

# KEY STORIES

## Sustainable Coastal Tourism



### WHY LOOKING AT... COASTAL TOURISM?

Coastal mass tourism in Europe has traditionally been based on the so-called 3S model: Sea, Sand and Sun. Ever-increasing masses of tourists reach the Mediterranean coasts every summer, and this impacts the coastal and marine environments. Coastal development illustrates such impacts: this bulging phenomenon impacts long stretches of the European Mediterranean coast with artificialisation of coastal and marine ecosystems, habitat fragmentation and deterioration. In turn, the environmental impact of tourism threatens itself the economic viability of the sector. As coastal tourism is a blue growth sector contributing to job creation and well-being, finding sustainable development paths contributing to the good state of the coastal and marine environments is essential.

### WHICH CHALLENGES FACED FOR ADDRESSING ... SUSTAINABLE COASTAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT?

Massive coastal urbanization is the result of complex social, economic and policy dynamics involving many economic activities and actors. As a result, tourism is a complex and fragmented sector, often lacking synergies among different stakeholders as well as adequate governance bringing together all actors of the tourism value chain. In addition, planning strategies developed in mass tourism destinations have often been fragmented,

uncoordinated and based on financial criteria and profit maximization.

An innovative and sustainable tourism model can be established through comprehensive strategic tourism development planning, taking into account the carrying capacity of local (eco-) systems and allowing for benefit-sharing among all stakeholders. In turn, this call for an overall governance system based on the cooperation and informed participation of all stakeholders, supported by a strong political leadership at all decision-making scales. While the importance of urban planning, regulation and economic policies in determining territorial processes and tourism outcomes is recognised, these are not the only drivers to sustainable coastal tourism development: one has to consider the ways in which policies and planning interact with economic and social actors for determining the outcomes of urbanization.

### WHAT CAN OCEAN LITERACY DELIVER?

Key actors of coastal tourism include tourists themselves, hotel owners and managers, food and beverage producers and sellers, beach resort and marina managers, as well as construction companies, utilities and national and local policy makers. While initiatives do exist for guiding tourists to more sustainable touristic destination or to support good environmental practice on the beach, many of the actors mentioned above are rarely targeted by awareness raising and capacity building activities in relation to the health of the ocean. When such initiatives exist, they focus on the (negative) ecological impacts of coastal tourism targeting the general public, failing to combine it with knowledge on socio-economic and welfare aspects including



on the connection between the health of the ocean and the sector's welfare.

To contribute to the blue growth of the tourism sector, ocean literacy needs to make explicit the multiple direct and indirect connections between coastal and marine environments on the one hand, and tourism activities on the other. One key goal of ocean literacy can be to demonstrate the need for enhanced coordination among actors overcoming current sector fragmentation. It requires identifying key economic and civil-society actors with the largest influence on coastal development processes at the local level. Ocean literacy should focus of course on environmental challenges, making explicit the links between ocean's health and local economies and the potential for blue growth resulting from the sustainable management of the ocean.

At the same time, ocean literacy initiatives need to target tourists with a dual objective: (1) raising tourists' awareness on their individual and collective impacts and on how ways to mitigate it; and (2) informing local actors on tourists' expectations vis-à-vis the environmental quality of their touristic destination, building then development strategies on



these expectations and wishes for a healthier environment

### OCEAN LITERACY CAN...

- Make explicit (a) the socio-economic benefits that arise from healthy coastal and marine ecosystems and (b) how to act (individually and collectively) to reduce the tourism footprint
- Enhance coordination among actors to overcome current sector fragmentation
- Share knowledge on the welfare aspects of environmental degradation in relation to the potential for the sector's blue growth
- Raise tourists' awareness on sustainable tourism

