Response of rocky shore communities to anthropogenic pressures in Albania (Mediterranean Sea): ecological status assessment through the CARLIT method

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Response of rocky shore communities to anthropogenic pressures in Albania (Mediterranean Sea): Ecological status assessment through the CARLIT method

Aurélie Blanfuné, Charles François Boudouresque, Marc Verlaque, Sajmir Beqiraj, Lefter Kashta, Ina Nasto, Stela Ruci, Thierry Thibaut

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1. Introduction

The Mediterranean Sea is a hotspot of marine biodiversity that is under siege due to high demographic pressure, a high percentage of worldwide shipping and tourism and the highest worldwide rate of biological invasions (Bianchi and Morri, 2000; Gaill, 2000; Boudouresque and Verlaque, 2002; Boudouresque, 2004; Lotze et al., 2006; Coll et al., 2010, 2012; Lejeune et al., 2010; Zenetos et al., 2010; UNEP/MAP, 2012; Bianchi et al., 2014; Giakoumi et al., 2015). Different pressures act over time and in unison, with possible synergy effects, to affect the species, the ecosystems and their ability to deliver ecosystem services (e.g. Worm et al., 2006; Halpern et al., 2008; Waycott et al., 2008).

Within the framework of the Water Framework Directive (WFD, 2000/60/EC) (E.C., 2000) of the European Union (EU), several indices based upon marine indicator species have been proposed to assess the ecological status of coastal water bodies, e.g. the CCO index (Cover, Characteristic species, Opportunistic species), based upon intertidal seaweeds along the European Atlantic coasts (Ar et al., 2016) and the EEI (Ecological Evaluation Index, based upon macroalgae), PREI (Posidonia oceanica Rapid Easy Index, based upon the P. oceanica seagrass), R-MaQUI (based upon lagoon macrophytes), MAES (for mesophotic assemblages between 50 and 150 m depth, based upon ROV-imagery) and CARLIT (Cartography Littoral), based upon mid-littoral and shallow water species for the Mediterranean coasts (Orfanidis et al., 2003; Ballesteros et al., 2007; Sfriso et al., 2007; Gobert et al., 2009, Nikolić et al., 2013; Cánovas et al., 2016). The indicator species of good ecological status used for the CARLIT index (Ballesteros et al., 2007) are the long-lived species, i.e. seagrasses, Lithophyllum byssoides (Lamark) Foslie (Rhodobionta, Archaeplastida) and Cystoseira spp. (Phaeophyceae, Stramenopiles), which are usually regarded as sensitive to pollution and coastal development. For this reason, they were included within the Berne Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats (Appendix I: strictly protected flora species) (Council of Europe, 1979) and the Barcelona Convention for the protection of the marine environment and the coastal regions of the Mediterranean (Annex II: ‘Endangered or threatened species that the Parties shall manage with the aim of maintaining them in a favourable state of conservation’) (Barcelona Convention, 1976, 1996).

Lithophyllum byssoides (synonym Lithophyllum lichenoides) is a calcified red alga that thrives exclusively within a narrow vertical range a few centimetres above the mean sea-level (lower mid-littoral zone sensu Pérès, 1982). It is the ecosystem engineer of the Lithophyllumtum lichenoidis, which harbours both marine and terrestrial taxa (Molinier, 1958, 1960). Its mid-littoral location exposes it to sea-surface pollution. Under suitable
environmental conditions (unpolluted, dim light and high hydrodynamics), it can constitute large bioconstructions referred to as Lithophyllum byssoides rims (Picard, 1954; Blanc and Molinier, 1955; Ballesteros, 1984; Laborel et al., 1994a). Due to the very narrow vertical distribution range (± 10 cm) of L. byssoides and to its slow growth rate (Faivre et al., 2013; Thibaut et al., 2013), such bioconstructions require a long period of relative stabilisation of the sea-level to settle. Consequently, L. byssoides rims are valuable indicators of near-stable or slowly rising sea-level and high sea-water quality over long periods (Laborel et al., 1983, 1993, 1994b; Morhange et al., 1992; Morhange, 1994; Laborel and Laborel-Deguen, 1996; Bressan et al., 2001; Faivre et al., 2013).

