

Mediterranean and Black Seas: a case for disseminating and communicating marine science through European projects

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The HCMR is the main research Institute in the southern Mediterranean area to coordinate two large EU-funded research projects under FP6 (SESAME) and FP7 (PERSEUS), both of which explore and study the natural and man-made pressures on the Mediterranean and the Black Seas and assess their effect to understand past and future ecosystem changes. Natural and social sciences were closely merged to predict the long-term effects of these pressures, while emphasis was given to dissemination and outreach activities, specifically built into both projects' work structure to target the general public and schoolchildren in particular.

The SESAME project, involving almost 400 scientists from 59 institutes in 24 countries, collected data on every aspect of the Mediterranean and Black Seas and went beyond science, as it committed to improving capacity building, training, dissemination of results and public outreach, integrated into one information platform. SESAME set in action activities fostering cooperation among Black sea and Mediterranean scientific communities, thereby providing opportunities for mobility of researchers, training of PhD students, graduate and post-graduate opportunities and summer schools. Regarding education, the project reached out to schoolchildren by inviting them to take part in its research activities, a plan thoroughly embedded in SESAME's strategy from the very beginning. SESAME accomplished virtual 'participation' of schools in the planned oceanographic cruises and online visits of the vessels prior to departure. The project also organised two school competitions via the School outreach program, which attracted the attention of 18 classes from 6 countries. Teaching aids were prepared and provided to all children, while the competition raised the interest of schoolchildren in marine research, increased awareness on human impacts and climate change and was positively perceived by all teachers. The 'SESAME Club', which originated in Bulgaria through the collaboration of researchers and the Natural Sciences Gymnasium, was one of the most positive and encouraging outcomes of the educational programme.

PERSEUS, a 4-year research project, will assess the dual impact of human activity and natural pressures on the Mediterranean and Black Seas. By providing strong links between natural and socio-economic sciences, it will help to predict the long-term effects of such pressures on marine ecosystems and design an effective research governance framework, to provide the basis for policymakers to turn back the tide on marine life degradation.

The project, implemented by 54 partners, has a clear and concise Communication Strategy plan, to target different stakeholder groups, ranging from scientists and policy-makers to schoolchildren and the general public at large.

Youth and schoolchildren will be particularly encouraged and stimulated through the two PERSEUS Citizen-Scientists initiatives: the Jellyfish spotting and the LitterWatch campaigns, which both require the public's active participation by recording their sightings (jellyfish and litter) and sending photos by e-mail/posting them on the PERSEUS website through Smartphone applications; this activity will help scientists monitor changes in jellyfish migration patterns and litter distribution. Posters, flyers, social media platforms and large media partnerships will all help in raising the campaign participation numbers.