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Regional Mediterranean Training combining:

RE-9-REG: SUPs-free coastal and marine protected areas

**RE-10-REG: Enhancing responsible tourism and recreation
related businesses in coastal areas**

**HE-5-REG: Strengthening the science/policy interface in the
region through citizen science**

Concept Note (CN)

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ACRONYMS

BRs	Biosphere reserves
CN	Concept Note
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
EU	European Union
ENI	European Neighborhood Instrument
MPAs	Marine protected areas
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PCs	Partner Countries
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SUPs	Single-Use Plastics
SPAMIs	Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UNEP/MAP	United Nations Environment Program/Mediterranean Action Plan
WES	Water and Environment Support

1. INTRODUCTION: THE WES PROJECT

The "Water and Environment Support (WES) in the ENI Neighborhood South Region" project is a regional technical support project funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI South). WES aims to protect the natural resources in the Mediterranean context and to improve the management of scarce water resources in the region. WES mainly aims to solve the problems linked to pollution prevention and the rational use of water.

WES builds on previous similar regional projects funded by the European Union (Horizon 2020 CB/MEP, SWIM I and II, SWIM-Horizon 2020 SM) strives to create a supportive environment and increase the capacity of all stakeholders in the partner countries (PCs).

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE REGIONAL TRAINING

It is widely accepted that the Mediterranean Sea is one of the most affected seas by marine litter worldwide (UNEP/MAP, 2015). Marine litter is found lying on the shores, as well as floating throughout the water column or deposited on the seafloor. **In the Mediterranean plastics are the most common types of marine litter, representing some 80-90% of the items found, with the majority of items in the surveyed areas originating from tourism and recreational activities**, followed by fisheries and aquaculture. Single-Use Plastics (SUPs), are a major contributor to marine plastic pollution.

Even in pristine environments of the Mediterranean, such as coastal and marine protected areas (MPAs) and designated areas such as biosphere reserves (BRs), marine plastic pollution is building up, threatening habitats and species and inhibiting sustainable development. Impacts vary from entanglement and ingestion, to bio-accumulation and bio-magnification of toxics released from litter items, facilitation of introduction of invasive species, damages to benthic habitats, etc. Managers of protected areas stand at the forefront of this issue but sadly they frequently lack the tools, knowledge, and often the resources to effectively tackle it. As a result, the achievement of the conservation goals set and sustainable development are hampered.

The root causes of marine litter and SUPs in the Mediterranean are the same as anywhere else in the world: a complex combination of unsustainable production and consumption patterns, weak solid waste management practices and misconceptions related to possible solutions, lack of adequate policy and legislative frameworks and poor implementation and enforcement of existing ones, ignorance and/or irresponsible behaviour of individuals and economic sectors, fragmented understanding of the problem due to the lack of fit-for-purpose data and inadequate monitoring and data collection, also due to shortages in relevant staff in public administrations.

In the last few years considerable advances have been made in the Mediterranean to fill in the marine litter knowledge gaps via harmonized marine litter monitoring programmes within the framework of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (Descriptor 10 – Marine Litter) and the UNEP/MAP Ecosystem Approach (Ecological Objective 10 – Marine Litter); however, information on marine litter is still rather limited. This is particularly true for Mediterranean coastal and marine protected areas and other designated areas (i.e. SPAMIs, BRs, etc.) where very few systematic efforts to collect data on the amounts, distribution, composition and sources of marine plastic pollution have been conducted.

Sustainable practices in coastal tourism and recreational activities are essential for the shift from a linear to a circular economy and to advance towards a SUPs-free Mediterranean region as a common vision for our future. Today, **the industry's extensive use of SUPs, coupled with its proximity to coastal areas, contributes to the vast amounts of plastic waste that ends up in the sea and on beaches.**

To encourage **sustainable practices in tourism and recreational activities**, particularly within or in proximity of coastal protected areas, it is therefore essential to foster collaboration with tourism operators, businesses, recreational activity providers, as well as with local authorities. By working together, a collective effort can be made to promote and advocate for sustainable practices that effectively reduce the use of SUPs, and thus minimize the generation of waste that could end up as marine litter. This can be achieved by encouraging the use of products with reduced packaging and promoting the adoption of reusable products or products with eco-friendly characteristics. Bans or levies targeting single-use plastics, implemented or planned in a growing number of Mediterranean countries, can also be effective measures to reduce the supply and demand-side of SUPs. Additionally, it is important to inform and sensitize MPA managers and visitors about the importance of proper waste disposal and provide convenient and accessible waste management facilities throughout tourist destinations. Collaborative initiatives can include the development of guidelines and codes of conduct for tourism operators and activity providers that prioritize sustainable practices.