Species of the genus Cystoseira C. Agardh (Phaeophyceae, Stramenopiles) are canopy forming brown algae dominating several assemblages from the subtidal fringe (< 1 m below the mean sea level) down to the lower limit of the euphotic zone (infralittoral and circalittoral zone sensu Péres, 1982) (Feldmann, 1937; Molinier, 1960; Pignatti, 1962; Verlaque, 1987; Ballesteros, 1988, 1990a, 1990b; Giaccone et al., 1994). The zonation and the extension of these assemblages are under the control of a range of environmental conditions (light, temperature, hydrodynamics, water quality and grazing) (Sauvageau, 1912; Ollivier, 1929; Vergès et al., 2009). Among the Cystoseira species, Cystoseira amentacea [previously referred to as Cystoseira stricta (Montagne) Sauvageau and Cystoseira spicata Ercegović] is a species widely distributed in the Mediterranean Sea. It belongs, like Cystoseira mediterranea Sauvageau and Cystoseira tamariscifolia (Hudson) Papenfuss, to a morphological group restricted to the subtidal fringe, (Sauvageau, 1912; Feldmann, 1937; Ribera et al., 1992). Cystoseira amentacea is the ecosystem engineer of the Cystosieretum stricta Molinier, 1956 association, which harbours hundreds of species and can occupy extensive zones of wave-exposed shallow hard substrates (Molinier, 1960; Bellan-Santini, 1968; Boudouresque, 1971a, 1971b).

Albania has about 427 km of coastline facing the Adriatic and Ionian seas, within the Mediterranean Sea. The marine environment of the Albania coast varies widely from north to south. The Adriatic northern part is dominated by shallow waters, sandy beaches, sandspits, wetlands and lagoons, whereas the Ionian southern part is a rugged rocky coast with high relief and caves (Tilot and Jeudy de Grissac, 1994). Located in the middle part of Albania, the city of Vlora is the second largest port (for trade and fisheries) in the country and one of the most attractive tourism resorts in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea (Frascetti et al., 2011). The resident population is about 150,000 inhabitants and about 2 million tourists were accommodated in 2008 (INSTAT, 2008). The north and south coasts of the Bay of Vlora are occupied by extensive beaches. Facing Vlora, Sazani Island and the Karaburuni Peninsula are composed mainly of Cretaceous limestone rocks. In contrast with Vlora, the rural population of Sazani Island and the Karaburuni Peninsula is low, with 5–20 inhabitants km−2. Sazani Island is military territory and Karaburuni Peninsula was declared a natural reserve in 1966. In April 2010, the coastal and marine area of Sazani Island and the Karaburuni Peninsula were raised to the status of Marine Protected Area (MPA), which is the first and the only existing MPA in Albania (Kasha et al., 2011).

Only a very few data sets regarding the presence, abundance and patterns of distribution of marine species and communities were available in this area, these being 3 seaweed checklists (Kasha, 1986; Kupe and Miho, 2006; Antolić et al., 2010), an in-depth study of the genus Cystoseira (Ercegović, 1952) and a general assessment of biodiversity and communities (Frascetti et al., 2011).

The aim of the present study was to assess (i) the distribution and state of conservation of the Lithophyllum byssoides rims, the Cystoseira amentacea stands and shallow subtidal communities (ii) the ecological status of coastal waters of the region by means of the CARLIT method, especially along the coastline of Sazani Island and Karaburuni Peninsula, after the establishment of the MPA, (iii) the comparison between two methods of calculation of the CARLIT index (Ballesteros et al., 2007; Nikolić et al., 2013), and (iv) the congruence of the CARLIT index versus two proxies of anthropogenic pressure (Lopez y Rojo et al., 2009; Flo et al., 2011).

