

Raising awareness on the state of our seas: Yes! But... for whom? On what? And how?

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Informing, communicating, raising awareness, enhancing ocean literacy... these buzz words are increasingly brought to the attention of scientists as (potential) by-objectives or tasks scientists need to fulfill, or contribute to. The overall aim is to ensure scientists share their knowledge outside of the scientific community, so non-scientists “better understand” and potentially “better act”. Clearly, communicating and enhancing ocean literacy in an effective manner requires answering some questions before hand. In particular:

Who? For some, children, the youth or students are the main target groups requiring specific attention in “communication” or literacy initiatives, as they will ensure tomorrow’s society better care of the our seas and of its marine ecosystems. For others, the wider public (a general world mixing inhabitants, tax payers, citizens, voters, potentially consumers) needs to receive attention, as it can influence local authorities (as inhabitants), decision makers (as voters), economic operators (as consumers). For others finally, “those who decides” should receive most attention, whether as so-called “decision makers” (although finding who eventually takes a public or private decision is challenging...) or economic operators and actors which activities, practices and processes are connected to the sea. Or maybe... all of them simultaneously?

What? The main messages and the material (content) that is presented clearly depend on the objectives, the context, and the target audiences (socio-economic conditions, cultural values, etc.) If we expect communication and literacy to help people “understanding better” so they are in a position to “act” and contribute to healthy oceans, the “what” question might encompass knowledge on: the state of the sea – and its likely effects on society and individuals (who is affected? How and where? Am I potentially affected – or those I know?); pressures imposed on the sea by specific socio-economic activities; possible solutions that can contribute to the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems. Some of it.... All of it?

How? There are many medias and tools for sharing information with different target groups. The ones we might propose are to be considered within the wider knowledge systems of our target audience(s): individuals’ literacy is influenced by many (informal and formal) sources of information (a course, a youtube movie, a marketing campaign, a book, discussions on a virtual forum, personal experience...). So how can I become “visible” with my own communication initiative? And how can we help others to “screen” all information available in different (potentially contradictory) source – so “sound knowledge” is identified and used in priority? The “how” question can also relate to the process put in place establish to develop a specific media or communication tool – in particular how I involve representatives of my (future) target audience into its design, development or testing.

The workshop aims at shedding light on the importance of identifying robust answers to these questions prior to entering into the development of communication and ocean literacy initiatives. Indeed, these answers are key to the effectiveness and impacts of these initiatives. And they have operational implications in terms of the communication products developed (content, format) and their dissemination. The workshop will build on: (a) the results of different assessments carried out within the EU-funded H2020 ResponSEable project (in particular: critical review of the current marine-based knowledge, assessment of socio-economic values chains linked to the ocean, assessments of current communication and ocean literacy initiatives dealing with the sea); and, (b) the individual experience and contributions from workshop participants that will be shared and discussed via interactive and innovative (including internet-based) facilitation techniques.