The role of Citizen/Participatory science

Citizen or Participatory science is research conducted by volunteers, including both children and adults. Any individual can become a scientific volunteer, regardless of her/his knowledge backgrounds. Nowadays, decision-making needs to rely on reliable information from various sources, including scientific research, indigenous and local knowledge, participatory and community-based research, and so on. However, the lack of reliable data, poses a serious problem for policy-making, which needs to be informed by data and statistics. Participatory science can contribute to reliable data collection on vulnerabilities, factors, trends and changes in many key areas related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, it is essential to design and implement scientifically robust participatory science initiatives and encourage all community members to get involved in scientific research actively.

The data gaps when it comes to marine litter, plastic pollution and SUPs are still prevalent the world over, including in the Mediterranean. The shift towards involving minimally trained volunteers in scientific research is gaining momentum, particularly in conservation and environmental management.

Involving volunteers in research has many benefits, including speeding up data collection and enabling long-term monitoring in remote areas (e.g. protected areas). In particular, when it comes to filling in the SUPs knowledge gaps, well organised (and tutored) participatory science can be a cost-effective way to gather required evidence and detect the emerging issues supporting public authorities, managers, and the coastal tourism industry to improve efficiency with less administrative burden. But getting a citizen or participatory science project off the ground can be daunting, with participants to train, funding hurdles to overcome and tools to be introduced or developed.

Findings of community-based science interventions are useful in research but can also act as a vehicle to raise community awareness and in turn societal support for certain measures.

Within this document a distinction is made between citizen science and participatory science. Even though there is no internationally accepted definition for citizen science, the term mainly refers to the involvement of non-professional volunteers in the scientific process, commonly in data collection, but also in other phases of the scientific process, such as data interpretation, problem definition, or dissemination of results (Bonney et al., 2009; Haklay, 2015).

Participatory science seems to be a more inclusive term that refers to research conducted in partnership between trained experts and members of a “community” or Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (Gall et al., 2009). Environmental NGOs are in many cases groups of professionals with strong competences in environmental research dedicated to the production of accurate, up-to-date research and data on the most pressing environmental issues. In fact, one of the most important roles that NGOs can play in global environmental governance is to provide up-to-date information on critical issues and governments often turn to NGOs to fill in the research gaps that stand in the way of effective decision-making (Gemmill and Bamidele-Izu, 2002).

In this document, the terms are used as almost synonymous, but during the training the distinction will be clear.

This WES regional activity, combines, brings back-to-back and integrates three of its regional trainings included in the WES project workplan:

- RE-9-REG: on SUPs-free coastal and marine protected areas
- RE-10-REG: on enhancing responsible tourism and recreation related businesses in coastal areas
- HE-5-REG: on strengthening the science/policy interface in the region through citizen science

3. OBJECTIVES, APPROACH AND EXPECTED RESULTS

3.1 OBJECTIVES

The **overall objective** of this regional training is **to capacitate the WES PCs in achieving SUPs-free coastal and marine protected areas; enhancing responsible tourism and recreation activities in coastal areas and strengthening the science-policy-practice interface through community-based research.**

In other words, the aim is to provide technical assistance and strengthen the capacities of stakeholders in the WES PCs to effectively manage Single-Use Plastics (SUPs) in and around coastal and marine protected areas, with emphasis on the role of the tourism and recreation sector, and by enhancing their capacities to implement citizen and participatory science interventions, with the ultimate goal of generating fit-for-purpose data related to the measures needed to address SUPs or for assessing the performance of the SUPs-related measures in place.