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Sampling sites

The study was conducted in May 2013 in the district of Vlora (Albania, Mediterranean Sea). Most of the study area was located within the MPA of Sazani Island and the Karaburuni Peninsula (Fig. 1). The shore south to Orso Bay, though belonging to the MPA, was not explored. Although L. byssoides and C. amentacea are perennial and long-lived species that can be observed year round, late spring is the most suitable period for such field work, as erect branches of C. amentacea are then fully developed.

2.2. Identifying ecological regions in the studied area

No coastal water bodies have been previously delineated in Albania, a country which does not belong to the EU, and is not bound to apply the European WFD requirements. We therefore undertook the following delineation by coastal water bodies according to the ridgelines watershed: the western and northern shores of Karaburuni Peninsula, the eastern shore of Karaburuni Peninsula and the southern and eastern shores of the Bay of Vlora, the western and the eastern shores of Sazani Island (Fig. 1).

2.3. Mapping of lower mid-littoral and shallow subtidal communities

The geomorphological characteristics of the shoreline were drawn on black and white A3 format aerial photographs from Google Earth®. The scale was 1:2500. Three observers worked on board a small boat (length 5 m) moving at low speed (3 to 6 km h−1) a few metres from the shore. The species and communities were entirely mapped. Observations were entered within a Geographical Information System (GIS) database (ArcGis10®), allowing the extraction of latitude and longitude of each location, using the coordinate system WGS-1984-UTM-zone-34N.

The Lithophyllum byssoides rims of measurable size (i.e. at least 0.2-m width and 1-m long) and with a distinct overhang were exhaustively mapped and their vitality was visually assessed (alive rims vs dead).

Among the shallow subtidal communities, down to 2-m depth, we mapped Cystoseira amentacea, Cystoseira compressa, Corallina caespitosa, Mytilus galloprovincialis, the mosaic of stands of other erect macroalgae and the barren grounds of encrusting corallines with the sea urchins Paracentrotus lividus (Lamarck, 1816) and Arbacia lixula (Linnaeus, 1758). For taxonomic and nomenclatural purposes, the worldwide electronic database algaebase.org (Guiry and Guiry, 2015) was followed.

2.4. Ecological status assessment

The ecological status of coastal water bodies of the study area was assessed by means of the CARLIT method (Ballesteros et al. 2007). The CARLIT method is based upon the mapping of geomorphological characteristics obtained in the field (slope, morphology and natural/artificial substrate) and some mid-littoral and shallow subtidal species and communities of the rocky shoreline.

Six relevant geomorphological situations identified by Ballesteros et al. (2007), according to the coastline morphology and natural/artificial substrates (Table S1), were mapped.

The species and communities taken into account, according to a decreasing level of sensitivity (SL, from 20, very sensitive, to 1, not sensitive) to disturbance, are listed in Table S2.

For each geomorphological situation, the length of the coast occupied by each community type was measured and the ecological quality...
value (EQ) was calculated using the formula:

\[ EQ_{ssi} = \frac{\sum_{i} (1_j \times SL_j)}{\sum 1_j} \]

where \( i \) is the geomorphological situation; \( EQ_{ssi} \) is the ecological quality value of the geomorphological situation \( i \); \( 1_j \) is the length of the coastline with the species/community \( j \); \( SL_j \) is the sensitivity level of the species/community \( j \) (Table S2) and \( \sum 1_j \) is the total length of the coastline occupied by the geomorphological situation \( i \).

According to the WFD, the ecological status of a coastal water body has to be expressed in terms of ecological quality ratios (EQR). This ratio indicates the relationship between the value of the biological parameters (here species and communities) recorded for a given coastal water body and the value for these parameters in the reference conditions applicable to this body.

