

Communicating the issues and challenges of “sustainable fisheries” across Europe: Trends and issues

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Sustainable fisheries energy is a topic relevant to the realm of ocean literacy, in particular in Atlantic European countries. The overexploitation of the ocean and seas has been a pressing problem for decades, mostly among the scientific community and fishing professionals. However, the general public might not have the necessary knowledge about this complex matter when it comes to decide, as consumers and as citizens, about what seafood to buy and what implications it does have on the overall state of the ocean.

In this paper, the main trends and issues of communication sustainable fisheries will be presented, reporting on findings of the EU-funded H2020 ResponSEable project, that aims at mapping European marine knowledge on the complex human-ocean relationships and on the economic benefits derived from the seas and the ecosystems they support.

In particular, ResponSEable investigates how knowledge on the human-ocean relationship is produced, disseminated and shared, investigating as much EU-wide campaigns (e.g. the “Inseparable” campaign of the EU, or initiatives such as “Fish farmed in the EU: a healthy, fresh and local alternative” and “MEDFISH4EVER: Our Heritage, Our Future”, reports to the general public on fisheries and aquaculture) then communication initiatives from local and world-wide non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private companies, or science brokers (see for example, the joint efforts of World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Unilever around the certification program and ecolabel Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) created in 1997 and that aims at addressing “the problem of unsustainable fishing and safeguard seafood supplies for the future”).

The assessments carried out under the ResponSEable project will help investigating key messages, content, media genres, the structure of communication and information mechanisms as well as actors (and related governance) involved in the production and dissemination of knowledge. In parallel, ResponSEable also analyzes the perceptions and understanding of different fishery-related stakeholders that have an influence on the marine environment, such as maritime entrepreneurs (fishermen, seafarers), policy makers, NGOs, consumers and the general public. The results of these assessments will help addressing questions such as: What do people know of the human-sea relationship in relation to fishing & fish products? Which information do different stakeholders need, so that they understand their (direct and indirect) responsibility in “sustainable fishing”? How to tap into their value sets and they start “feeling responsible” (individually or collectively) for the oceans – and potentially become inclined to adapt their behavior towards more “sustainable” practices? What campaigns or media products – and with which messages – would be more effective and why?