3.2 APPROACH TO MEET OBJECTIVES

This regional WES activity will address the tourism and recreation sectors, in terms of SUPs management. At the same time, community-based research interventions are barely starting to be applied in the WES

PCs, which is why the activity embeds support for the design and implementation of participatory science interventions. Such interventions encourage all community members to get involved in tackling the SUPs challenge by generating fit-for-purpose data in order to characterize the SUPs problem, identify tailored-made measures and monitor the performance of the applied measures.

Therefore, it is foreseen that the training will be structured in **6 main modules** across four days with lectures and case study presentations, working group sessions, interactive exercises, etc. Site visits nearby may be incorporated in the agenda. The modules of the regional training will build on the preparatory work conducted by the WES experts in advance of the training. In fact, the WES experts will prepare and disseminate prior to the training a **questionnaire** in English and French that will help define the focus of the regional training and potential mentoring needs for the post-training phase. More specifically, the questionnaire results will facilitate (or confirm) the identification of:

- the level of understanding of the trainees;
- any on-going relevant activities in the WES PCs;
- the priority aspects for the training modules' development and type of cases to be included.

In addition, the WES experts will compile prior to the training a first draft of a **Background/Guidance document** that will include:

- useful resources relevant to all of the themes of the activity, primarily based on outcomes of recent EU-funded and/or UfM labelled projects;
- operational guidelines and case studies covering all of the themes of the regional activity (SUPs management in coastal and marine protected areas);
- sustainable tourism and recreation policies and practices that minimise or eliminate the use of SUPs;
- showcasing of sustainable alternatives to SUPs;
- how participatory science has been or can be used to enhance knowledge on the SUPs related problem, the measures needed and the performance of applied measures;
- etc.

Moreover, in synergy with other on-going initiatives and projects in the region (mainly EU-funded and/or UfM labelled), the modules will capitalise on findings and case studies, and invited speakers will be incorporated in the agenda to showcase examples and lessons learned from the EU and the Mediterranean.

A pre and post training 'testing' will be conducted early in the training and again at the end to evaluate the impact of the training on the knowledge acquired in situ.

The regional training will also capitalize on the results of other regional and national WES activities on plastic waste management, SUPs reduction, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes, and marine litter monitoring and management (see more at www.wes-med.eu).

3.3 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

By participating in this regional training, the trainees will:

- strengthen their capacities to effectively manage Single-Use Plastics (SUPs) in and around coastal and marine protected areas
- gain deepened knowledge on the tourism and recreation sector in terms of SUPs management

- learn about the various ways to enhance sustainable tourism and recreation related businesses in coastal areas as well as practices that minimise or eliminate the use of SUPs
- learn how to strengthen the science-policy-practice interface in the region through citizen/participatory science
- learn about the design and implementation of participatory science interventions
- be encouraged to get involved in tackling the SUPs challenge
- reinforce a regional network of stakeholders in the Mediterranean dealing with the themes of the regional training.

4. TARGET GROUP OF THE REGIONAL TRAINING

Concerning the target group, this combined regional training of the WES project, is designed for policy makers linked to plastics management, protected/specially designated coastal areas and sustainable tourism, as well as NGOs working in the same fields that also run or plan to run relevant community-based research interventions.

More specifically, the target group includes:

- From each of the participating WES Partner Countries:
 - 1 policy person dealing with coastal and marine protected areas
 - 1 policy person working on sustainable tourism or from a coastal local authority
 - 1 policy person from the Ministry of Water working on protected areas or the tourism sector
 - 2 competent NGOs or managers of coastal or marine protected areas
- 2 competent NGOs from Albania and Turkey (due to their considerable coastline).

Trainees will be from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Albania and Turkey.

5. CALENDAR AND LOGISTICS

The regional training will take place in-person for **4 days** from **9-12 July 2024**, in **Thessaloniki, Greece**. Travel dates will be the 8th and 13th of July 2024.

Visa applications at the Greek Embassy for the trainees without a valid Schengen visa will have to be submitted early in advance (at least 2 months before the training) to allow for the timely issuance of their visas. Support letters will be provided by the WES Project.

The **working languages of the training** will be **English and French** with simultaneous interpretation. Trainees are required to have a good understanding of both or one of the two languages in order to be able to follow the training.

Further details on the training (link for the on-line registration of the trainees, detailed agenda, support materials, etc.) will be provided directly to the approved trainees by the WES team.