The EQR (Ecological Quality Ratio) of the geomorphological situation of a coast is calculated as the ratio between the EQ obtained (\( EQ_{ssi} \)) and the EQ obtained in the reference sites corresponding to the same ‘geomorphological situation’ (\( EQ_{rsi} \)) (Table S1). Therefore, the EQR of a coast corresponding to a coastal water body is calculated according to the following formula:

\[ EQR = \frac{\sum (EQ_{ssi}/EQ_{rsi}) + 1_i}{\sum 1_i} \]

where \( i \) is the geomorphological situation; \( EQ_{ssi} \) is the EQ at the study site for the geomorphological situation \( i \); \( EQ_{rsi} \) is the EQ at the reference sites for the geomorphological situation \( i \); \( 1_i \) is the coastal length occupied by the geomorphological situation \( i \left( 1_i = \sum 1_i \right) \) and \( \sum 1_i \) is the total length of the coastline of the coastal water body \( \left( \sum 1_i = \sum \sum 1_i \right) \).

The EQR is expressed as a numerical value between 0 and 1. The ecological status of a coastal water body is defined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQR</th>
<th>Ecological status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to &gt;0.75</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.75 to &gt;0.60</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.60 to &gt;0.40</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.40 to &gt;0.25</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.25 to 0.0</td>
<td>Bad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nikolić et al. (2013) developed a slightly modified CARLIT index for the eastern Adriatic Sea. The equations and the rationale are the same as described by Ballesteros et al. (2007). The differences lie in the geomorphologically relevant situations (Table S3) and in some species and communities, in their sensitivity levels (Table S4). The two methods of calculation of the CARLIT Index have been applied to the same database and water bodies.

2.5. Assessment of anthropogenic pressures

A water quality assessment of coastal water bodies must be done in relation to anthropogenic pressures. The assessment of known pressures that could affect the water quality within the study area was performed using the land use pressures according to CORINE Land Cover information system 2000–2006 (Büttner et al., 2004; CORINE land cover, 2006). We considered maps of the coast spanning a 1 km wide strip along each coastal water body: the western and northern shores of Karaburuni Peninsula, the eastern shore of Karaburuni Peninsula, the southern and eastern shores of the Bay of Vlora, and the western and the eastern shores of Sazani Island.

Land uses simplified index (LUSI) was calculated according to Flo et al. (2011). Assessment of anthropogenic pressures on the coastal zone by calculating the LUSI index using the publicly available data is described in UNEP/MAP (2011). In the present study, we used the adaptation of LUSI index proposed by Nikolić et al. (2013) (Table S5).
For each coastal water body all scores for pressure were summed. Afterwards, a correction was applied to this sum in order to take into account the degree of confinement that could emphasize or diminish the effect of these pressures on the water body. Depending on the concave, convex or straight shape of the coastal line, the sum was multiplied by the correction factor 1.25, 0.75 or 1.00 (Table S5).

\[ \text{LUSI Index} = (A + B + C + D) \times E \]

In addition to the LUSI index, which provides a quantitative value assessing the anthropogenic pressures, we also tested the qualitative index proposed by Lopez y Royo et al. (2009) based on the surface area occupied by urban, agricultural and industrial activities using the Google-Earth images (for further details see Lopez y Royo et al., 2009).

3. Results

3.1. Distribution and state of conservation of Lithophyllum byssoides rims

In the lower mid-littoral zone, L. byssoides was widespread. In 96 localities, it has built bioconstructions larger than 0.2-m wide and 1-m long for a cumulative length of ~2.5 km for a total coastline length of ~68 km, which represents 3.6% of the rocky coastline (Fig. 2, Table S6). Most of the L. byssoides rims were facing W and NW (Fig. 2). Although large L. byssoides rims, up to ~1-m wide, were previously reported in the study area (Tilot and Jeudy de Grissac, 1994), most L. byssoides rims were relatively narrow with a width of <0.5 m.

At Sazani Island, especially in its southern part, a number of L. byssoides rims were in very poor condition (Fig. 2: arrows). They were located at a relatively low tide level, resulting in an unusually frequent covering by the sea water, even under calm conditions. They were deeply bored by holes and a network of blow-holes, making some of them a veritable lacework of calcareous bioconstruction. Lastly, their upper side was densely coated with perennial macroalgae, especially Corallina caespitosa, a species previously misidentified as C. mediterranea or C. elongata, and commonly used as a proxy of the upper limit of the subtidal zone. The vitality of these L. byssoides rims was considered as nil and their status as dead (fossil L. byssoides rims). In contrast, at Karaburuni Peninsula and in the north of Sazani, the upper side of the rim showed a more or less continuous cover of living L. byssoides, and the rims were considered as alive (Fig. 2: solid circles). However, with regard to the fossil L. byssoides rims, they were often perforated by a network of holes, so their health status was considered as intermediate.

