Title of the Story: Innovative Beaches in Terres de l’Ebre

Destination Name: Terres de l’Ebre
Country: Catalonia, Spain
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Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)

☐ Localizing the destination supply chain
☐ Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
☐ Culture & Communities
☒ Environment & Climate
☐ Nature & Ecotourism
☐ Tourism Reset & Recovery
☐ Other

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Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced
The Mediterranean is the most important tourist destination in the world with an offer dominated by the sun and beach model. This offer has contributed to the democratisation of many people’s dream holidays. However, the marked seasonality of the activity means that the negative externalities are many and diverse. For example, an excessive consumption of scarce natural resources, the degradation of the land, loss of biodiversity, a diminution of the aesthetic value of the landscapes and the employment generated is often of low quality, seasonal and of little added value, etc. The Terres de l’Ebre, despite its efforts to develop a sustainable tourism system, is no stranger to these challenges. Therefore, in order to improve the management of the destination’s prime natural tourist resource, the beaches, it was proposed to set up a system of indicators for the sustainable beach management that would allow the diversification of their uses and the maintenance of their ecosystemic functions, establishing an information system and an integrated management of beach services, as well as an accessible information system useful to visitors that, in the case of the Terres de l’Ebre, are mostly families with children.

Methods, steps and tools applied
Beach management is to a large extent the responsibility of local town councils and different departments and personnel in each of them, for example, specialists in the environment, culture, sports, tourism, etc. Therefore it was decided to design a system that would facilitate the collaborative relationship between public and private agents and to stimulate the creation of tourism-oriented services and products for family experiences on the beaches throughout the year. The project also set out to characterise the requirements to be defined for a smart family beach: to establish an integrated information and management system for beach services aimed at improving the sustainable use of this resource.

It was also necessary to establish an accessible system of information useful to visitors, especially families.

Steps:
1. The first step was to analyse the existing beach management indicator systems, both local and international.
2. The main guidelines for beach ecosystem management established under a regulatory framework in Catalonia, Europe and internationally were compiled.
3. The indicator design process was carried out.

Indicator System Design:
1. First of all, a series of interviews was conducted with experts in the tourism and environmental management fields to identify the relevant aspects and criteria that guide beach management.
2. Workshops were held with children to ask them how they imagined the beach of the future:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmBbxhS07fs

3 - Later, in a workshop on the creation of indicators held in November 2020 with the participation of technical personnel specialising in tourism management and promotion, environmental management and beach management from the municipalities and public bodies of the Terres de l’Ebre...

4 - proposed indicators were identified.

5 - Finally, the criteria and indicator proposals made during the consultative process with the agents involved were integrated and summarised and a proposal of beach management indicators was drawn up.

Key success factors
The system resulting from the project incorporates actions that help to:

- Develop coastal regulation and protection functions.
- Build a diversity of habitats and maintain species diversity.
- Mitigate climate change by maintaining the absorption of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) and reducing emissions from uses.
- Maintain a diverse underwater landscape.
- Provide resources for local use.
- Encourage the diversity of tourist experiences and family-oriented activities throughout the year.
- Offer experiences and activities adapted to functional and sensory diversity.
- At accommodation location offer on-site experiences and family-oriented activities.
- Offer gastronomic proposals with added value and that are adapted to children.

Lessons learned
During the indicator identification process, the interviewees and participants in the co-creation workshop described management measures and initiatives promoted by town councils, operators and entities that foster a diversity of uses based on the conservation of ecosystem functions. Some of these measures and initiatives were good practices inspired by other actors and municipalities. These measures or initiatives could be aimed at different issues: for example, fostering alliances, diagnosing, facilitating access to funding, equipping beaches, restoring ecosystems, regulating and controlling uses and activities, etc.

