

The role of marine science communicators in bringing about the blue society

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The Ocean holds tremendous opportunities to meet society's present and future needs. It can feed and care for people, provide renewable and clean energy, create jobs, generate more equity, etc.

Marine science communicators are often the first point of contact between researchers and the general public. Whether they directly interact with visitors at aquariums and science centres, through participatory events, or produce communication materials, maintain websites, write newsletters, or produce pamphlets for the public, they are the actors who set the tone for the science-citizen conversation. They are information "brokers" at other levels, also, the interface between different stakeholder groups and the public, and a source of inspiration. They give their audience a large role in crafting new approaches to ocean governance, such as the Blue Society concept.

The Blue Society is one in which the marine environment is sustainably managed, giving future generations the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from the many services and resources provided by a healthy Ocean, while also preserving ecosystem integrity and functioning. It relies on the potential of the Ocean for a better and desirable future based on a sustainable and equitable socio-economic development. By sharing knowledge and involving citizens and stakeholders in co-creating the Blue Society, the marine science educators can initiate technological, ecological and inclusive social solutions and positive actions.

The concept of the Blue Society was introduced at the UN Rio+20 Summit on Sustainable Development and the International Aquarium Congress in Cape Town in 2012. At the same time, Nausicaa, World Ocean Network and European partners launched the Sea for Society (SFS) project funded by the DG R&I of the European Commission. It gathered 28 organizations and networks from various activity fields: research, data management and knowledge transfer, business and innovation, environmental advocacy, public engagement and education in 12 countries. Together, they consulted citizens and stakeholders throughout Europe who identified challenges and developed new ideas for marine research and maritime governance. They crafted the Blue Society concept, its principles, implementation recommendations, and launched a European awareness raising campaign reaching almost 1.5 million people and actively engaging with 350 000 of them.

This momentum sparked other initiatives: new European projects focusing on knowledge transfer and ocean literacy are now building on the results of SFS. In France, the Blue Society Think Tank assembles representatives of the research area, maritime industry, NGOs and decision making bodies, who operationalize the Blue Society in their fields of activity. Blue Society is also on the agenda of the international ministerial meeting on Sustainable Ocean Economy convened by Portugal in June 2016.

During this presentation we will look at the experiences of the SFS consortium in communicating marine issues and promoting the Blue Society, to different stakeholders and actors. We will explore the most effective methods, through examples from some of our most successful outreach events, and provide an analysis of the role of Marine Communicators in carrying the Blue Society message beyond the breath and lifetime of the SFS project.