3.2. Distribution of Cystoseira amentacea stands and shallow subtidal communities

Cystoseira amentacea is well-distributed on the western and northern sides of the Karaburuni Peninsula and the western part of Sazani Island. On the eastern side of the Karaburuni Peninsula, C. amentacea populations are less continuous and are replaced southwards by C. compressa (Fig. 3).

Beyond the L. byssoides rims and the C. amentacea stands, either barren-grounds or stands of erect macroalgae were present, except in front of the totally artificialized north-eastern part of Sazani Island that is occupied by the concrete bunkers and reclamations of a military base, with no macroscopic marine stands. Barren-grounds were characterized by encrusting corallines and sea urchins, Paracentrotus lividus and Arbacia lixula. These barren-grounds thrived from ~30 cm below the subtidal fringe down to at least 2 m depth. They occurred on the eastern side of the Karaburuni Peninsula and the western side of Sazani Island (Fig. 3). Along the rocky shores of the southernmost part of the Bay of Vlora, the barren-grounds extended up to the sea surface.

Stands of erect macroalgae consisted in a patchwork of species, mainly Corallina caespitosa, Halopteris scoparia (Junnaeus) Sauvageau, Padina sp., Dictyota spp. and four species of the genus Cystoseira: C. barbata.

![Fig. 2. Distribution and vitality of Lithophyllum byssoides rims in the study area (for exact location, see appendix S6). When two or more L. byssoides rims are too close to be separately represented, they are depicted by a larger solid circle.](image-url)
Fig. 3. Distribution of Cystoseira amentacea, C. compressa, mosaic stands of erect macroalgae, barren-grounds and reclamation and artificialized coastline in the study area.

Fig. 4. Ecological Quality Ratio (EQR) and ecological status of the different coastal water bodies of the study area in 2013, according to the Ballesteros et al. (2007) CARLIT method.
(Stackhouse) C. Agardh, *C. crinita*, *Cystoseira crinitophylla* Ercegović, *C. corniculata* (Turner) Zanardini. Large populations of *Cystoseira foeniculacea* (Linnaeus) Greville *f. foeniculacea* and *C. barbata* were found in rock pools close to Narta Lagoon, at the northern mouth of the Bay of Vlora. Lastly, a drift specimen of *C. foeniculacea* *f. latiramosa* (Ercegović) A. Gómez Garreta, M.C. Barceló, M.A. Ribera & J.R. Lluch was found in a fish net, at Vlora harbour, which indicates its occurrence in the study area. No individual of *Fucus virdoides* was found during our field surveys.

3.3. Ecological status and anthropogenic pressures

The ecological status of the northern and western shores of the Karaburuni Peninsula and of the western shore of Sazani Island was high. In contrast, the three other coastal water bodies fell within the bad to moderate ecological status range (Fig. 4, Table 1). Except for one coastal water body (eastern shore of Karaburuni Peninsula), the ecological status was identical whatever the CARLIT index calculation used (Ballesteros et al., 2007 versus Nikolić et al., 2013); however, the Nikolić et al. (2013) EQR was often higher (Table 1).

In order to validate the use of the CARLIT index, the EQR values (calculated for both CARLIT methods) were compared with values of LUSI (Land Uses Simplified Index) and Lopez y Royo et al. (2009) pressure index obtained for each coastal water body (Table 1). The calculated EQR values were significantly correlated with the LUSI index ($r = 0.85$, with Ballesteros et al., 2007 method; $r = 0.87$, with Nikolić et al., 2013 method; both being significant, $p = 0.001$) confirming a good response of the CARLIT method to the different levels of disturbance.

