



Policy Brief

Supporting Blue Challenges in Mediterranean Schools

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1. CONTEXT AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

From studying non-indigenous species to exploring octopus' reproduction, combating pollution and especially marine litter, while utilizing different kind of media for raising-awareness campaigns for the protection and conservation of the Mediterranean Sea and its resources, the **Blue Schools Med project** exhibited a diverse and inspiring array of activities in and out the classrooms of XX schools, revealing the inextricably interconnection between humans and the sea, and promoting Ocean Literacy across the Mediterranean Sea region. Spanning primary and secondary education levels, encompassing both general and vocational studies, the BlueSchoolsMed pupils eagerly embraced the Blue Challenges. They worked together and in collaboration with their teachers, marine scientists and local communities to create projects that reflected their identities and spaces of living.

The project's **success** is due to multiple factors. Notably, its **international dimension**, facilitated by transnational cooperation and the exchange of experiences among different countries, stands out as a celebrated strength. Pupils, including children and youth, developed **critical thinking skills** fostering a deeper but also wider connection to concepts such as (eco)citizenship, inclusiveness, and ultimately, participatory **democracy**. This process enriched their understanding and knowledge of the interplay between diverse human activities and the marine environment, while also fostering pro-environmental attitudes and activism but also strong peer bonds through collaborative work.

A major key factor contributing to the project's value is its **multidisciplinary** and **interdisciplinary** approaches, seamlessly integrating subjects such as earth and physical sciences, mathematics, civic education, arts, by developing hands-on field and lab work and targeting on Blue Challenges. This holistic approach promoted **transformative teaching methods and learning experiences**, empowerment, and critical thinking. Teachers and pupils enjoyed a certain level of **autonomy**, with pupils becoming active learners and effective **communicators** through different public speaking and talking engagements. Rooted in a pupil-centric ethos and guided by Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), the project can be a model for teachers/educators, inspiring them to adopt similar methods and practices.

The project's influence extends **beyond the classroom**, resonating with scientists, school principals, families, local communities and relevant stakeholders. This initiative encourages diverse educational interactions and perspectives. Notably, the project effectively engaged pupils who typically display low enthusiasm for traditional classroom settings, resulting in substantial transformation through their learning journeys.

However, the journey of the project also faced its **challenges**. Teachers dealt certain **insecurities** and a **limited confidence** in addressing complex sea-related topics, highlighting the need for robust knowledge support, structured collaborations, specialized teacher training, and tailored educational materials focused on marine scientific issues along with STEAM disciplines. In addition and despite their proficiency in effective teaching methodologies, teachers/educators around the Mediterranean often feel and treated **undervalued**, both within their national systems and at the European level.



Navigating **diverse education policies and rules** across different countries introduce its own set of limitations, namely in **coordinating** transnational activities, exchanges and events. The **language** barrier, particularly pronounced at the primary school level, emerges as a hurdle, underscoring the importance of innovative cross-border **communication** strategies.

Furthermore, the project sheds light on **the difficulties in connection between pupils/modern families, and nature**—a phenomenon referred to as "nature deficit disorder", especially after covid-19 restrictions. This disconnection can lead to **indifference toward environmental concerns**, resulting in a lack of initiative and care. Notably, practical experiences such as fieldwork prove to be pivotal not only for knowledge retention among pupils and teachers but also for this “connection to nature” concept, as demonstrated by the success Educational Marine Areas network in France. To encourage citizens’ involvement and responsibility in connecting to, and safeguarding, the marine environment, the establishment of similar initiatives and **extracurricular activities** on national and regional levels should be promoted by ministries, municipalities, and educational institutions.

In conclusion, the BlueSchoolsMed Project celebrates notable accomplishments while navigating substantial challenges, underscoring the importance of holistic education and collaboration in nurturing environmentally conscious and engaged citizens.

Below is a summary of key recommendations extracted from the various activities that took place over the project’s lifespan, focusing on (1) Policy, partnerships and collaborations (2) Curriculum and pedagogy (3) Teachers needs for support (4) Pupils engagement and learning.

2. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on three years of exchanging experiences, raising debates, doing activities, facing challenges, organizing trips, events, trainings in order to integrate Ocean Literacy into school curricula by developing and implementing creative blue school projects, recommendations are followed in order to ensure the successful uptake of these Blue Challenges in the Mediterranean schools.

2.1. Policy, partnership and collaborations

- ▶ **Build official partnerships between formal education and non-formal education entities :**

With research centres/scientists/academia, the educational system/ national education ministries/schools...

- Provide institutional support for adequate twinning/school collaborations;
- Support the EU Blue Schools Network with funding, training opportunities and exchange programs.
- Formalise the collaboration to ensure effective involvement and increased engagement of teachers;
- Clarify and define expectations from both ends of the agreement.

2.2. Curriculum and pedagogy

- ▶ **Integrate Sustainable Development Goals and Ocean Literacy into National Curricula:** from kindergarten to secondary school, particularly SDG13 “Climate Action” and SDG 14 “Life under water”. As such, marine topics would gain space alongside primary subjects and other environmental education.
- ▶ **Use complementary pedagogical / project base approaches:**
 - Addressing marine topics across different disciplines of the curriculum through an investigative and multidisciplinary approach in all pedagogical projects and at all school levels.
 - Noting the differences in the needs between primary and secondary school levels in terms of content development or pedagogical approach.
- ▶ **Promote cross cultural exchange:** Expanding opportunities for cultural exchanges and co-working with local coastal/inland schools but also across sea basins.
- ▶ **Focus on Open Schooling:** by promoting flexibility, personalisation, innovation, lifelong learning, collaborations, active participation and accessibility as a dynamic way to acquire knowledge and skills. This will ultimately lead to active citizenship in blue education, allowing teachers to freely experiment with various teaching and learning methods, according to their time and abilities.

2.3. Teachers' needs for support

- ▶ **Develop supporting ecosystem around teachers:** Building a strong core group gathering marine scientists and educators, NGOs, key stakeholders, local communities etc into a local, regional, international educational network that can support teachers and pupils and their projects.
- ▶ **Facilitate access to information and existing resources:** Providing a single/simple platform/user-friendly database (quality controlled) where content knowledge can be free access and therefore shared to support teachers including the Ocean Literacy concept in mainstream disciplines.
- ▶ **Provide targeted funding for school projects:** Facilitating access to EU, regional and national funding opportunities, rationalising what is available, homogenising and simplifying the application procedures.
- ▶ **Organise trainings specifically for teachers:** promoting collaboration among research centres/institutes/academia, networks of schools, associations, and local authorities to support teachers to feel confident regarding content knowledge, development of scientific (project-based) and teaching methods, and practical activities on ocean-related issues.

2.4. Student engagement and learning

- ▶ **Utilise the pupils' natural interests:** building the project based on what is attractive for the pupils instead of giving formal lecture courses, particularly focusing on field and lab work/ outdoor educational activities.
- ▶ **Anchor a relationship with nature:** rendering pupils more eager to learn about and protect the environment by giving a different meaning to school learning.
- ▶ **Forge links across the local communities:** Building/ implementing the project with families and friends, experts, local communities and stakeholders...
- ▶ **Sustain pupils' commitment to the ocean:** As an introduction to eco-citizenship and a motivation to take part in such activities beyond school hours.

2.5. Communication

- ▶ **Overcoming language barriers :**
 - Through innovative games, interactive activities, using performance arts, hand crafts... which can be exchanged between different classes around the Mediterranean.
 - In transnational events, consider having interpreters, particularly to help younger pupils express themselves.