

Traditional fish markets: Bringing marine research and society together

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The link between science and society is set as a current priority, acknowledging that it will promote the best conditions for mutual collaboration and social awareness.

MARE - Marine and Environmental Sciences Center, is a Portuguese research, technological development and innovation unit that seeks excellence in the study of aquatic ecosystems and to disseminate knowledge supporting policies for sustainable development. Promoting Ocean Literacy and contributing to a participative Blue Society is one of its major goals, and has been accomplished by several communication actions and projects that engaged the public with the research developed in the center.

So how to bring marine research and society together? This was the main question behind the “Look at the fresh fish!” project, which is set in a traditional fish market, and engaged 200 young students with ages between 9 and 14 years old, from four schools of a Lisbon neighborhood (Portugal).

Several environmental awareness initiatives took place between 2015 and 2016, namely: visits to the local fish market guided by its technical manager and MARE marine biologists, explaining the ecological, commercial and social importance of various fish species; classroom sessions with fish biological sampling where students experienced how to be a biologist; development of small school projects representing the market and the laboratory experiences; and an exhibition with public presentations of the school projects in a mini scientific conference. These initiatives were evaluated through questionnaires targeting participants to provide feedback to researchers and towards improving future science communication projects.

After these initiatives, the project grew outside the schools and the guided visits and other activities were extended to the general public, including partnership with other stakeholders (workshop “There’s science in Lisbon”, Researchers European Night, Agência Ciência Viva “Biology in the Summer”, specific activities with an elderly association from a Lisbon neighborhood). More than 3,000 citizens between 8 and 80 years old participated in 10 sessions.

A communication plan was prepared and included: information about the project was made available on the project, MARE and partners’ websites and social networks pages; dissemination through the media was carried out and the project was reported in a radio news station, in a local newspaper and in the city university website; two events were promoted coinciding with the beginning and closure of the school year; the students exhibition was carried out from the school to the market itself; merchandizing materials were produced to the project mini scientific conference.

Supported by EEA grants, this was a unique and original project that brought together a scientific research unit, the university, several primary schools, the city council and a local parish, engaging all kinds of public contributing to increase scientific literacy and awareness of the importance of the oceans.