It is worth noting that, in contrast, the Lopez y Royo et al. (2009) pressure index was more roughly linked to the calculated EQR values than the LUSI index (for the both CARLIT methods) (Table 1), indicating the poorer efficiency of the former.

4. Discussion

The lower mid-littoral and shallow subtidal communities (0–2 m depth) were studied in the district of Vlora (Albania), three years after the establishment of a Marine Protected Area. In the lower mid-littoral zone, *L. byssoides* rims represented 3.6% of the coastline, a significant value although lower than some percentages previously measured in the western Mediterranean (Table 2). Most of the *L. byssoides* rims were facing W and NW, which is consistent with the wave exposure and the dim light conditions required by the species. No individual of *C. crinita* was found during our field surveys, as already reported by Kashta (1995–1996), which confirms the general decline of the species in the mid-Adriatic Sea (Mačić, 2006; Falace et al., 2010).

In 1992, some specimens of the mid-littoral fucoïd *Fucus virdoides* J. Agardh, an Adriatic endemic species common in the northern part of the Sea (Munda, 1972), were reported in the Bay of Vlora (Kashta, 1986, 1992). This record constituted the southern limit of distribution of the species. No individual of *F. virdoides* was found during our field survey, as already reported by Kashta (1995–1996), which confirms the general decline of the species in the mid-Adriatic Sea (Mačić, 2006; Falace et al., 2010).

### Table 1

Comparison of EQR and ecological status of coastal water bodies according to the two CARLIT methods (Ballesteros et al., 2007 and Nikolić et al., 2013) and two indices of anthropogenic pressure: LUSI (calculation method from Nikolić et al., 2013) and the Lopez y Royo et al. (2009) pressure index.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>EQR</th>
<th>Ecological status</th>
<th>LUSI index</th>
<th>Lopez y Royo et al. (2009) pressure index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western shore of Sazani Island</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern shore of Sazani Island</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Moderate pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western and northern shores of Karaburuni Peninsula</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern and eastern shores of the Bay of Vlora</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>High pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern shore of Karaburuni Peninsula</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>High pressure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With regard to the large areas covered with barren-grounds, the total lack of environmental management is clearly to be blamed. The regime shift from marine forests to barren-grounds devoid of erect macroalgae is generally linked to the overexploitation of predatory fish, which gives rise to the rapid expansion of herbivorous sea urchin populations (Sala et al., 1998, 2012; Steneck, 1998; Boudouresque and Verlaque, 2013; Ling et al., 2015). Overfishing, not only using fishing nets and trawling but also by means of the illegal use of explosives, has already been denounced by Tiloto and Jeudy de Grissac (1994) and Fraschetti et al. (2011). These illegal harvesting methods are still widely spread, according to Ballesteros et al. (2007) and Omrane et al., 2010; Blanfuné et al., 2011; Mangialajo et al., 2007; Omrane et al., 2010; Blanfuné et al., 2011; Blanfuné et al., 2014; Thibaut and Blanfuné, 2014). It is here applied for the first time in Albania, a non-EU country. The broad acceptance of this methodology for the assessment of the ecological status of coastal water bodies is due to the fact that (i) it is not destructive (no collection of species required); (ii) the mapping only concerns intertidal and very shallow marine habitats (no SCUBA diving required); (iii) large coastal stretches can be exhaustively explored; (iv) the considered taxa are relatively easy to identify by well-trained observers; (v) the CARLIT index is robust, with the ecological status of a given coastline congruent at a long time scale (Cavallo et al., 2016; Torras et al., 2016).

The ecological status assessed by the CARLIT method was high for the northern and western shores of the Karaburuni Peninsula and the western shore of Szazani Island. In contrast, the three other coastal water bodies fell within the bad to moderate ecological status range. Nikolić et al. (2013) proposed some improvements to the CARLIT method, e.g. a change in the species taken into account and a local adaptation of Ecological Quality values of the relevant geomorphological situation. Measuring the substrate slope for each habitat and community type, as suggested by the authors, was time-consuming and adopting their improvements only had a slight effect on the final assessment.

