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CREATION

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SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Massive human population pressure (urbanization, tourism, transport) in the Mediterranean coastal zone that has increased dramatically since the mid-20th century, with related modifications concerning behaviors and uses.

DISRUPTING EVENT

Recognition in the 1990s of the need for sustainable coastal zone management and advent of the ICZM concept in the early 2000s in France.

KEY TOPICS

- Environmental quality (coastal waters, watersheds, air, soil, ecosystems, etc.)
- Management and protection of coastal areas and habitats (origins and effects, conflicts, reserve effect, environmental engineering, spatial planning)
- Ecosystem services and environmental amenities
- Natural, industrial, technological and health risks, and local risk management (risk prevention and management, planning, remediation)
- Quality of life (health, living standards, demographics, identity)



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TERRITORY

This Human-Environment Observatory (OHM) is dedicated to the study of the French Mediterranean coastal zone, focusing on four study areas facing different levels of urbanization and human population pressure. In descending order of pressures, they are the Greater Marseilles area, extending from the port complex of Fos-sur-Mer in the west to La Ciotat in the east, the Aigues-Mortes Gulf between Sète and Le Grau du Roi, including the coastal lagoons and their watersheds, the coast of Balagne and the southern outskirts of Bastia, along with the Biguglia lagoon, in Corsica. Research activities are organized to better understand the interface between land and sea, not just the actual shoreline, but also the marine and terrestrial zones that mutually influence each other on both sides, this influence being ecological, hydrological or societal.



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SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

A major tourist destination and thriving residential economy, home to several of the country's largest cities as well as to the largest port in the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean coast of France is characterized by a high level of urbanization. It has nonetheless proved possible to preserve natural areas of special interest that are remarkable not only for their biodiversity, but also for their good state of conservation. In addition to development pressures, owing to the influx of tourists and new residents, the French Mediterranean coast is also beset by problems of conflicting projects and uses, and disagreements over how it should be managed both now and in the future.

In the 2000s the concept of integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) brought a new operational framework to handle these issues. ICZM empowers local stakeholders to show their interest in coastal issues and commit themselves into local and regional development plans involving both land and sea. These plans may allow innovative measures for controlling the ongoing urbanization of the coast. The OHM has been set up for the monitoring of this new situation by studying five key aspects: environmental quality; management and protection of coastal areas and habitats; ecosystem services and environmental amenities; local risks and risk management; and quality of life.

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