cycles. Many local and regional governments struggle to secure the resources needed to protect people, infrastructure and ecosystems over time.

Integrated Governance and cooperation. Fragmented responsibilities between institutions, sectors and levels of government make coastal management more complex. A clear example of this challenge is the Port–City relationship. Integrated governance is needed to align urban planning, climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, ecosystem protection and economic development. Given that adaptation projects can take decades to implement, building and maintaining institutional memory is critical to ensuring continuity, informed decision-making, and long-term project success.

Private sector participation. Private sector participation is essential. Private capital must be guided by public goals, transparent decision-making and fair financing models that support resilience without increasing inequality. To this end, it is important to develop public–private partnerships and collaborative forums that support systemic transformation rather than isolated projects with limited time horizons. At the same time, developing capacity and strategic alliances is crucial to address potential asymmetries between private investors and public authorities, particularly in regions where differences in financial expertise, resources or negotiation capacity may affect their ability to engage on an equal footing.

Technical and scientific support to cities and regions in decision-making. Urban coastal areas have a knowledge base that can and must be strengthened. The critical challenge is to translate available evidence into timely decisions and effective action. Strengthening scientific cooperation, technical support and local capacity is essential to guide place-based adaptation strategies, ensuring that the continued development of knowledge supports, rather than delays, the decisions needed to build long-term coastal resilience.

Environmental challenges

Protection of biodiversity and ecological systems. Coastal areas face rising sea levels, coastal erosion, storm surges, flooding, saltwater intrusion and the degradation of beaches, wetlands and marine biodiversity. These impacts threaten natural habitats, reduce the protective role of coastal ecosystems and increase the exposure of urban areas to extreme events.

Reduce pollution and recover habitats. Pollution, habitat loss and pressure from urban growth commensurate with population growth further weaken coastal ecosystems, making it harder for coastal cities to adapt to climate change and recover after disasters.

Ocean economy challenges

Minimize the impact on vital infrastructure. Investing in coastal resilience is essential not only to protect people and ecosystems, but also to strengthen the capacity of coastal economies to adapt, innovate and thrive. Critical infrastructure such as water treatment plants, sanitation infrastructure, energy systems, transport networks, communication infrastructure, ports, and food supply chains is increasingly exposed to climate change induced coastal hazards. Damage to these systems can trigger cascading impacts that manifest in a variety of ways, and which have both direct and indirect impacts that may be experienced at multiple scales that can threaten human safety.

Strengthening the economic case for investment in coastal and maritime resilience. Developing compelling business cases that demonstrate the economic value and investment potential of resilient infrastructure, healthy marine ecosystems, and thriving coastal and maritime activities, including fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, and maritime industries. Transforming knowledge into strategic insights to foster the

Sustainable Ocean Economy and increase awareness of its potential to generate employment and enhance the competitiveness of businesses in coastal cities and regions.

Improving the management of public and private funds. One challenge is to strategically direct public funds and private capital investing in sectors such as the continuity of fisheries and aquaculture, infrastructures, tourism, ports, logistics, as well as in the protection and regeneration of marine ecosystems. But in other hand, many local governments have difficulties to retain technical capacity to implement large projects.

Funding opportunities must take place commensurate with building and retaining appropriate capacity within local government. The challenge is not simply to attract more money, but to align investment flows with public coastal communities' resilience objectives and make the case in terms of a resilient return for urban areas and the private sector.

4. VISION

We champion a transformative approach to urban coastal resilience that anticipates change, connects knowledge to action, aligns action across institutions and time horizons, and mobilises public and private investment to turn coastal resilience challenges into opportunities for sustainable economic development and long-term prosperity for people, communities and coastal ecosystems.