Results, achievements and recognitions
Results:
1) A proposal of areas and criteria (or aspects) relevant to what are considered “innovative beaches”.
2) A proposal of 34 indicators to ascertain changes in the established “innovative beach” criteria that help guide the design and implementation of the necessary management measures, and
3) A proposal for parameterisation of the indicators that allows their measurement and monitoring. In addition, a number of good practices have been identified that can drive the desired changes in the established indicators:
1- Training of municipal technical teams by entities specialising in coastal and maritime management of beach restoration and management to augment their capacity to protect themselves from and absorb storms.
2- Training for tour operators and activity facilitators in ecosystem protection functions and the role of phanerogam prairies in the undersea environment, as well as the naturalisation of beaches.
3- Experimentation on the effectiveness of different restoration and reinforcement systems for beach surface areas based on revegetation and the maintenance of algae remains (e.g. strapwort).
Implementation of beach restoration strategies based on the use of algae remains (e.g. strapwort, posidonia, etc.).
4- Awareness raising activities and volunteer campaigns for the revegetation of dune systems with entities specialising in the restoration of coastal ecosystems.
5- Promotion of the manual beach cleaning to mitigate the impact of mechanised waste collection.
Information, awareness-raising and regulation of the use of disposable plastic in bars, services and accommodation, and its prevention.
6- Preparation of studies and technical-scientific evaluations of the state of the phanerogam prairies through alliances with the entities specialising in conservation and ecosystem management.
7- Preparation of beach management plans (municipal or supramunicipal) to guarantee a zoning of beach uses, taking into consideration the maintenance and restoration of the eco-systemic functions, including the location of signposting, entry restrictions, surveillance programmes, monitoring and local marine protection areas (e.g. algae and phanerogam communities, pre-coral and coralligen communities, benthic marine systems), and biodiversity conservation.
8- Zoning and protection through systems of delimitation and entry restriction (e.g. reed palisades) to breeding areas and habitats of species of special interest, e.g. the “Camanegre Path”. Visitor flow control.
9- Placement of information panels aimed at beach users, informing them of habitats and species of interest.
10- Create an initial information capsule for participants in recreational aquatic activities (motorised and non-motorised) to inform them of the value of the habitats and species and ecosystem functions: eco-briefings. Train operators to undertake this task.
11- Regulate the access of certain types of motorised craft that generate high levels of noise in certain areas of the beach where there are habitats and sensitive species. Regulation of vessel anchorage taking into account marine habitats.
12- Mapping of pollution points of untreated wastewater that flow directly to the sea to seek treatment solutions.
13- Campaigns through operating agents on the impact of widespread pollution caused by activities on beaches.
14- Carry out citizen science campaigns to enable families to participate in the monitoring of species of special interest.
15- Encourage alliances with entities specialising in ecosystem conservation and management to carry out initiatives for the restoration of habitats and monitoring of species of special interest.
16- Visibility and distinction of experiences and activities that undertake measures to reduce the carbon footprint, for example, the use of renewable energy through solar panels (e.g. for beach bars, boats, etc.), reduction of energy consumption, promotion of eco-mobility (e.g. bicycles), use of locally sourced products, etc.
17- Promotion of water sports without fossil fuel combustion engines, e.g. sailing. Implement virtual backup platforms that save energy and materials.
18- Protection of marine coastal areas and generation of management plans that, among other things, enable an increase in the absorption of GHGs.
19- Fresh water consumption and use control.
20- Design and distribution of resources informing of the richness and quality of the underwater landscape: signs and posters on the beaches, paper materials (e.g. fans, tablecloths, ashtrays, etc.).
21- Promote family environmental discovery experiences.
22- Carry out programmes with schools to generate learning experiences about the underwater landscape.
23- Carry out activities to disseminate the riches of and risks faced by the beaches and marine environment accessible to the public.
24- Preparation of good practice manuals for sailors explaining possible problems and the actions that can be taken.
25- Participation in technical training to obtain marine activity licenses (recreational motor boating, sailing schools, recreational fishing, diving, etc.) organised by entities specialising in coastal conservation and ecosystem management.
26- Promote competitions and activities aimed at children to identify shells and other treasures of the sea. Promote artisanal fishing activities or those linked to fishing and artisanal exploitation for the discovery of the coastal environment.
27- Disseminate the values of the sustainable and local use of ecosystem resources through posters, exhibitions and educational and awareness-raising activities, in alliance with all the public and private agents in the territory.
28- Carry out communication and tourism promotion campaigns aimed at families outside the summer season, positioning the added value of the autumn-winter and spring experiences (including social media campaigns).
29- Preparation of thematic events and festival/celebrations based on local attractions outside the summer season.
30- Creation of new products that involve attractions in environments of special interest outside the summer season (e.g. the "Pantena Route" in the Ebro Delta).
31- Create "membership site" and "discovery market"-type websites that promote a diversity of experiences and activities among affiliated people/families.
32- Design a system of distinctions/incentives to participate in diverse experiences and activities.
33- Create "packages" of activities for families that can be taken over several days at advantageous prices.
34- Promote environmental discovery and education activities aimed at families and children.
35- Promote educational, training and scientific stays that welcome students and research groups from fields such as biology, geology, ecology, environmental sciences, etc.
36- Position the experiences, uses and activities outside the summer season on family tourism portals, platforms and networks.
37- Organisation of systems that bring together a diversity of experiences that can be enjoyed as a family (e.g. cards to stamp, discovery “passports”, etc.) as incentives or challenges. Use new technologies to set the scene and enliven the itinerary.
38- Adapt bicycle lanes for people with functional diversity.
39- Adapt the network of informative panels and posters for people with functional and/or sensory diversity.
40- Adapt the accesses to the facilities for discovering the environment and its services (car parks, viewpoints, walkways, toilets, etc.).
41- Develop a catalogue of experiences and activities adapted for people with functional and/or sensory diversity.
42- Accompany operators in their search for solutions to adapt the experiences and activities they offer.
43- Create interpretive resources for people with functional and/or sensory diversity with the help of new connection technologies (e.g. beach sound guides).
44- Create synergies between accommodation operators and entities specialising in conservation and ecosystem management to offer environmental exploration and conservation activities.
45- Support programmes for entities specialising in ecosystem conservation and management for accommodation operators to generate new experiences and environmental discovery products they can offer.
46- Improve the online booking systems for the experiences and activities offered at the accommodation location for good capacity management.
47- Involve cultural, educational and design agents (e.g. schools, theatre groups, design and illustration professionals, museums, etc.) in the creation of informative animations aimed at children to motivate their integration into experiences and activities.
48- Promote outreach projects on coastal ecosystem functions and marine sciences in schools.
49- Accompany gastronomic operators in adapting menus for children based on the use of value-added products and in keeping with a healthy diet.
50- Adapt the “tasting” experiences of local products (e.g. prawns, artichokes, eels, mussels, oranges, etc.) to children.

Additional references
Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from Youtube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL.

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