Overall, the ecological status of the study area was among the worst recorded in the areas already studied in the western Mediterranean basin and the Adriatic Sea (Table 3). Overall, despite the establishment of a MPA in 2010, the ecological status of a large part of the area was still poor or bad in 2013. No improvement was apparent when compared with the 2007 situation (Fraschetti et al., 2011), rather to some degree a decline in status. The same conclusion has been drawn for this area through an assessment of macrobenthos and fish, carried out in June 2015 (Samjir Bekiraj and Lefter Kashta, unpublished data).

The ecological status of the study area exhibited a good correlation with the LUSI index as a proxy of anthropogenic pressures, as previously evidenced by Bermejo et al. (2013) and Nikolić et al. (2013). In contrast, the Lopez y Royo et al. (2009) pressure index appeared not to be suitable at coastal water body scale.

In the light of the experience gleaned on the occasion of the present study, certain improvements to the method might also be suggested. Firstly, the delineation of 5 categories of abundance of C. amentacea could be usefully simplified into only 2 or 3 categories, as already suggested by Nikolić et al. (2013). Second, it might seem logical to lessen the number of habitats grouped at level 1 of the distribution and abundance categories to only two (good and moderate) and group the distribution to only two categories (continuous and patchy).

### Table 3

Comparison of the ecological status of coastal water bodies in different Mediterranean regions, based upon the CARLIT methodology. Number of coastal water bodies falling within each category (high through bad).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study area</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District of Vlora (Albania)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>This study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alboran Sea (Andalusia, Spain)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Bermejo et al., 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalonia (Spain)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Ballesteros et al., 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France, including Corsica</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Blanfuné et al., 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genova-Portofino area (Liguria, Italy)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mangialajo et al., 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capo Carbonara MPA (Sardinia)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ferrigio et al., 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Blanfuné et al., 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Adriatic Sea (Croatia)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nikolić et al., 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* According to the Ballesteros et al. (2007) method, slightly modified.
The weight of *C. amentacea* within the index calculation, in light of the fact that the species is less sensitive to water pollution than previously assumed (Thibaut et al., 2014; but see comments below). Thirdly, the presence of *L. byssoides* rims seems to be overestimated, and their death by submerison could be wrongly attributed to a decline in ecological quality, while actually due to the rise in sea level (Faiivre et al., 2013; Thibaut et al., 2013). These suggestions, at a broader geographic range (the Adriatic and the Western Mediterranean Basin), will be the subject of further studies.

As regards the weight, possibly too high, of *C. amentacea* within the CARJIT index calculation, it should be considered that the WFD uses the assemblage/habitats/species as indicators of water quality. The WFD says that water quality has to be high enough to not modify the species diversity, functionality and the habitats in the water body. If these three parameters are indistinguishable between a given place and a reference site (i.e. a place where human disturbances are nil or kept at a minimum), and the bioindicators used (in this case macroalgae of the habitats constituted by them) show no differences, it means that the water quality is not affecting the assemblages/habitats, and thus, this is consistent with the aims of the WFD. In this case, there would be no need to downweight the value of *C. amentacea* as the habitat remains unmodified in relation to a pristine place (Enric Ballesteros, pers. comm.). Furthermore, the article that claims that *C. amentacea* is less sensitive to pollution than previously expected (Thibaut et al., 2014) does not provide nutrient or pollution data. Finally, several papers unequivocally relate the effects of increased pollution values with the decline of *C. mediterranea* (the vicariant species of *C. amentacea* in some areas of the Mediterranean Sea) (Arévalo et al., 2007; Pinedo et al., 2007, 2015).

At present, the Sazani Island–Karaburuni Peninsula MPA established in 2010, is not yet managed as an MPA. The management plan and its implementation are just at their very inception, so that the present study may represent a useful tool to support the implementation of the management plan and as a baseline for future comparisons.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.marpolbul.2016.05.041.

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