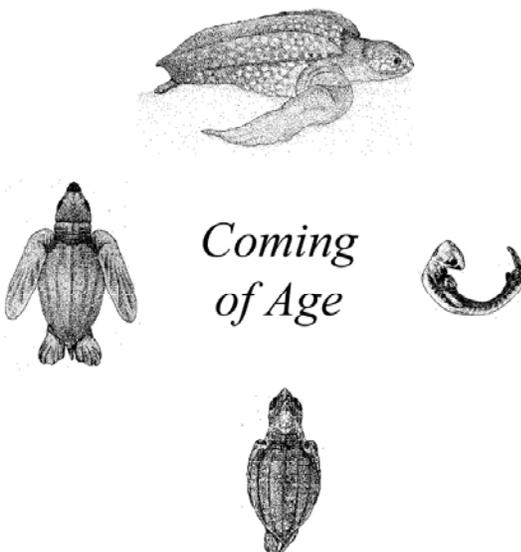# PROCEEDINGS
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Coming of Age

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FUNDRAISING IN TURTLE ORIENTED NGOS: A TOOL FOR INVOLVING THE PUBLIC IN CONSERVATION WORK. THE CASE OF CRETE

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INTRODUCTION

ARCHELON, the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece, was established in 1983 to protect and study the sea turtles. Since its very beginning, the Society has relied on voluntary work, recruiting people from Greece and abroad. The Society's Public Awareness program was soon established as an important tool for conservation. Among other target groups, beachgoers are informed of the sea turtles and fragile coastal habitats as well as the simple protection steps that they could take in order to help.

The case study for the present paper is Crete, Greece's largest island and a world-known holiday destination. Every summer, around 500 nests are laid on the nesting beaches of Rethymno, Chania and the Bay of Messara. These are the same areas that attract - during the very same season - most of the 3,000,000 tourists that visit the island every year.

THE STUDY AREA

Crete's economy has become dependent on tourism in less than two decades. No blueprint or planning whatsoever was provided for its rapid growth, which explains why the island is now facing increasing implications from this kind of far-from-sustainable development. Along the coastline, for example, several activities have led to beach degradation; further inland, water resources are becoming scarce, while land erosion is an increasingly common phenomenon.

Tourist development has had a devastating impact on the loggerhead sea turtle's habitat on all fronts. Extensive beach use by tourists is a major factor of the ongoing coastal degradation. The tourism industry is itself directly responsible for beach destruction through coastal development. The local society has played a major role, too; illegal buildings are the norm in the case of family housing and/or small businesses, which are often located along the coastline. This situation is tolerated by both local and national authorities, which fail to impose existing legislation.

The actors are themselves interlinked; Authorities are always unwilling to displease their local voters; for the local society, the tourism industry has become the major job provider by far; for this industry, in turn, increasing numbers of tourists are needed to counter balance falling profit margins due to international competition; and, to this goal, national authorities become major advertisers attracting more tourists. Overall, the loggerhead sea turtle visiting the nesting beaches is threatened from all sides, effectively making its protection a multi-dimensional issue. [see fig.1]

DISCUSSION

ARCHELON'S conservation strategy is indeed multi-dimensional, addressing all actors on a one-to-one basis, while at the same time taking steps to reverse their negative interactions. Lobbying and media work puts pressure on the tourism industry to shift towards -

environmentally and financially- sustainable options. All-year-round environmental education projects call on the local society to minimize the impact from its activities on the sea turtle's habitat. An extensive public awareness program promotes implementation of simple protection measures from the tourists themselves. Last, but not least, authorities are approached directly (lobbying) and /or indirectly (through media work) in order to enforce existing legislation and to extend legal protection measures. [see fig.2]

Furthermore, the project takes steps to involve all actors as potential allies in reversing destructive trends. Informed tourists promote implementation of protection measures from the hotels that lodge them, just by stating their care for the sea turtle survival. Tourism corporations, such as tour operators, that realize that sustainability in the long run is to their own best interest, provide new opportunities and resources for the local communities. And environmentally aware citizens are a powerful force for changing public policies, while authorities can use environmental values to promote higher quality tourism.

During outreach activities the same actors become also funding sources for the Society's projects. Tourists support the organization directly through donations, sponsorships and purchase of merchandise. Tourism companies that make the strategic shift towards sustainability are the first to enter corporate sponsorship schemes such as sponsoring a hatchery. Environmental education provides opportunities for local financial support. Authorities can provide direct funding of projects or -more often- make substantial resources available at no charge, such as communal buildings for use as information centers.

