



Soft Shore Protection: An Environmental Innovation in Coastal Engineering (Coastal Systems and Continental Margins)

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Global warming, melting polar caps, rising sea levels and intensifying wave-current action, factors responsible for the alarming phenomena of coastal erosion on the one hand and adverse environmental impacts and the high cost of 'hard' protection schemes, on the other, have created interest in the detailed examination of the potential and range of applicability of the emerging and promising category of 'soft' shore protection methods. 'Soft' methods such as beach nourishment, submerged breakwaters, artificial reefs, gravity drain systems, floating breakwaters, plantations of hydrophyllous shrubs or even dry branches, applied mostly during the past 20 years, are recognised as possessing technical, environmental and financial advantageous properties deserving more attention and further developmental experimentation than has occurred hitherto. On the other hand, 'hard' shore protection methods such as seawalls, groins and detached breakwaters, artefacts borrowed from port design and construction technology, no matter how well designed and well implemented they may be, can hardly avoid intensification of the consequential erosive, often devastating, effects on the down-drift shores. Moreover, they often do not constitute environmentally and financially attractive solutions for long stretches of eroding shoreline. Engineers and scientists practising design and implementation of shore defence schemes have been aware for many years of the public demand for improved shore protection technologies. They are encouraging efforts that promise enrichment of those environmentally sound and financially attractive methods that can be safely applied.

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