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FROM CONCRETE TO SAND: TRANSFORMATION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN TOURIST INDUSTRY

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The Mediterranean Sea faces a plethora of anthropogenic stresses that threaten its diverse and abundant population of marine organisms. One of the biggest culprits is rampant development for the mass-tourism industry. Using the lens of the potential for marine turtle community-based ecotourism in Turkey, a transferrable policy framework of participatory coastal management, and community-based conservation and education initiatives will be proposed, to be adopted by the signatories of the Barcelona Convention and Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP). Based on clause 1.1.4 of the 20-year objective of the MAP Phase II (1995): ‘...to encourage regional and international cooperation that promotes environmentally-friendly tourism compatible with sustainable development’, a participatory community-based conservation model to counteract destructive socioeconomic practices that fail to balance biodiversity conservation is proposed.

Reflecting upon successful non-consumptive marine turtle ecotourism models, the long-term socioeconomic benefits of sustainable ecotourism over destructive mass-tourism are shown. The building of resorts may provide economic benefits in the short-term, but in the long-term, the destruction of the Mediterranean ecosystem and extinction of biodiversity like marine turtles will have severe socioeconomic consequences, as well as ecological.

Improved coastal management of Protected Areas (PAs) and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that integrates research on the “core-use zones” of marine turtles— such as feeding, breeding and nesting habitats — with local participation is proposed instead of centralised development-oriented management. The policy framework of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and research into the migratory patterns of sea turtles are assessed to create proposed extraction-free areas that overlap spatially with “core-use zones”. These include crucial feeding habitats like sea grass fields for *Chelonia mydas*, and areas of continental margins known to have large juvenile turtle populations. This will be extended to include ecotourism guidelines that utilise a temporally and spatially adaptive and randomised zonal exclusion strategy that limits pressure on “core-use zones”, thereby reducing the stress of excessive human-turtle contact.

Community participation in conservation activities and the ecotourism industry, coupled with educational programmes targeted towards directly-involved stakeholders like fishermen, boat captains, hotel managers and tour operators will be proposed. Community members will also be trained in turtle-monitoring techniques, providing an alternative to economic practices with destructive impacts on marine turtles.

This grassroots participatory ecotourism model aspires to successfully balance the conservation of marine turtles with socioeconomic development pressures. In creating a tourist industry that seeks to interact symbiotically with nature, as opposed to extracting from and subordinating it, this ecotourism model can help preserve the sociocultural value and diverse ecosystem services provided by marine turtles. While this model focusses on marine turtles in Turkey, the scales can be adapted to include other countries facing similar threats of unsustainable development, and other biodiversity threatened by extinction.