All actions share a single underlying principle: combining fundraising and communication activities with conservation in order to maximize the overall efficiency and impact. In effect, each and every fundraising activity contains a conservation component, whereas each and every conservation activity contains a fundraising component. ARCHELON consistently targets its public -be it tourists, the local society, the tourism industry or local and national authorities- promoting conservation objectives and citing the organization's own work; the public responds by changing its attitude and providing funds for the continuation of the conservation activities. [see fig.3]

A few examples will be useful in demonstrating the above principle in practice:

(1) Slide shows conducted in the native languages of the tourists promote the conservation message. These are a self-financed awareness-raising tool: donations and merchandise sales from the shows provide valuable funds for the organization. At the same time, slide shows are one of the most cost-effective ways to familiarize tourists with the impact of their activities -as well as those of their hotels- and to promote alternative attitudes. Slide shows in effect become indirect lobbying tools; educating the tourists is an extremely effective way to put pressure on hotels to implement turtle protection measures.

(2) Information kiosks, like slide shows, provide an important outlet of merchandise and sponsorship products. The added value in this case is that kiosks are mini-environments where the organization's field researchers can better explain their own work on a one-to-one basis. In practice, this also becomes a tool for recruitment of new volunteers to support the Society's conservation activities.

(3) Beach patrols when researchers survey the beach to examine turtle tracks, build cages to protect nests and move threatened nests to hatcheries, are primarily a conservation activity. They, however, have an important fundraising and communication component. Field researchers are in fact the most widely seen display of the organization's actual work; to this effect, the organization has taken steps to make its team members instantly identifiable and provide a clear image of straightforward scientific attitude. In addition, inquiring tourists are informed of the ways to support -or even join- the work and are invited to upcoming slide shows.

In order to effectively combine fundraising and conservation activities, a few principles should be noted. First, that everyone involved needs to be provided with a view of the full picture. Complex as they may be, comprehension of the interactions between the various activities is essential for team members to be aware of the actual impact that their own work has in ensuring a future for the sea turtle. People need to know that they can and do make a difference. Second, every effort should be made to maximize the impact of each and every activity. Continual monitoring, feedback and improvement is necessary, particularly in an ever-changing setting such as the developed areas of Crete. In fact, this approach also ensures maximum involvement of everyone taking part in the projects. Last, but not least, "a dollar saved is a dollar earned". Efficient management of resources at all levels is a self-sustaining policy.

ARCHELON is not a big organization by any standards; even less so when compared to the rest of the actors whose attitudes need to be changed. However, the Society is probably the only actor in this scene that does have a long-term strategy. Through diversification of the organization's funding base, an NGO can ensure its financial sustainably, political independence and ability to focus on its campaign objectives. At the same time, awareness activities gradually change the public's attitude and promote those same campaign objectives.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of protection measures such as the daily removal of sunbeds, based on a Management Plan produced by ARCHELON, is increasingly taking place. At a higher level, enforcement of legislation, such as the demolition of illegal buildings on the beach area, is no longer a case of wishful thinking. Awareness of the sea turtle issue is now widespread and has lead to a significant improvement in influencing the decision-making process at all levels.

The most powerful argument in support of ARCHELON's strategy in Crete is indeed that it works.
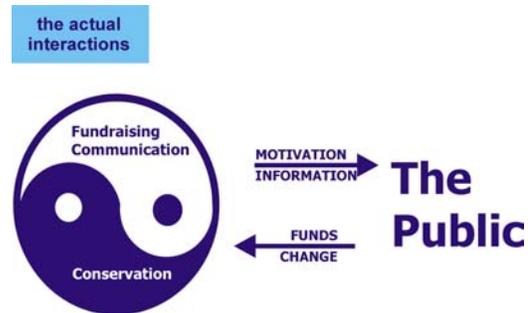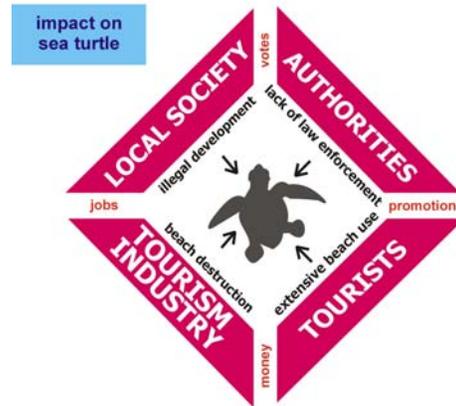
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