

Realising potential of the leaders of tomorrow, the young scientists: Reaping results of rewarding public engagement

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BONUS, the joint Baltic Sea research and development programme www.bonusportal.org produces knowledge to support sustainable development and implementation of EU, regional and national regulations, policies and management practices specifically tailored for the Baltic Sea region. It issues calls for competitive proposals and funds projects of high excellence and relevance based on its strategic research agenda. It is funded by eight coastal Baltic Sea countries and the EU (FP7), with the next phase proposed to be funded within the Horizon 2020 framework and with its geographic scope broadened out to the North Sea (Andrusaitis, A., D. Cox, A. Dosdat, et al. (2016), Towards sustainable blue growth: Outline of the joint Baltic Sea and the North Sea research and innovation programme 2018-2023. BONUS Publication No.15).

As part of its programme delivery mechanisms, key communications and dissemination tools and means are put in practice in BONUS with an ultimate aim to seek and seize opportunities to enhance scientific knowledge and its use across policy and socio-economic stakeholders. A particular emphasis in all this is invested in inclusion of the young scientists, the leaders of tomorrow. By realising their full potential in disseminating their science and knowledge, and for instance creating strong online and social media presence with direct links to wider societal dialogue, can create a new generation of scientists who are not only comfortable talking about their research but who are also understood by 'your average layperson' – be it your member of the parliament or grandmother!

To this end, training in the BONUS Young Scientists' Club events in recent times have included hugely popular sessions e.g. the world-renowned researcher trainer Hugh Kearns revealing 'The seven secrets of extremely successful researchers', an interactive public engagement workshop 'The engaging researcher' facilitated by a professional researcher trainer Mr. Paul Toombs and most recently a social media and blogging clinic provided by a science communication company Kaskas Media.

Particularly in mind the empowerment of young scientists – and BONUS projects' news dissemination in general – BONUS launched a new website www.bonusprojects.org in November 2014, with management tasks handed over from the very start to the individual BONUS projects. During its first calendar year of existence (2015), a total of 28 000 visits (close to 20K unique page views) were recorded with over half of the visits then – and since – consistently to the blogs' section of the site that contains BONUS young scientists' blog posts on their experiences while working in BONUS projects.

There was one main idea directing all the actions on this new projects' website in order to ensure its success: the threshold for producing content by enthusiastic project members had to be kept as low as possible while still maintaining a good quality base-level with all the posted content. Gradually this can be then improved and built upon as skills – and projects – mature and results start accumulating. In late 2014, BONUS had been also chosen as one of the six pilots of the PE2020 Public Engagement Innovations for Horizon 2020 project <https://pe2020.eu/> which after shortlisting different potential 'public engagement case-studies' of BONUS e.g. stakeholder driven development of the region wide strategic research agenda, BONUS advocates network etc., chose the innovative projects' website and young scientists' blogging activity as its real-time case study.

The oral presentation will open up experiences and successes of concerted efforts to invest into the future – the young scientists and realisation of their skills, and support mechanisms and framework developed for this. For instance, the blog training did not only bring BONUS a bunch of new bloggers and visitors, since although seeing growing numbers is always satisfying, even more so is reading more and more inspiring, well-written, thoughtful and funny blog posts that reach out far beyond the BONUS community! For instance, would you like to know what are the three changes 'under the surface' that we can feel in everyday life; or how you are affected by eutrophication or overfishing; or how does the world look like through the eyes of the Baltic seal; or perhaps how is it like on research cruises portrayed through travel stories while on the vessel. This type of ample science communications promises good things for our future aspirations!