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“MED SEA LITERACY BROCHURE”- operational insights for an effective upgrade of a recently launched OCEAN LITERACY MILESTONE

The Ocean Literacy (OL) is an emerging research field begun in the USA in the 2000s as a concept developed for the education system aimed at teachers (Santoro et al., 2017). Beside other high-sounding organizations up to the official UN recognition of the ocean literacy goals definition, even in Europe, an international and multidisciplinary team of marine educators and scientists founded the EMSEA association and since 2012 is working hard, in order to fill the gap between the confined and often autoreferential world of research and the wider audience of sea-aholics and everyday marine users (Borja et al., 2020).

Despite the ambitious objectives guiding this research sector and the numerous ongoing initiatives on related topics, both self-funded and officially financed by national and international organizations, some shadows still being tangible among the currently available materials and research proposal which still being advertised in order to move from the ocean we have to the ocean we want for the near future.

In the last few hours, a milestone into the thematic literature focused on ocean literacy has been officially presented among interested stakeholders and research/academic world representatives (Fig.1). On this perspective, the year 2022 begun with the official presentation on the Med Sea Literacy brochure, which has been presented to the audience into its four translated versions available into four different idioms (English, Italian, Greek and Croatian) and thanks to several international collaborations many other will come in the near future.

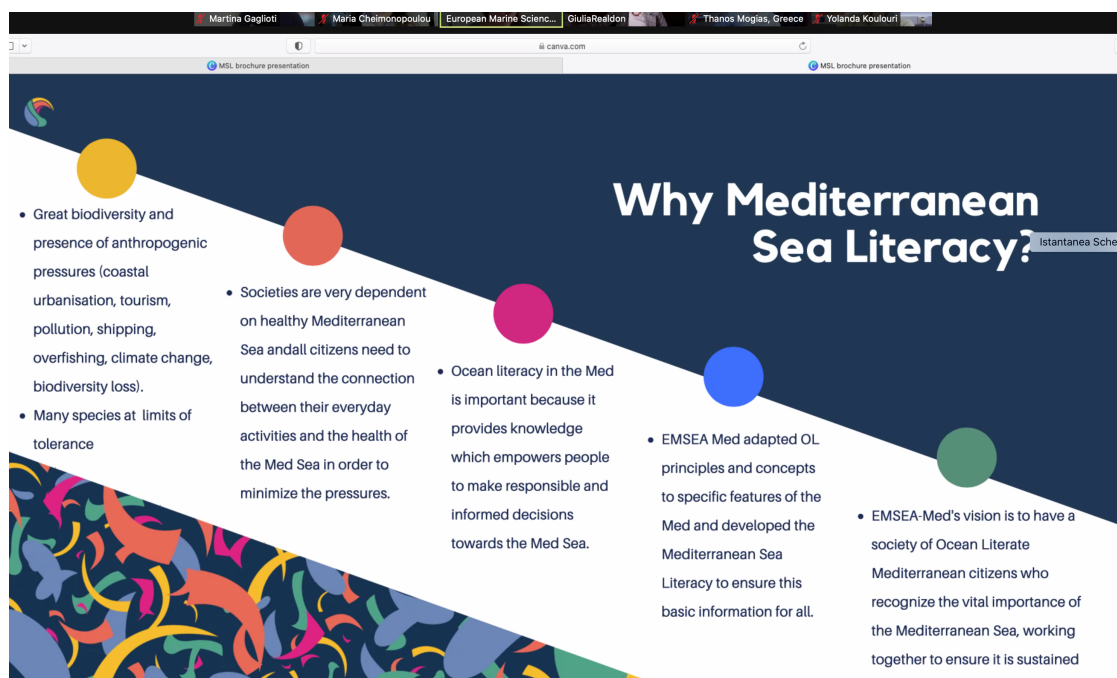


Figure 1 A screenshot from the recent virtual presentation event of the MSL brochure

According to the main aims underpinning similar initiatives the desired goal might be encouraging a change of behavior among the intercepted stakeholders. On this perspective, considering the behavioral traits of the main part of professionally “sea-related” people the less desirable attitude is the academic approach to extremely practical aspects of their daily life which are already

undermined from several difficulties and too often theoretically-designed rules. Thinking about a practical situation or some reference characters who might be involved in the near future as main addressers of a similar research product what I feel to suggest is an additional upgrade of this version in order to make understandable each of the highlighted principles through the most practical examples available. Moreover, for each relevant aspect highlighted in the list of the OL key points a tangible example might be identified. The customization and the adaptation of general principles for each category of interested stakeholders is essential in order to translate into effective action the yet another piece of paper, in this case a virtual one, full of general information.

Practical examples aimed at specific categories

Referring to specific users the dialogue between the interested professionals and the academic representatives is essential in order to make them more positively prepared in order to make this kind of milestones part of their daily working life but at the same time to make the academics closer to the real world at the basis of their high-sounding speculations. For this reason, a desirable upgrade of this recently published version, which currently represents the link between the higher-level guidelines distributed through the intergovernmental organizations as outcomes of wide-range guidelines (written by international panels of experts) and the locally developed research products and scientific literature reflecting more local perceptions resulting as the outcomes of regional working groups (Mokos et al., 2020), might be a bottom-up developed customization of the brochure for each category of potentially interested stakeholders.

For instance, thinking about a practical application aimed at the diving industry categories, considering that the time of action and the temporal space available for OL-related initiatives during the daily-work routines of a diving center is limited to a very narrow lag-time, a too written or too general brochure might be completely ineffective. It is almost useless speaking about Med Sea basin in general to a recreational diver or even worst to a technical diver who in the few minutes to come is going to act on a highly frequented and ecologically relevant dive spot in which the tiniest wrong approach might result into damages lasting for several decades to come.

Moreover, the demanding diving profile and technical equipment setting might require to concentrate on the more operational aspects of the dive planning than on theoretical aspect of marine conservation. More in general, a conscious approach to the SCUBA diving activity means that each dive should be mentally approached as if it would be the first of the diver's life. It means that the term "expert" in this field is inappropriate and might be even dangerous in some case, therefore is highly unlikely that a representative of the diving industry (both professional or customer) will find time and willingness in order to read entirely a written document speaking of general principles on the environmental setting of the activities he/she is going to do. If we will be lucky enough to find a particularly inspired speaker probably it will not have the right background to understand the real linkage between the too general principles and its concrete scenario. In this case a visual-based material showing the practical effect or the tangible consequences of a wrong buoyancy control or a too invasive approach toward charismatic species of the benthic life might be more effective. In the same way without the proper scientific background the connection between the complex phenomena behind the ocean acidification effects and the bleaching events retrievable along the dive site walls cannot be properly understood.

In any case, considering the lack of high-quality material on these kinds of issues up to the last few years, this new resource is as well a great advancement into available material suitable for

dissemination purposes. Just a small step ahead is needed to skip from the general theoretical definition to tangible and easily understandable resources really suitable for each addressing category. Great job, *just keep swimming!*



References

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