We envision a future where coastal resilience is not merely about protecting shorelines from climate hazards, but about **creating thriving, equitable, and sustainable urban coastal communities and their economic systems.** A future where coastal cities and regions are empowered to transform climate risks into opportunities for innovation, social progress, ecological restoration, and sustainable economic development. This vision requires:

- **Inclusive and equitable coastlines that promote collective prosperity**, reduce social and territorial inequalities, and ensure that the benefits of coastal development are shared by all communities.
- **Climate-ready coastlines**, equipped to adapt to changing environmental conditions, withstand climate risks, and strengthen resilience through proactive, flexible, and nature-based solutions.
- **Turning coastal resilience into an economic opportunity.** A resilient coast is a more attractive place for investment and economic development and job creation, as it reduces disaster-related costs, improves infrastructure reliability, and increases attractiveness for businesses, investors, and workers.
- **Innovation and a thriving oceanic economy.** Fostering innovation, sustainable investment, economic diversification and new business models across the ocean economy to strengthen the resilience of coastal economic activities, enable businesses and communities to adapt and seize emerging opportunities, and

generate sustainable prosperity while preserving the natural systems that sustain urban coastal environments.

- **Connected and collaborative coastal communities**, where governments, businesses, academia, civil society, and local stakeholders work together to shape decisions and co-create resilient futures.
- A **transformative governance model guided by long-term vision and co-decision spaces**, capable of anticipating future challenges, overcoming institutional fragmentation, and driving coordinated action across all levels of decision-making. This requires the participation of all sectors of society, including citizens, civil society, businesses and public institutions.
- To adopt an **integrated approach**, considering environmental, economic and social aspects in the urban planning of coastal cities.
- Promote integration and **cooperation between ports and cities**, as a partnership for sustainable development.

5. CALL FOR ACTION

Therefore, considering the current state of our coasts, cities and regions have chosen to raise our collective voice, stand firmly in favour of change, and commit ourselves to improving what lies within our reach.

For this reason, we commit to:

- **Strengthening climate-resilient infrastructure and public services**, supported by effective monitoring tools to improve our capacity to anticipate, withstand, and adapt to climate impacts including sea-level rise, flooding, heat, storms, and water-related risks.
- **Protecting, restoring, and valuing coastal and marine ecosystems** as essential assets that provide biodiversity, ecosystem services, risk reduction, and long-term societal benefits.
- **Placing equity and climate justice at the centre of resilience efforts**, prioritising vulnerable communities and ensuring that the benefits of adaptation and development are shared by all.
- **Developing and implementing integrated coastal resilience plans**, informed by long-term coastal risk assessments and spatial planning approaches, supported by cross-sectoral governance mechanisms, and monitored through regular reporting to ensure effective and coordinated adaptation action.
- **Promoting a sustainable ocean economy**, supporting innovation, responsible investment, and economic activities that generate quality jobs, strengthen business competitiveness, and create prosperity while safeguarding natural resources and ecosystem health. Aligning public coastal resilience goals and private investment decisions so that private capital reinforces, rather than conflicts with expected resilience outcomes.
- **Building a governance approach that is responsive to the needs of vulnerable communities**, and which institutionalises key elements that are central to building resilient coastal cities and regions.

- **Enhancing public awareness, fostering shared understanding, and fostering meaningful participation, transparency, and co-creation**, engaging communities, academia, businesses, financial actors, and civil society as partners in shaping the future of our coastlines.
- Practise a **responsible tourism** in coastal cities, whilst ensuring access to affordable housing.
- Incorporate all above criteria into the **urban planning of coastal cities**.

We call on national, regional and local governments, international institutions, public and private financial actors, business, research organisations, coastal stakeholders and citizens to strengthen their support for coastal resilience and to join this collective effort and make coastal resilience a global priority for economic, environmental, and social transformation, for the benefit of present and future generations.

Addressing the challenges facing our coastlines requires greater international cooperation, increased technical assistance and capacity building, and funding mechanisms that enable cities and regions to implement short-term and long-term adaptation solutions. We also call for stronger platforms for collaboration and knowledge exchange, allowing coastal territories to share data, innovations, technological advances, and ocean economy solutions.

We call on the global community at the 2027 UN Ocean Decade Conference to recognize local and regional coastal governance as the foundation on which all ocean sustainability commitments must rest. However, recognition alone is not enough. Delivering coastal resilience at the scale and speed required demands predictable, accessible, and long-term financial resources.

We therefore urge governments, international financial institutions, and private investors to significantly increase investment in coastal adaptation and resilience initiatives grounded in evidence-based decision making, ensuring that coastal cities and regions have the resources needed to turn commitments into action.

Partners