Turning ABCs into ABSeas – Engaging Education Stakeholders to Bring Ocean Literacy to European Schools


Teachers, educators, outreach workers, curriculum designers, media representatives, government agencies, parents and students across Europe are coming together under the Sea Change project (www.seachangeproject.eu) to discuss key issues associated with incorporating topics related to ‘Ocean Literacy’ in European education systems.

Ocean Literacy refers to an understanding of the ocean’s influence on us and our influence on the ocean.

Sea Change is an EU-funded Horizon 2020 project which aims to create a fundamental change in the way European citizens view their relationship with the sea. This will empower them, as Ocean Literate citizens to take direct and sustainable action towards a healthy ocean and seas, healthy communities and ultimately a healthy planet.

As part of its efforts, Sea Change is organising consultations with education stakeholders in eight European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK) from April to June 2016, to discuss the barriers that exist to teaching 12-19 year-olds about the ocean, and how to overcome them. A one-day workshop will be held in each country to ensure that there is a sufficient dialogue to include all geographical and cultural differences.

Dr Patricia McHugh of the National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway, who is leading the consultations, explained: “This is not only an opportunity for participants to network, share experiences and discuss barriers with other participants, but also to address causes rather than solutions and be part of the Sea Change project. The consultations facilitate mutual learning between the project partners and stakeholders involved in teaching, education, outreach, curriculum design and policy. They will enable us to create a map of how the barriers are interrelated for each country, which will then be used to guide other project tasks and also be of benefit to the education community.”

The workshops will use a facilitation process called ‘Collective Intelligence’ that helps groups deal with complex issues, such as Ocean Literacy, through systems thinking. The barriers to teaching 12-19 year-olds about the ocean identified online prior to the workshop.

Dr Christine Domegan (NUI Galway), EU Lead Methodologist for Sea Change, said: “Collective Intelligence goes significantly beyond asking people for their opinions, it gives stakeholders a voice about the barriers to change, and ownership of and responsibility for solutions. Collective Intelligence is a vehicle to overcome barriers to promote Ocean Literacy across Europe. The structured dialogue, listening and learning in the consultations will empower teachers, educators, outreach workers, curriculum designers, media representatives, government agencies, parents and students from all over Europe to understand their thoughts, beliefs and mental models compared to others. The time and space afforded to participants allows them to clarify their thinking. Looking at the problem and
solutions from different perspectives will contribute to a modelled understanding of the complexity, patterns and interlocking elements of teaching 12-19 year-olds about the ocean."

The results from the consultations will be compared and analysed on a transnational basis in order to identify commonalities and differences across the different regions and cultures in Europe with the aim of establishing a strong strategy for embedding Ocean Literacy into education in Europe.

For more information about the Sea Change project, visit: www.seachangeproject.eu

Notes for Editors

The Sea Change project is funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement n° 652644. The Marine Biological Association (MBA), UK is coordinating the project. AquaTT is the project dissemination partner.

Dr Christine Domegan is a social innovation researcher with over 20 years’ experience. She was EU Lead Methodologist for the Sea for Society project (www.seaforsociety.eu), a FP7 European funded project which aimed to engage stakeholders, citizens and youth in an open and participatory dialogue to share knowledge, forge partnerships and empower actors on societal issues related to the ocean. Her research addresses key questions pertaining to ‘ocean ecosystem services’, with an emphasis on relating complex biodiversity to ‘lived experiences’ in order to bridge how everyday human behaviour interplays with science.

Dr Patricia McHugh is a Sea Change Social Innovation Postdoctoral Researcher with the Whitaker Institute at NUI Galway. She holds a PhD on the Development and Measurement of Process Indicators for Science Communication using Social Marketing and Social Innovation Theory. She previously held a Postdoctoral position with Sea for Society, with the responsibility to design, develop, analyse and report on Sea for Society mobilisation activities, using social innovation indicator measurements, within an EU marine context. Her current work involves designing, training, and implementing Social Innovation Participation and Processes (SIPPs) within an Ocean Literacy context for Sea Change.

The National University of Ireland (NUI), Galway is the largest and oldest university based in the west of Ireland, employing in excess of 2,000 staff with a 17,000 strong student population. NUI Galway is a research-led University and has an overall ranking of 284th in the QS World University Rankings for 2013 and 314 in the Times Higher Education world rankings for 2013/2014. Over the past ten years the University has heavily invested (excess of €400 million) in its research & teaching infrastructure. The University was recently awarded the EC Research Executive Agency (REA)’s “HR Excellence in Research” designation identifying NUI Galway as a provider of a high standard working environment for researchers. NUIG is the lead partner on the Social Innovation Participation Processes (SIPPS) Work Package (WP2) of the Sea Change project.

For press queries, please contact the project Communications Officer:

Tanja Calis, AquaTT (email: tanja@aquatt.ie, tel: +353 1 644 9008)